

Marketing for the Minimum



*Low cost marketing tactics
to help your business achieve
development goals.*



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Introduction

For most small businesses, highly effective marketing is a make-or-break necessity. Each year thousands of businesses fail—not because they lack effective management or a superior product, but because they lack good marketing and sales techniques. After all, it is these fundamental elements which bring in revenue and generate profits. “I don’t know what to do,” or “I don’t have the money,” is the common cry of entrepreneurs and small business owners.

The good news is you don’t need a degree in marketing to sell your products or services effectively; nor do you need a million-dollar budget. In fact, the low-cost methods many business owners and entrepreneurs use to reach their target markets are the most effective. Pursuing the fundamentals doesn’t require as much cash as it requires focus, wit, persistence and a little creativity. The bottom line – you have to spend money on marketing, but you don’t have to break the bank to achieve great results.

The Concept of Marketing

Marketing continues to be a mystery – for those who create it, those who use it and for those who sponsor it. Many people, including top executives and management, use it as synonymous with sales and selling. Today, it’s easy to become confused about the terms marketing, sales, advertising, promotion, public relations and publicity, because they are often used interchangeably. Although similar in many ways, each term encompasses very different activities.

Definition of Marketing:

The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably.

Marketing is the wide range of activities and programs involved in making sure you are continuing to meet the needs of your customers and getting value in return. These activities include market research to find out who your best prospects are, where they’re located, what their needs are and how you should target them. Marketing also includes analyzing the competition, positioning your product and/or service, pricing your product and/or service and promoting your business through advertising, promotions, public relations and sales.

All too often, the idea of marketing makes even the most seasoned business owner a bit uncomfortable. Business people know the ability to meet the changing needs and demands of customers has become increasingly important in recent years. New technology, growing international trade, improved communications and profoundly more sophisticated and demanding buyers have all increased the pressure on businesses to make continuous improvements in their products and services. Given a choice, customers will always do business with those who most completely meet their needs – needs that are constantly changing. Thus, companies must continuously assess their markets and develop strategies to best reach their target audience(s).

**If one concept sums it all up,
marketing is about building and maintaining successful relationships.**

The Importance of Planning

Like having a business plan, it is important that you develop a marketing plan to keep you on track and focused in the months ahead. Developing a marketing plan can be a simple task of writing down the goals you would like to achieve in the next six to 12 months to a more comprehensive activity that includes market and financial projections. Your marketing plan should address the following five constants.

People

Who are your target customers? What are their needs? What pain do they have which you can alleviate?

Product/Service

What products or services meet their needs? What is your unique selling proposition?

Price

What pricing and payment policies will customers accept that yield sufficient revenues?

Place

Where will the business operate (e.g. geographic, virtual)?

Promotion

What forms of promotion will reach the customers (e.g. advertising, brochures, sales staff and customer support)?

Software is available to help you in the planning process. An inexpensive, web-based planning and tracking tool is available at www.plantracker.com. Here is the simple four-step process to developing a marketing plan:

Step 1

Set goals for realistic growth. What are your sales goals for specific products or services during the upcoming year? What are your overall revenue goals? Be specific, as your marketing plan is intended to help you reach your goals. Each goal should be considered a “SMART” goal: Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Reachable, Time-constrained.

Step 2

The next step in the planning process is research. You will need to examine the external factors that affect your business: the industry, your market size and characteristics, and your competition.

Tip: It is important to remember the focus of marketing is people. If you’re concentrating your efforts on your product or service, you’ll miss the market. The term “target market” is used because this market —this group of people —is the bull’s eye at which you must aim all your marketing efforts. The more you know about your target market, the more precisely you can develop your marketing strategy.

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Step 3

Next, you should conduct a comprehensive internal evaluation. Evaluate employee perceptions and attitudes, sales performance, strengths and weaknesses, your positioning in the marketplace and your overall business operations. This will help you identify any problem areas that could keep you from attaining your goals.

Step 4

A key part of your marketing plan is your marketing strategy. Based on your overall objectives and external and internal evaluations, you need to determine what it will take to reach your goals.

What media will best reach your target audience?
Will you use public relations to boost your image?
How much advertising should you do?

