

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

## The Three Biggest Marketing Challenges for Small Business Owners Are:

- What to do?
- How to do it?
- Where to find the time to do it effectively?

This guide will answer the “what to do?” question and offer tips on how to get it done effectively while leaving you time to do what you do best - run your business!

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## Table of Contents

1. Developing a strong web presence
2. Conducting research
3. Create compelling content
4. Guard your online reputation
5. Get social
6. Develop a linking strategy
7. Follow up leads with email marketing
8. Implement other marketing methods, such as mobile
9. Include traditional advertising in your marketing
10. Use professional printed marketing tools
11. Connect with your audience offline
12. The key to successful marketing

## Keys to developing a strong web presence:

- **Control your own web property** - While it's great to use social media platforms and online directories to develop your online presence, be aware that you do not own those properties, nor do you control them. The use of a platform owned by another company limits you according to their terms of service. Besides being limited, you have no guarantee that the platform will remain popular (example: MySpace, which is desperately attempting to make a comeback through a redesign) or even exist in the future.

We recommend small business owners use a hosted WordPress site as the hub of your online marketing. This is not a free website, but one in which a domain name is purchased from a domain registrar and is "hosted" by a paid service. Most hosting is set up by leasing shared space on one of the host company's servers. Typical hosting costs are about \$10-15/month, depending upon the size and usage of the site, but you retain complete ownership and control of the domain name and site content. This type of website is a legal property that can be sold, bequeathed or given away.

**\* TIP:** Make sure YOU are the administrative contact of your domain name. If you aren't, you don't have control of your site.

WordPress is an open source (free) content management system (CMS) that is uploaded (placed onto the domain's host server) onto the site. This platform is flexible, secure, easy to optimize for search engines and easy to make updates to content. It is the preferred platform of professional online marketers due to its flexibility and other features.

Like spokes in a wagon wheel, all social media profiles and directory listings should link back to your marketing hub. Your goal in developing this hub is to develop it into an authority site, which will give your company credibility in your market and with search engines.

- **Optimize for search** - One of the best ways to develop long-lasting traffic to your website is to optimize your site for search engines. SEO (Search Engine Optimization) is accomplished through use of both on-

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

page and off-page tactics. On-page optimization includes use of title tags, image alt tags, targeted keywords and other tactics. Off-page optimization is about developing backlinks, which will be discussed later in this ebook.

What many people don't realize is that SEO isn't about trying to rank an entire website, but rather specific pages within that site. Yet, the more often searchers select your content from the list and remain on your site long enough to read what you've written, the more authority search engines will give not only that particular article, but your site in general. The overall site rating is called PageRank (PR). PageRank ranges from 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest. The scale increases exponentially.

The best part about SEO is its lasting benefits. Once a site gains a good reputation with the search engines by consistently producing quality, relevant content, that site can often remain in the top search results for a keyword even after years of little or no activity. (Note: Although this happens frequently, it isn't a recommended practice, though, because search engines do consider activity frequency in their algorithms.)

**\* TIP:** Another key when setting up an optimized site is to structure it properly. More about that will be presented in the section on content creation.

- **Make your site mobile friendly** - Each day more and more online inquiries originate from mobile devices. If your website isn't responsive (automatically resized) to display on smart phones and tablets, it's time for a re-design.

**\* TIP:** Most newer WordPress themes are designed with mobile in mind. If your site isn't built on a responsive theme, you can either do a re-design (highly recommended) or at the very least create a mobile-friendly subdomain and link to it in your site's main navigation.

- **Secure your site** - Nothing is more frustrating than having a site hacked or losing all the content you've worked so hard to produce. Like most criminals, hackers typically go for the easy targets. A few simple security

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

measures can make your site hard to breach. Keep your content protected by performing regular backups. Then, if some disaster does happen, such as a server crash or a hack, you'll be able to be up and running again in a matter of minutes.

**\* TIP:** There are several easy-to-use premium site-cloning WordPress plugins and security plugins available to choose from.

- **Create compelling content** - Because content is so important to your overall marketing plan, this ebook contains an entire section on content.
- **Set up a lead generation and capture system** - Your company's lead capture system is the most important part of your marketing plan. See chapter 7 for more information about this.

