

# Growing Your Business on a Small Marketing Budget

Marketing is a challenge when the amount of money your business can afford to spend on advertising and public relations is limited. But, with a bit of creativity, you may find you do not need a big marketing budget to build your company's reputation and spread the word about your products and services.

Here are some ideas to help you jump-start your marketing efforts without draining your cash reserves:

**Identify your target customers.** Marketing dollars are often wasted through indiscriminate targeting. Think about who is most likely to patronize your business and what type of customer you wish to attract. By focusing on the group of people you are trying to reach, you may be able to do without more expensive forms of marketing, such as advertising in mass media outlets or large-scale direct mail campaigns.

**Don't overlook the classifieds.** A small ad or a few lines offering your services in the classifieds section of a newspaper or trade publication can bring in more business than you might expect. In addition to posting a phone number, refer potential customers to your website for more information about your company.

**Network, network, network.** If your customers are based locally, seek them out at community meetings and events. Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club events are good places to meet members of the local business community, but you may also make valuable contacts at softball games, holiday parties, or school fundraisers. Always have your business cards with you, and hesitate to distribute them to all potential customers.

**Keep the customer satisfied.** All business owners know how important it is to provide efficient and friendly service to customers. But there are many additional ways you can make customers feel special and encourage them to come back. For example, you may want to offer an unexpected discount or bonus item to a client who places a large order. To improve the chances that a good customer will return, send a thank you note with a personalized offer of a discount on future business.

**Ask for customer feedback.** Customers' comments will provide you with useful insight into your company's performance, while making them feel that you value their opinions and suggestions.

**Ask for customer referrals.** When clients compliment your company's products or services, ask them to tell their friends about you. If you explain that you are in the process of growing your business and greatly appreciate their patronage, many customers will be happy to recommend your business to others. Consider offering incentives to existing customers for providing the names and contact information of people who may be interested in doing business with you in the future.

**Be your own PR agency.** You don't need to hire a professional to establish relationships with media outlets that could be useful in publicizing your business. Start by sending e-mails to reporters and editors at local newspapers and trade journals relevant to your industry. Include information about yourself and your company, and offer to make yourself available for interviews as an expert in your field. You may also want to suggest ideas for future articles or submit your own editorial. If an article related to your business catches your interest, write a letter to the editor. Getting your company's name in print can provide an instant and no-cost boost to your public profile.

**Make the most of trade shows.** You may not be able to afford a large booth at a trade show—or any booth at all. But even if you are not among the exhibitors, trade shows can provide valuable opportunities for forging and improving relationships with clients and business partners. Before attending a trade show, scan the list of participants for useful contacts. Arrange as many meetings as you can in advance, and make a list of people you hope to talk to once you arrive.

**Use the Internet to expand your market.** Most businesses now have web addresses, but the quality of websites varies greatly. Even if you know nothing about website creation and design, reading up on Internet marketing techniques may provide some ideas on how to improve the appearance and content of your website. If you can't afford to hire professional web designers, consider bartering your products or services in exchange for help with your website. Step up your networking by writing a blog or participating in online communities relevant to your industry.

**Try something new.** Your marketing strategy must evolve as your company grows. Just because a marketing tactic worked well in the past does not mean it will always be the best way to bring in business. Continually seek new ways to build relationships with potential and existing customers.

Paying attention to customer feedback and changing market conditions can help you grow your business—even on the smallest of marketing budgets.

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