When working on your strategy, be sure to include needed developmental plans for each product and/or service to support your strategy. You also need an action plan with due dates and costs to track what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and whose responsibility it is to accomplish each action.

In the end, a well-planned marketing strategy is built on the premise that all aspects of your operations are open for review against the needs of your customers.

Businesses focused in this way both identify their value to their customers and strive to regularly assess their customers' changing needs.

Once you have determined your marketing plan is complete, it should be considered a living document – one you will revisit at regular intervals as you discover new information. After all, your marketing plan can chart the course to reach your goals instead of just dreaming about them.

Low-Cost Marketing Ideas

There are many ways to advertise, promote and publicize your business which cost very little or nothing at all. Here is a list of Marketing for the Minimum's top low-cost marketing ideas.

Collateral Material

Every item of collateral material leaving your office is an opportunity to promote your business and establish an identity in the marketplace. Thus, one of your first investments should be in your printed materials. You frequently hear people say "it's the first impression that counts." When it comes to the materials you use to market your business – from brochures to business cards – this is certainly true.

Your collateral material is a representative of you and your business. The design should thoughtfully reflect the image you wish to portray. Approaching it this way will help you be much more effective with both prospects and current customers.

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Tip: A routine method of inexpensive advertising includes having a small promotional blurb relative to your product or service printed on the front or back of your envelopes and business cards at the time you have them printed. Quite often, this is your unique selling proposition.

You could hire a graphic design firm to create the look and feel of your collateral materials. Though more expensive, the results will be professional. You might also hire them to create only your logo. This costs as little as a few hundred dollars and in the end you will have a professional, unique design to build into your other materials. Your logo needs special attention. It shows professionalism and gives a prospect a visual that will stick in their mind if it is memorable enough.

Another option is to hire an independent graphic designer. This is usually more economical than hiring a design house. If your independent is also proficient in word processing and desktop publishing, they could be an invaluable resource. If you decide to have your logo and/or collateral materials designed by someone, make sure they understand your business and the message you are trying to convey.

Tip: Once you have decided on a particular design, logo, font type and/or color(s), maintain consistency to reinforce the image you are trying to create.

Once the design work is complete, visit a few print shops to obtain quotes, ask about turnaround time, and suggestions for keeping costs as low as possible. Tips for keeping print costs down:

- Select from house stock and stick with one color (multiple colors increase your costs significantly)
- Always go with standard paper sizes which require no special setup for the printing press
- Try to avoid “bleeds” – when the color or a picture runs off the edge of the paper. This requires large sheets that must be trimmed down

You might consider having your stationery printed at your local office supply supercenter, such as Staples or Office Max. They have standard, template-based designs ready to go and cost 50% less than a traditional printer.

Costs: Items can cost you as little as \$180 for 500 letterhead, envelopes and business cards. On average, the small business can go six months or more on a 500-count of letterhead and envelopes and at least three months on a 500-count box of business cards.

Tip: Take your business cards with you everywhere you go and remember to hand them out at every opportunity. Give a small stack to your friends, family and business associates. These people are often your best representatives.

Word-of-Mouth

Perhaps the most effective and under-appreciated tool of them all: word-of-mouth. Talk about your business, your products or services and your web site at every opportunity and encourage your customers, friends, relatives and colleagues to do the same. You would be surprised at just how many businesses owe their success to word-of-mouth referrals.

Costs: Absolutely nothing, except your time and hard work.

Networking

Most marketers would agree, networking is a powerful, cost-effective marketing tool. Networking is the art of making and utilizing contacts and when done correctly, can lead to substantial returns. The goal of networking is to create a pool of people and information that can directly increase the quality of your product or service, decrease customer churn and, most importantly, help your business gain a competitive edge. Networking, or getting together with other business people for a mutual purpose, can prove to be very beneficial to promoting your business.

Networking can be done through formal groups or just by having a ready supply of business cards when you bump into someone at a conference, at a party or in a supermarket. The art of networking is multi-faceted; by being in contact with other people, you may generate direct business or direct referrals. It is also a two-way street. When you meet someone, you want to ask them about their business and tell them about yours. Start with the basics - name, company, affiliation, position, nature of business, etc. You next want to find out if you can benefit each other.

Tip: Remember that networking is NOT about selling - it's about finding common ground and possibly an opportunity to be the solution to someone's problem.