## Things to research before you begin:

- **Target audience** - The goal of marketing is to reach the right customer with the right message at the right time. Other than sheer luck, the best way to accomplish that goal is by knowing your target audience. Know their desires, their dreads, what questions they're asking and where online they go to find the answers.
- **Competition** - In addition to being in tune with your audience, you need to know your competition. What methods are they implementing? What keywords are they using? How effective are they? It's been said, "Knowledge comes by learning from your own mistakes, but wisdom comes by learning from the mistakes of others." Spying on your competition can make you a wise marketer, which will in turn save you time and money.
- **Keywords** - Keyword research is vital to an effective marketing strategy. Keywords are usually not just a word, but rather phrases, often called "long-tail," meaning the keyword phrases contain three or more words. Effective keywords have a moderate-to-high search volume combined with low-to-moderate optimization competition. What this means is that a good number of people are typing the keyword phrase into a search engine but not many marketers are optimizing pages in their sites for that exact phrase.
- **Domain name(s)** - Some business owners try to use catchy or cute phrases for their domain names that really have nothing to do with the business. A domain name should be straightforward. If your business centers primarily around you, such as performers or authors, then register your professional name if it's available. Otherwise, use your company's name for your business website.

The next best choice, if neither your professional name or business name are available, is to register a descriptive term for your business and include a geo-reference, such as YourTownYourIndustry.com, or perhaps your business tagline. A tagline isn't the preferred choice for a domain

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

name, but if it is descriptive of your products/services and it's the closest domain name available, then use it.

Is it okay to use an extension other than .com? Get the .com if at all possible. People are accustomed to .com extensions. But a .net and .org are easy to rank well, because search engines weigh them with higher authority than the newer extensions (.biz, .info, etc.).

As more "designer" extensions become available, it may be all right to go away from .coms, but in the meantime .com is the preferred extension. Owning the .com of your domain is perceived as more stable, just as having an actual 1-800 toll-free number instead of an 877 or 866 number lets consumers know a company has been around a while and will likely continue to be here in the future.

## Creating compelling content:

- **Why you need a blog** - A blog is one of the best marketing tools for small businesses. First of all, it's cheap. Next, it enables you to set yourself apart from the crowd as an authority in your industry. Third, blogging builds a bond between you and your customers. The Internet is no longer simply the "Information Highway" - it has evolved into the "Referral Highway," and blogging is a means to transform yourself into the go-to-guy or gal for your market.

Blogs don't have to be complex. In fact, simple is better. Posts should be between 300-500 words, and a good blogging frequency is about three times per week. More often if you have time, as the more often you blog, the more traffic you will generate. But the frequency isn't as important as being consistent. If you only have time to blog once per week, then blog only once per week. But do it every week.

**\* TIP:** Consistency is vital for both community development (people don't like change) and search-bot crawling. Even search bots have expectations. They scan your site and determine your fresh content posting rate, but if that rate of content posting changes, they may adjust their crawling frequency and therefore increase the time between page indexing. The amount of indexed pages within your site is one of the keys to developing site authority.

Another misconception about blogging is that each post should be optimized for search. Actually, that isn't the case. In fact, it's your static content - your pillar articles (see next point for more on this) and landing pages - that are optimized for keywords. To increase effectiveness, blog posts should link to pillar content and/or landing pages when appropriate, but their tone should be spontaneous and conversational.

- **Producing pillar content** - Pillar content is static content (Think: Articles) that is typically longer than blog posts (usually at least 500-700 words) and is written to support a specific keyword. In an effective website platform, such as WordPress and other CMS-type platforms, each

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

post and article displays on a unique page with a unique URL (uniform resource locator) - basically, it's the online "address" of that piece of content.

Pillar content is designed to solve a specific problem faced by members of your market. When they type a question into the search engine and find your article, they'll be pleased because it helped them. Then they will return to your site or will perhaps even bookmark it, share it on social platforms, or link back to it from their own site if they have one. This helps that particular article page increase in the search engine results and helps toward improving your site's overall PageRank.

Other pages that offer solutions to specific reader problems are often referred to as "landing pages," because, since the content on these pages is designed to rank high in search engines, they are typically where a searcher first "lands" on your site. When created properly, landing pages offer business owners a great opportunity to further connect with potential customers.

Each landing page should have a specific call-to-action with the desired outcome you want your customers to take after reading the page's content. You may want them to purchase a product, call for an appointment, fill out an information request form, or submit their name and email address in exchange for a free download. Whatever the action is you want them to take, ask them in a direct manner to do it.

