

## Ten marketing priorities when you start your business

### 1. Build credibility quickly

Why should people buy from a new business? Your first challenge is to overcome their doubts by building trust and credibility quickly. Some tips:

- Promote your skills and experience, plus those of your staff and associates.
- Join your industry or professional organization and start building a profile.
- Commission a writer to produce articles using your ideas.
- Feature customer feedback and/or projects completed on your website.
- Gain a market foothold by offering a service or product at less than full price in return for an endorsement you can use. (Regard this as an advertising expense.)

### 2. Focus on solving pain points

Identify and then focus sharply on solving the customer's challenge, whether it is a problem, a desire, or a fear.

Try building a story around your product or service that the customer can relate to. Be specific and monetize your solution if possible. For example, how much does double glazing save an average house in heating costs? Wrap the savings story around other payoffs, like a more comfortable and healthy living experience – warmer in winter, cooler in summer.

Look for the 'hidden' pain points in your industry. Service businesses often have a reputation for being late. If you offer services, can you guarantee to arrive on time?

### 3. Promote your point of difference

Boil down your customer solutions into a compelling point of difference that will overcome customer hesitation. Refine this competitive advantage into a memorable slogan or a few short sentences at most. Run the result past your advisers and some small business owners. Once they approve, promote your point of difference vigorously on your website and in all your marketing material. Make sure staff can also confidently communicate it to customers.

### 4. Develop a strong website

A website can be a powerful marketing tool. Some priorities:

- Make sure customers can find you. Get expert advice to improve your search engine ranking.
- Make the website fast and user-friendly. Get outsiders to test the site without any prompting and fix what frustrates or baffles them.

- Include credibility-enhancing Frequently Asked Questions, Customer feedback or Projects Completed sections. People often browse a website to build their confidence in your business before they buy.
- Include social media buttons to help readers spread the word.
- Encourage people to sign up for a newsletter in return for free e-books, access to premium sections or other incentives.
- Give people a reason to return by featuring hot deals and new information on the home page.

## 5. Favor low-cost promotions first

Try the low-cost tactics first.

Direct mail and telemarketing can still be cost-effective for higher priced services or products. Small-scale runs can give you an indication of demand and allow you to experiment with different options.

Blogs and profiles on social media such as business-focused LinkedIn or people-focused Facebook and Twitter are useful ways to develop conversations with customers or potential customers.

If you are new to the social media world, then do some research first on online etiquette.

## 6. Start with a splash

Can you come up with some newsworthy event or gimmick to launch your business with a splash? Study how other businesses launch. Can you do better? If you can't afford to hire a PR firm, ask a retired journalist with media contacts to help you put together some press releases.

The media are always hungry for good stories. Can you invite celebrities, influencers or well-known business people to your launch? Some innovative thinking can lead to free publicity in the local (or national) media.

## 7. Build a customer database

A good customer database is worth gold. It is easier and cheaper to sell more to existing customers than it is to find new customers. Start capturing customer information (with their permission) from day one, and decide what details you need to include that will help you build repeat business.

For example, you can record what customers buy (and have not yet bought), how often they buy, how much they spend and when their purchases of services are likely to need renewal.

Your database will help you build a more complete profile of your customer types, so you can focus on finding more people like your best customers.

## 8. Network vigorously

Business is all about people. The more people you know, the better, so make an effort to get out there and meet others in the community. Join your industry or professional association and local



# Business guide

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organization such as small business networks, the chamber of commerce and community groups such as Rotary or Lions

Being able to pitch your business confidently is also important. Organizations like Dale Carnegie and Toastmasters International can help you communicate more confidently.

## 9. Focus on referrals

Word-of-mouth referrals are the most cost-effective way of gaining new customers because you don't have to spend anything on advertising or marketing. Research has repeatedly shown that referrals have a higher conversion rate (enquiries to sales) and end up spending more than other customers. People simply have more confidence in a business that friends or colleagues have recommended.

Referrals will happen naturally if you provide excellent service and good value, but you can improve your referral rate through an active program of incentives.

## 10. Measure to improve

Give preference to marketing you can measure to avoid the mistake of many businesses who don't measure marketing results. You may be talked into some radio or newspaper ads but if you don't measure what happens, you'll never know if your investment was wise or a waste.

Measuring can be anything from adding a clip-out coupon or code to simply asking customers 'By the way, how did you find out about us?'

The results may surprise you, but will also empower you to focus your marketing budget on what really works.