A great first step in networking is meeting business owners in your core business area. This means physically going out to every business in your immediate area to introduce yourself. These visits should not be traditional sales calls, but rather, "Hi, I'm Dan. I own Smith & Associates around the corner and just wanted to stop by and introduce myself." The only collateral material you need is your business card and possibly a brochure.

Tip: Be sure to ask others for their business cards too, and make notes on the back of each card about your new business acquaintance.

You might also consider joining your local Chamber of Commerce or an industry trade group. These types of organizations offer ample opportunities to network among other business owners and industry peers. Most Chambers hold monthly gatherings that give all Chamber members the opportunity to mix with other businesspeople.

Networking usually revolves around social events, not business meetings. Thus, this is not the time to try and close the sale, but rather to get your information into the hands of decision-makers in a relatively non-sales environment. You can follow-up with business leaders you've talked with at a later date.

Costs: Networking is a no-cost or low-cost marketing initiative, except for the cost of joining a Chamber of Commerce or trade association. Membership costs vary—be ready to spend in the ballpark of \$50 to \$300.

Testimonials and Endorsements

Using testimonials, feedback and endorsements to promote products and services is one of the most effective ways to build credibility and earn customer trust. A new customer will not buy from you until you can PROVE you will deliver everything you promise. By using the power of third-party testimonials and endorsements, you can immediately validate the quality of service or products you provide.

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The main objective is to keep claims honest, sincere and believable. Resist the temptation to fabricate a testimonial. They are much more powerful if they are in the customer's voice. After you have your customer's permission to use their testimonial, you must decide how to put them to best use. Capitalizing on testimonials and endorsements is a matter of being creative. You can easily turn a testimonial into a powerful advertising headline. Written quotes also make excellent content for all your marketing materials. Approved endorsements can be placed as an article in a national or trade publication, highlighted on your Web site, used in sales tools and to support direct mail campaigns.

Testimonials and endorsements help break the barriers that would otherwise prevent a prospect from buying your products or utilizing your services. They speak volumes if they specifically explain how someone else has benefited from doing business with you.

The Art of Promotion

Promotion is a terrific no-cost or low-cost way to keep your business in the mind of the customer and help stimulate demand for your products or services. Promotional activities not only advertise, but they offer prospects and customers added incentives. Some promotional examples used by those on a limited budget include contests and sweepstakes, rebates, trade show "attendance", packaging, premiums, special give-aways and point-of-purchase displays.

Referral Programs

A referral program is one of the easiest and most beneficial promotional programs available to entrepreneurs. At the conclusion of each new client meeting or project, give or send your client a coupon which offers them a percentage off their next project or order for every paying customer or client they refer to you. Remember to give out three or four extra business cards with each completed project, order or at the end of every client meeting and be sure to ask the customer for referrals. Most people will be happy to do so if they are satisfied with your work, but they generally won't think of it on their own.

Costs: Referral programs cost little to nothing to implement.

Seminars/Workshops

In this information-hungry age, people love to receive advice, how-tos and insight on topics of all sorts. Consider renting a small hall or meeting room for a free-admission event that spotlights your business, while providing valuable information to those who attend. Send postcards or e-mails to everyone on your in-house mailing list inviting them to the event and asking them to bring along a friend. Promise them a free gift in exchange for their attendance. Make sure to advertise the event in local newspapers, magazines and radio stations - possibly tying the event with an existing campaign.

Costs: Costs vary and are dependent upon where the workshop or seminar is held, the materials provided, advertising and gifts selected for attendees. If held at your place of business, the costs are reduced. A 20 person workshop can be conducted for under \$100.

Coupon Offers

Today, consumers are very coupon-conscious. Coupons are great to use as incentives for future purchases. Test the market: at what level will coupons increase the volume of various product or service lines? When you get some tentative answers, start distributing coupons that offer a discount on your services and/or products. You can also use them with current customers to increase their orders based on a minimum purchase. Distribute them to area newspapers, store counters, in door-to-door mail packets (which can often be quite inexpensive), at the public library—at any location where your prospects congregate.

Costs: With coupons, your only out-of-pocket expenses are printing and mailing. Consider printing the coupons in-house and bringing them to your local office supply store for a professional job cutting them apart. Estimated cost is \$50 for 250 coupons.

