



Ten Strategies for Small Business Marketing in Today's Economy

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When running a small business, marketing is often the first thing to get cut during a tough economy. But dumping the marketing line item can be damaging to your brand and undermines the awareness you've worked hard to build. Instead it may be time to evaluate your marketing, perhaps make some cuts and but also try some new things. Here are ten strategies for marketing in tough times.

1. Analyze First

Sure, marketing can be hard to quantify. But now is the time to measure what you can and analyze what you can't measure directly. Perhaps add a special offer to any paid advertising or direct mail and see how many are redeemed. Track your web site traffic and email clicks to see what motivates your customers to click.

2. You Are Not Your Demographic

Don't assume anything about your customers. Find out. Send out an online survey. Find out what media they watch, read and listen to. Do they get information from online newsletters? How do they use the Internet? What do they think of your products and services? It's too easy to fall into assumptions about your targets.

3. Press Releases

Press releases aren't just for reporters any more. They speak directly to your customers. You don't need a huge event to send out a press release. Any change or new development in your company can warrant a release. Look into putting releases on an Internet wire such as PRWeb. You'll get your message on sites like Yahoo! News that get your message out even wider.

4. Media Relationships

Spend some time developing relationships with the reporters who cover your sector. Get to know them. Take them to lunch. Talk to them about the industry. Position yourself as a source of information. Earned media is free and the best kind of "advertising" because it's validated by a third-party source.

5. Telephone

Remember the telephone? One of the best marketing tools is already right there on your desk! Pick it up and call five of your best customers today. Find out what they think about your products and services. Thank them for their business. Tell them about what's coming up for your company. A personal phone call is proven to be one of the most effective methods to keep customers.

6. Digital Communications

Switching from paper mailings to a comprehensive website with an email newsletter can save thousands of dollars in the long run. Now is a great time to make the switch. A few email newsletter companies to start with are Constant Contact or Emma.

7. Grassroots

Grassroots is the fancy marketing word for “sweat marketing”. Get out there. Put up posters. Put cards on car windows. Hand out free water at the park. Talk to people. Make connections in your community.

8. Traditional Media

Take a hard look at your traditional media such as paid advertising and direct mail. If you need to cut back, become more targeted. How useful is your database? It might be worth the cost of getting more detailed information if it helps you send messages to top prospects only. You might not completely cut print ads, but hit the most effective publications, and negotiate a better deal. The newspaper is hurting too and doesn't want to lose your business.

9. Collaborations

Other businesses and nonprofits are suffering right along with you. Reach out and create collaboration where you both win. Or talk with your vendors or other businesses about trading services and products. Everyone gets what they need and no one touches their budgets.

10. Social Media

Use social media to get out your message and position yourself as an expert. Take a seminar or give yourself a crash-course. Are you following and commenting on blogs on your sector? If you have things to say and want feedback, it might be the right time to start your own blog. Do you have videos or audio files? Post them on your web site and YouTube and then promote them with a press release. Start using Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter or other online sources to send out messages. Social media allows others to learn more intimate details about your company and become a fan.

These are just a few thoughts. Take three of these ideas and try them out today. And let me know how they are working for you.

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