

STEP 12

Market your business like crazy

The importance of marketing

Essentially, marketing involves everything you do to get your potential customers and your product/service together. Marketing generates income for your business. No matter how awesome you think your product/service may be, you still need to inform people about it and influence their buying process. Without marketing, your business might never have the chance to reach your target customers. Here are the four key reasons why marketing is so important:

1. The name of the game in marketing is attracting and retaining a growing base of satisfied customers – a critical factor in not losing ground to the new businesses, products/services that hit the market.
2. Good marketing helps you to put your product/service at the front of every customer's mind. Marketing helps make you the first option to turn to when in need of a specific product/service.
3. Once customers are aware of your business, your chances of being able to sell your product/service to them have significantly improved. What's more, once you've become visible to your audience, your business will be the name on their lips, and word of the quality of your products and services will spread. Without marketing, these sales wouldn't have been possible.
4. Any success you achieve with your business will rely heavily on having a strong, trustworthy reputation. Your ever-growing reputation needs to be built on the quality of what you offer your audience and how you offer it – and marketing is a vital component in all of this.

Creating a solid marketing plan

Creating and implementing a solid marketing plan will keep your marketing efforts focused, prevent you wasting precious resources, and increase your sales. You have identified your target customers, analysed your competition, and refined your product/service. Now it's time to bring all of this together into a marketing plan that does its job.

There are a number of elements you can – and should – include in your marketing strategy. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be complicated in order to work. The following components will help you get your marketing plan in place.

Build an engaging website

A small business absolutely needs a website to drive business in today's digital world. Indeed, a website is one of the best branding and marketing efforts you can offer your business. Without a website, you give up much, if not most, of your potential business because consumers will not be able to learn anything about you and your business's offerings. Here are 10 biggest benefits your small business can receive from the simplest of websites:

1. A website will attract customers to your business and make you more money.
2. A website makes you look professional. In our digital age, consumers expect you to have a website. Customers will seek you out online and having a website is one of the criteria for determining trustworthiness.
3. You can clearly showcase your product/service.
4. You can display reviews and testimonials prominently on your website.
5. You can integrate your website with Google Maps so people can find your business more easily.
6. A website works for you 24/7.
7. You can get all of these benefits without spending a fortune. These days it is simple and inexpensive to set up a website. Professional website designers can design the perfect website for you without you having to pay anything up front. They then host it for you (which you have to pay for anyway) and the hosting fee includes maintenance and updates and a bunch of vital services.

With all the competition online, it is not sufficient to just have a website. Whether your website is two pages or twenty or a multi-functional online experience, you have to have a GREAT website. Here is a checklist to help you:

1. It must be mobile responsive – this is critical for an effective website.
2. It must support and enhance your brand.
3. The pages need to be uncluttered and have a good balance of text and graphics that present a clean and simple page.
4. Use short paragraphs and bullet points to make the info more scannable and likely to be read – and ensure there are no spelling or grammatical errors.
5. Your homepage must clearly showcases your product/service.
6. Your photos must look professional. You can have a great site design, but if your product photos look terrible, your prospective customers will think twice about buying your product/service.
7. It must be easy to navigate.
8. Your contact information must be prominently visible so that visitors don't have to search for a phone number or address if they want to contact the business.

Create a buzz using social media

Social media marketing is a powerful way for businesses of all sizes to reach customers. Your customers are already interacting with brands through social media, and if you're not speaking directly to your audience through social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest, you're missing out! Great marketing on social media can bring remarkable success to your business, creating loyal brand advocates and driving sales. Starting a social media marketing campaign without a strategy is like wandering around a forest without a map – you might have fun, but you'll probably get lost, so you need to think it through carefully and formulate an effective marketing plan.

My social media marketing campaign

1. What are you hoping to achieve through social media marketing?

Here are some common goals to help you help you stay focused and ensure that you're driving the right results with your campaign:

Create a brand identity and positive brand association

Build brand loyalty

Drive traffic to your website

Drive sales and leads

Build a community around your business

Improve communication and interaction with key audiences

Boost ratings

Boost reviews

Manage brand reputation

Monitor customer feedback

2. Where do your target customers hang out and how do they use social media?

3. Form industry partnerships

Reach out to other business owners whose products and services complement yours and see if they're open to creating a cross-promotional deal with you. This can be a great way for you both to tap into each other's client bases and advertise your business for free.