Contests

Contests are a great way to promote your business and build customer loyalty. People love to play games and for a small investment, you can create a unique contest that will focus attention on your business. The key is to offer a desirable or unique item or even several items as contest prizes.

First, find a contest theme that ties into your business. If you are a manufacturer for instance, have a contest where entrants must answer a series of questions that are only found on your product box or your Web site. Invite people to enter your contest and offer prizes to the winners. Contests can attract significant attention. All it takes is a few signs, several press releases and the word will spread. You might even consider working cooperatively with other local businesses, to bolster the prize offering in exchange for their promotional consideration.

Costs: The costs for holding a contest vary. A simple trivia game or raffle can be conducted for under \$100.

Public Relations, Publicity and Media

Public relations can be best defined as a function that creates, develops and carries out policies and programs to influence public opinion or public reaction about an idea, a product or an organization.

Public relations can:

- Increase sales
- Build credibility
- Forge customer relationships
- Penetrate new markets
- Attract partners and investors

Public Relations vs. Publicity

Publicity is one aspect of public relations. While both involve the same goal of drawing attention to your business, publicity refers to media interest and actual coverage such as a news story, radio interview or a product review. Most other public relations activities aim directly at the potential customer, such as speeches and newsletters. Except for the cost of a press kit, postage and some calls, publicity costs you nothing but your time. The pitfall of publicity is that it comes and goes, while solid PR connects with your audience over the long haul.

The ultimate goal of any public relations effort is to win favor with the general public or an intended target audience. In order to do this, the public's interests and concerns must be addressed. Thus, good communication is the foundation of any successful public relations campaign.

Issuing Press Releases to Targeted Media

A press release is a short document, usually one or two pages, aimed at raising awareness and calling attention to an event or happening at your company. Press releases are sent to all focuses of media, including print, television and radio, and if deemed newsworthy, can generate a multitude of public awareness.

The media's response to your press release depends on its quality. If it's well written, truly newsworthy and relevant to the publication that receives it, your odds of success soar. Start by sending your press release to 50-100 targeted media contacts and monitor your response rate. If the press release appeals to general interest, expect 1 to 5 mentions out of a 50-100 distribution. If the release is highly specialized, you may only get one response. If you don't get a reasonable response, rethink your message.

Another option is to use a release service such as PR Newswire. The cost of this service depends on the size of your target market and the length of your release, but you can expect to get more pick-ups for less time investment.

Costs: E-mailing releases to local media contacts will cost you nothing. Using a press release survey varies greatly, starting around \$200.

Media Kit

A media kit, also known as a press kit, usually includes a company's press release along with pertinent background information on the company - all presented neatly in a high quality, "eye-catching" folder. The folder may contain other press materials including: photographs, product information sheets, white papers, company brochures, business card(s), earlier press releases or news articles, customer references or testimonials, financial data, a company biography, contact information, a list of questions that the company is prepared to answer (referred to as a media "cheat sheet"), product samples and any other relevant materials.

The media kit can be adapted to meet the needs, interest and/or requirements of the intended recipient, by taking out unwanted materials or enclosing additional ones. Electronic press kits might also contain videos of relevant information (e.g. commercials, news spots, event participation, etc.). Additionally, your web site should contain an online media kit, including the same types of valuable information.

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Tip: Media kits can also be extremely helpful in attracting new clients and potential investors.

Costs: The elements of your media kit will define the costs. If you are sending a printed kit, purchase presentation folders at your local office supply store for as little as \$0.50/each. Print your logo onto adhesive labels to place on the front and enclose your printed materials. If done in-house, each media kit can be developed for under \$2.00. Digital kits are also very beneficial and less costly.

Tip Sheets

A tip sheet is a page of advice, the answers to the most frequently asked questions about your product and/or service or general information that helps your customers. By handing out tip sheets to a mix of customers, prospects, vendors, investors and journalists, you can update them all on your business activities and growth, while providing useful facts or research that they'll enjoy.

Costs: Printing is the only cost associated with tip sheets, unless you decide to mail them. If you do them in-house, you can affordably print 200 for under \$25. To cut down on postage expense, include a copy of your tip sheet with customer invoices, proposals, press releases, etc. Also provide them via e-mail and on your web site for little or no cost.

Newsletters

Newsletters provide short articles and other information that may be of interest to your target audience(s). They help you build credibility with potential customers, enhance your image with existing ones and serve as the basis for media coverage if it contains catchy, compelling information.

Costs: Set up an e-newsletter to send on a monthly basis. Using an email marketing service, such as Constant Contact, will cost approximately \$20 per month. Printing 100 newsletters in-house and sending them by regular mail can be achieved for under \$100, depending on the size of your mailing list.

Speeches

When properly executed, nothing can convey your message better than a well-delivered speech. However, your speech must be concise, entertaining and well articulated in order to be effective. Delivering a speech helps you reach new customers and gain recognition as an industry leader.

A good way to establish yourself as a speaker is to contact your local Chambers of Commerce, small business associations or other business organizations in your area. You should also be proactive and volunteer to speak at engagements such as community groups, school functions, non-profit agencies or at any number of other events.

Costs: Giving a great speech is a free way of establishing yourself as an expert in your field.

Bylined Articles

The advantages of a company writing articles about its area of expertise and persuading editors to publish these submissions can be challenging, yet extremely beneficial. A good first step, is to arrange to have the name, phone number, URL and a few sentences about your company appear at the end of a targeted piece.

Costs: Another no-cost wonder when distributed by e-mail or if published in a newspaper or magazine. Reprints can be made available at no cost via your web site.

Awards

Applying for industry or local awards provides tremendous visibility when you earn recognition as a finalist. Many key associations, trade publications and government agencies sponsor annual award programs.

Costs: There are sometimes entrance fees associated with award programs. The majority, however, charge nothing.

It is necessary to test PR tools, to find out which ones yield the best results. While some benefits are intangible, most PR will have measurable impact.

Some ideas for making the most out of your PR efforts include:

- Reprint articles and news blurbs to use as direct marketing material and at trade events
- Provide your sales people with copies of feature articles they can pass along to prospects during sales calls
- Send copies of news articles to customers, potential investors, business partners and major creditors
- Record your speeches to use as electronic marketing assets
- Put all materials on your web site

Creative Advertising

Advertising continues to be one of the most misused of all marketing activities. Everyday thousands of marketers waste precious time, resources and money expecting advertising to work wonders for them. The truth is traditional advertising can be a costly, often prohibitive proposition for small businesses and it may not even be an effective medium for reaching your target audience.

Advertising can be a dynamic tool if used properly and it doesn't have to be too expensive for you to utilize its many benefits. Advertising is primarily used to create awareness, by placing your product and/or service in front of prospective customers. In order to afford the repetitiveness that effective advertising requires, a small business must use a little creativity.

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A small business should advertise

- When it has a specialized product or service intended for a small “niche” audience
- When its target market is a decent sized mass-market
- When this is the only way it can reach its intended audience(s)
- When it is moving into a new market
- When its budget permits frequency
- When its competition does
- When its competition does not
- When web advertising makes the cost affordable

Tip: If your budget will not allow for repetition do not invest your dollars into advertising - as the success of advertising is all about frequency.

Advertising in print media is considered the queen of all advertising, providing an exciting medium to marketers for more than a hundred years. Typically, print advertising involves the buying of page space for the purpose of running a display ad, for which most publications charge an arm and a leg. Instead of making a huge investment in traditional print advertising, many small businesses are using more cost-effective methods such as newspapers, classifieds and the web.

Classifieds

Classifieds are a good choice among small businesses for effective and inexpensive advertising. Generally, there are three places where you can run a classified ad: in magazines, newspapers and online. Magazines are ideal if you are selling nationwide, while web-based classifieds let you reach a global audience. Stick to area newspapers when trying to reach a localized target market.

Tip: Classifieds are best used when you have a specific product or service to offer.

It doesn't cost much to run a classified ad – even in major magazines. But writing an effective classified ad is confusing to many entrepreneurs. To get the best results, simply start your classified with a headline. This should be two or three words capitalized at the beginning of your ad that immediately grabs the attention of the reader. Next, try to use an action word at the beginning of your ad. Words like save, earn, do and feel all encourage the reader to take action. It is also important to let your potential customer know what problem(s) your business, product or service can solve for them, as we are all looking for solutions of some kind. This should be your unique selling proposition.