4. Brochures or flyers

Brochures and flyers can really work, provided they are eye-catching so people stop and take an interest in reading them, informative so people know what the brochure/flyer is advertising and where they can find out more, and convincing so that people get excited about your product/service.

5. Create eye-catching business cards

Make your business cards stand out from the pack. Your business card is important for marketing because it helps people you meet remember you, your business, and the product/service you offer.

6. Signage

There are all kinds of signs – and you should be using them! Signs over your place of business. Signs in your business. Signs on your vehicle. Signs announcing what's on sale. Signs saying what you do.

7. Run a competition

People love competitions. The prize doesn't have to be big.

8. Run a Facebook contest

Running a Facebook contest is a fantastic way to make your business stand out on Facebook. Facebook contests are highly shareable – to enter you can require that users share the post and tag other users which will put your business in front of countless potential new customers.

9. Email signatures

Put your business's contact information in your email signature. It helps people connect your name and face with your business.

10. Design a T-shirt with your name and logo on it

Wear it everywhere! Get family and friends to wear them!

11. Ask for reviews

Review sites on the Internet make it easy for people to rate their experiences with your business. Asking valued customers to leave feedback on these sites can help promote about your business.

12. Use your community

Think about your community's needs. Could you help get your name known by organising a food or clothing drive or a clean-up effort?

13. Ask for referrals

A satisfied customer is often glad to refer you to their friends. Help them remember to do so by leaving them extra business cards or fliers that they can give to their friends and family.

14. Give back and be socially responsible

Altruism pays back – and even if it doesn't, it's the right attitude to have. Consumers respect a brand that supports a charitable cause or sponsors initiatives that improve lives or help those less fortunate.

15. Get in touch with your local newspaper

Contact your local newspaper if you organise a drive in your community. See if they want to do a feature on it. The smaller the paper, the more likely.

16. Offer deals or giveaways

People love free stuff. Offering a good deal or a giveaway is a great way to get more interest and business. A small item will do the trick. The business this generates can be great and people often share the good news with their friends.

17. Power up word-of-mouth advertising

Have a business culture that is so friendly, helpful, efficient, obliging, caring and supportive that customers are so delighted that they rave about your business to all their friends, family members and neighbours!

18. Have a great launch

You can quietly open your doors for business one day, or you can have a great launch! A launch is a great way introduce your new business to the world and interest customers.

- It doesn't need to be expensive. It simply has to be a bright, colourful, fun event everyone remembers.
- Invite people who can make a positive impact on your business.
- Invite your local newspaper so you can get some free press coverage.
- Post photos of the event on your social media.

Set your marketing budget

Knowing how much you have to spend on marketing and how to spend it is critical to the success of your business. A marketing budget will ensure you accurately calculate your marketing plan. When developing your marketing plan and budget, make sure you're only spending money on the activities that contribute to your current marketing goals. Make sure to pick options that will give you the best value while still reaching your target customers.

My marketing plan

My marketing budget

My marketing activities and the actions I need to take to make them happen

Monitor your sales

You need to monitor your sales closely. This will allow you to see if sales are falling and immediately figure out what you need to do to increase them. Monitoring your sales allows you to see patterns. Patterns are crucial symptoms to any business. They don't just emerge out of nowhere – they're clear signs of something going wrong or right in your sales process. Use them to rectify the former or build on the latter.

Here are two ways you can track sales –

1. Total sales by time period

You can track your sales on a calendar basis. You may choose to track your sales by day or week or month or quarter or year. By tracking sales by time period, you know exactly how well you're performing. You know if your sales are up versus the prior period, be it the prior day, week, month, or quarter or year. And if sales aren't up each period, you know you have work to do.

2. Sales by product or service

You can track your sales by product or service. This tells you exactly what's selling and what's not. Armed with this information, the most effective and simplest thing to do is to spend more time promoting what's already selling and less time on what isn't selling.

If sales have fallen, something is wrong and you need to fix it:

1. Is it your competition? Has something changed? Has a new competitor entered the market?
2. Have the needs, wants or expectations of your target customers changed?
3. Is it in the customer experience you are offering?
4. Is your marketing strategy not working?
5. Is it a staffing problem?
6. Is it something you are doing? Or not doing? Or should be doing?

How I will monitor my sales