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Remember to keep your sentences short and easy to read. Don't try to get all the information about your company or product into your ad. The goal of your ad should be to peak the curiosity of the reader - enough that they will want to find out more about your business or product, so make sure they know how to reach you. Continue to make modifications to your ads and test them. Once an ad has proven itself effective, you will feel more comfortable positioning it in places which may cost you a bit more, but have a much higher return.

Costs: Running a classified ad will vary greatly in cost depending on the size of the ad, the days you would like it to run, the size of the geographic market and the length of time you commit to run the ad. You can expect to pay between \$200 - \$400 for a classified ad.

Print Advertising in Newspapers

Once you have decided to advertise, by far the number one choice in small business advertising is newspapers. Newspapers combine local reach with a universal appeal. Advertising in newspapers is flexible, convenient and inexpensive to implement. The most important considerations are design, copy writing and repetition, as it takes the average person between three and nine exposures to an ad before it is readily remembered. Before running a newspaper ad call and request their media kit, which will give you the display advertising rates as well as audience demographics and how many copies are distributed.

Tip: Newspapers charge for advertising by the column inch and usually offer frequency discounts.

The best position for your newspaper ad is on the right-hand page above the fold. Check to make sure your ad doesn't get placed on the left-hand side under the fold, which is the worst spot for advertising in this medium. Try to run ads on days when your business is open, which is a simple yet often overlooked marketing rule.

Remember to target your market accordingly. The sports section is a male magnet, while horoscopes tend to attract a female audience. Your ad should include a strong headline to grab the attention of the reader. Request a border to make smaller ads perform like their larger counterparts. And always include an 800 number when possible, the business address, and web address.

Tip: Make your good ads perform double duty by making reprints and turning them into circulars, flyers or mailing pieces.

Costs: Display ad rates in the Post-Journal average \$25.17 per column inch. An ad three inches high by three columns wide would cost approximately \$226.53. A daily 1" ad for a minimum of 31-days costs just \$9.37/day or \$290.47 a month.

Television Advertising

Most small businesses overlook the possibilities of advertising on television and radio, assuming that these media are much too expensive to fit into a micro budget. With network television this is true; however, there are a number of affordable alternatives including cable television, independent television and radio.

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Savvy entrepreneurs know that television advertising has tremendous impact and can generate an emotional response like no other advertising medium. And despite what most people have come to believe, television doesn't have to be expensive. In fact, television is a great place to find affordable advertising. Although television response rates can be low, there are so many people watching TV that it doesn't take a very high response rate to bring in sales. Look for especially low prices in smaller markets and on cable TV outlets. Save on product costs by hiring a small, capable one or two-person production house, or turn to your local college or university for assistance.

Tip: When running any type of TV commercial to advertise your products and/or services, make certain that your corporate logo and the name of your business appears in the lower right-hand corner of the screen throughout the entire commercial.

Costs: Cable television advertising rates vary, depending upon audience demographics, geographic reach, schedules and channels selected. For example, a 30 second commercial run three times per day on the ETC Cable Network in Georgia costs \$10.20/day, \$71.40/week or \$285.60 a month. Still ads cost just \$50 and are usually run on the channel that features program listings.

Tip: If you can make a 15 second commercial as effective as a 30 second, you'll be able to run your ad twice as often for the same budget.

Radio Advertising

Like television, radio provides creative entrepreneurs with a variety of low-cost advertising alternatives. Most radio stations break up the day into units called "dayparts", with peak advertising rates occurring during the commuting drive times 6-10 a.m. and 3-7 p.m. Inexpensive airtime can be purchased during 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. referred to as midday and evening from 7 p.m. to midnight. Both of these inexpensive day parts have fanatically loyal listeners. They follow very predictable habits in their listening and are less apt to turn to another station.

Radio is the ultimate remnant space medium and stations will usually take an offer for unsold airtime. If a station has several unsold minutes, they will usually run your ad for a small fee. Radio stations are also open to bartering. If you have something of value that can be exchanged with a station, go ahead and make an offer they can't refuse. You should also let them know if they have last minute cancellation, you're willing to buy it. Typically, the station will give you 50% off the particular spot.

Like other forms of advertising, radio ads require repetition to work. A minimum run of at least fifteen ads on one station during a one-week period is recommended. Ads should be kept within a particular time slot, based on audience demographics to create awareness and a desire to buy your product and/or service.

Costs: On average and outside of the larger metro areas, radio stations charge between \$10 and \$12 for a 30-second advertisement and around \$14-\$16 for a 60-second ad during peak times. During non-peak times, spots average \$5 to \$7 for a 30-second ad and \$9 to \$11 for a 60-second. For example, Nevada's KCLS 101.7 Classic Rock radio station charges \$7.00 for a 30-second spot during off-peak hours. Running the ad 15 times per day during the normal five-day business week would cost \$525. You can easily negotiate as much as 50% off this weekly rate by committing to a one-month advertising plan.

Other Advertising Ideas

- Many publications will give you a contract for standby advertising space. Such a contract requires you send the publisher your ad and they hold it until they have unsold space available. Then at a price that's always one third or less than the regular price for the space you need, the publisher inserts your ad. Be sure to check with neighborhood newspapers for such an arrangement as well.
- Specialty advertising is a great way to stay on the minds of current clients and prospects. Have your name placed on items that have some value to people such as calendars and pens. You can easily find companies that provide these services in the Yellow Pages under "Advertising Specialties." In fact, there is a whole industry of people ready to sell you novelty and professional items that have your name printed on them. Pens, calendars and mouse pads are extremely useful and people tend to keep these around. T-shirts, baseball caps and sunglasses are also popular promotional products.

Online Marketing

Online marketing has quickly become the most popular medium for reaching the masses. Properly understood, it can be harnessed to complement existing marketing practices, extend operations and create new opportunities.

The main benefits of marketing on the web include:

- A website provides your business with continuous, 24/7 operations and a global reach
- Information is always current and relatively easy to maintain. You can change the information on your website as often as necessary
- Customers come to your site pre-qualified, saving you valuable time and money on sales calls
- A website levels the playing field. You might not be able to compete with your competition's traditional media campaigns, but your website can function as well as or better than your larger competitors - simply and affordably
- With a website, your exposure is increased and your business is easier to find
- Your website is a cost-effective way to capture valuable customer data and contact information for new prospects

Costs: website development ranges from a few hundred dollars for designing it yourself to several thousands of dollars hiring an independent web designer. You will also be paying a monthly or annual fee to host your domain name.

Retention Marketing

Retention marketing enables regular customer feedback that can help your company improve current products and services and explore new market opportunities. If you have a limited marketing budget, it is worthwhile to develop the skills to hear what your existing customers are telling you on a one-on-one basis - commonly referred to as retention marketing.

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Retention marketing is a tactically driven approach based on customer behavior. It's the core activity going on behind the scenes in relationship marketing, loyalty marketing and so forth. Retention marketing allows you to learn about your customer, their needs and their desires. It produces a much better communication channel than through traditional marketing, by placing the customer at the center of the organization.

Tip: Customer acquisition costs up to five times more than customer retention. Focusing on retention marketing that involves close communication with customers to build lasting relationships over time can greatly reduce your marketing costs.

Some considerations for no-cost retention marketing in your organization include:

User group – Gather your customers together to discuss new ideas and obtain feedback on your current products or services. Their input can help keep your business on track by staying in tune with their needs, wants and requirements. Be sure to reward the participants and share the credit for good ideas.

Informal survey – In a relaxed setting, take a few clients aside and ask them how your business is doing in meeting their expectations and where it is falling short. Be sure to take notes. Follow-up with letters thanking customers for their time and telling them what you plan to do with their suggestions and feedback. REMEMBER WHAT THEY TELL YOU! There is no greater damage to your business' goodwill than when customers perceive they have not been heard.

Online survey – use a survey service such as surveymonkey.com to develop a short customer survey and email it to your current customer list. You may want to consider offering a promotion for those that complete and submit the survey.

Walk in you customer's shoes – Pretend that you are a customer or client of your company and call to see how you are handled on the phone. Provide a report to key management as to what observations you made. If it is not feasible for you to do so personally, hire an outside party to handle the task for you.

Customize – Customizing your operations to meet individual needs can be a true value-added service. For instance, try offering your customers various communication options. Ask how they prefer you contact them (e-mail, phone, direct mail or fax) and be sure to follow their direction.

Marketing Mistakes to Avoid

At every level of business, entrepreneurs are bound to make some mistakes and marketing is no exception. Avoid these common marketing mistakes and you'll save energy, disappointment and money.

- Lack of commitment. If you don't believe in your product or service and you're not consistent in the way you promote it, your odds of succeeding go way down. As an entrepreneur, it is your responsibility to do whatever it takes to make your product and/or service the best it can be.

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- Lack of a clear benefit. As obvious as it may seem, many marketers forget they are in the business of selling something people actually want or need. One of the biggest mistakes made in marketing is to focus on the features of a product or service, instead of the benefits. Your marketing messages must convey the benefits your customers will receive by using your product and/or service. Find the interesting aspects in your offering and state the benefits as believably as possible. People do not pay attention to marketing, they pay attention only to things that interest them. Customers simply want to know what's in it for them.
- Not motivating your audience to do something. To make marketing work, you must tell people exactly what you want them to do. Tell them to make a phone call. If you're a manufacturer, tell them to visit you online. Ask them to fill in a coupon, write for more information, take a test drive or stop by for a free demonstration. Don't stop short. Motivate them to action.
- Jumping on board every ship that passes your way. It is important to analyze and plan your promotional efforts before throwing valuable marketing dollars at every opportunity that comes your way. Carefully set objectives, define your target audience and set your budget over the next six to 12 months.
- Not measuring results. Measuring the results of your marketing efforts will allow you to reinvest in those activities yielding a higher return on investment and drop those producing little or no benefits.
- Dedicating your time and resources to one area only. When your entire marketing budget is used on just one method of promoting your business, you won't experience the same results as those entrepreneurs who use a mix of vehicles to convey their message. Diversity allows you to expand your marketing reach and stretch your marketing dollars.
- Eliminating marketing during cash flow crunches. When things get tight, many business owners significantly cut marketing from their budgets, as they are often the easiest expenses to reduce. It is important to remember marketing and sales are the elements driving revenue through the door. Cut these and your cash flow problems will only worsen.
- Not getting help when you need it. Sometimes a little outside help can do wonders for an ill-looking brochure or a less than effective ad. To keep costs under control, look to your local college or resources such as Elance.com for assistance. Most importantly, make sure you're getting the message out in a manner that accurately reflects your business.
- Not following up on leads generated by marketing activities. It is important to follow-up with people you meet and sales leads sent your way. Not only is this a common courtesy to those who may have provided the lead, but it is also a necessity. Personal contact should be made by phone, if possible. Don't just leave a message on a voicemail, keep trying until you reach the potential customer. Implementing a follow up procedure can substantially increase your volume of business, and because following up is so inexpensive the business it produces is very profitable.

Conclusion

Marketing is both an art and a science. No one does it perfectly, but savvy entrepreneurs persist and continuously improve. Marketing, advertising and promotion are not frivolous or secondary expenditures - they should be included in your overall budget and receive as much attention as your other business functions.

You don't have to break the bank with a big, splashy marketing campaign to get noticed. There are a number of inexpensive alternatives for marketing your company, as shown throughout *Marketing for the Minimum*.

Unleash your creative powers. By combining the myriad of ideas available to you with the dedication to make yourself a success, you will easily reach the goals that you have established for yourself and your business. Start today!

Was *Marketing for the Minimum* helpful to you? Help someone else out by [forwarding to a colleague](#).

About the Author

Jacquelyn Germaey, Independent Owner of the Alternative Board TAB Suffolk County, Long Island, and President of HyTech Consulting, has more than twenty-five years experience leading both entrepreneurial and large corporations. She now focuses on helping CEOs, presidents, owners, and partners create, execute, and exceed their personal and business success goals. She has extensive experience facilitating the development of strategic plans for small businesses and is a Certified Strategic Business Leadership® Coach. She has developed a web-based product to help small business owners in the development and tracking of their plans called PlanTracker™. More information on this topic is available on her websites www.tabny.com, www.hytechny.com, www.plantracker.com or by calling her office at 631.474.4310.