**\* TIP:** Structuring your site with pillar content (it's recommended that new or re-designed sites begin with between 5-12 optimized pillar articles and/or landing pages and add more at the rate of 2-4 per month) supported by shorter blog posts. Internal linking to relevant pillar content is the best way to develop an authority site that will dominate your local online competition.

- **Types of content** - In addition to blog posts, pillar articles, and landing pages, it's a good idea to include other forms of content, such as videos, podcasts, images and interactive features such as polls. Besides making

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

your site more appealing to visitors, those who stop by tend to stay longer, another metric that helps your site gain authority.

## Guard your online reputation:

- **Claim and enhance online directory listings** - There are many free online directories and social review sites. The first step toward guarding your online reputation is to claim your listings and enhance your profiles with your logo, videos, images and anything else you can add (menus, etc.) to give potential customers information about what they can expect when they visit your business.
- **Respond quickly to positive and negative reviews** - Whether you're aware of it or not, people are talking about your business online. Isn't it time you joined in on the conversation? Sometimes just letting others know you care enough to read what they've written by responding to it can increase good will with a customer who may have encountered your business on a bad day. Staying proactive is the best line of defense when it comes to online reputation management.
- **Set up Google alerts for your name and your brand** - It's free and easy to have a Google alert emailed to you each day with a list of the places that mentioned your name or your company's name online. This will help you monitor exactly what is being said about you and give you the opportunity to respond quickly.

## Get social:

- **Start with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube** - Getting social is all about being where your audience is. Today, nearly everyone is on Facebook, so your company definitely needs to have a Facebook page. The key to success in social media marketing is to distinguish yourself from the crowd. Research how other businesses are using social media successfully and mash those ideas into a campaign that works well for your market.

Twitter is another popular site, but Twitter marketing is different than using Facebook. Each social platform has a unique personality, offering marketers the opportunity to reach different prospects with different tactics. Twitter is used by many companies to respond to customer service issues. Again, see how others in your industry are using this platform effectively and adapt those ideas to fit into your marketing goals.

YouTube is a great way to get the word out about your company. You can use video marketing a number of ways. Try “un-boxing” a new product while you film it. Market through education by publishing tutorial videos. Interview an expert in your niche.

- **Engage your audience** - Ask questions. Create polls. Host contests. See what others are doing and adapt their tactics to fit your market.
- **Add other platforms if appropriate to your industry** - Pinterest is currently the fastest-growing social media platform. It is well-suited for creatives and those products and/or services that can be presented well visually. LinkedIn is best suited for business professionals. You can use the answers feature to showcase your expertise and network with other professionals using groups.

## Develop a linking strategy:

- **Links are what make the web the web** - Links help search engines find new content so it can be indexed. They also help search engines determine how much "link juice" to distribute to your site, depending on where the link came from.
- **Use deep-linking within your site** - Deep-linking is the use of links within your own site. For example, if you're a veterinarian and your website has a pillar content article or landing page about a dog skin condition - that content would likely have information about the condition's symptoms and treatment options. You can support your landing page by writing a short blog post about a related topic, perhaps a different skin condition or a new treatment method, and link the blog post using proper anchor text to your landing page.
- **Build quality, relevant backlinks (also called "inbound links" to your site** - Off-page optimization includes building relative backlinks from authority sites, Web 2.0 properties and social media platforms. Inbound links have higher authority with search engines than internal and reciprocal links because they signal a site opted to link to your content without receiving anything in return.

When possible, use anchor text that reinforces the keywords you are attempting to rank for.

- **Link-building has changed** - In the early days of the Internet, he who had the most links won, so marketers would often buy links. Today, that can get your site de-indexed. Now search engines have improved and can determine if a link is relevant to a website's content. Also, links are no longer created equal. Search engines weigh links by the site's PR authority and even by extension authority. A link from a higher PR site is more valuable than one from a lower PR site, and a link from a .gov or .edu site pulls more weight than a .com, .net, or other extension.

## Follow up & nurture leads using email marketing:

- **List-building** - Building a list is essential to success in no matter what the market. The easiest way to build a list of customers and leads is to dangle a free carrot in front of them and trade it in exchange for their email address and/or phone number.

Make your giveaway product as valuable to your customer as possible, then set up a landing page - also called a squeeze page. The squeeze page should have a lead capture form set up with an auto-responder. Once the prospect enters his or her email address and/or phone number and clicks the submit button, they'll be taken to a download page where they can click a link and download the free product you've offered them.

Now you have the contact information of someone who is interested in your products or services enough to give it to you. This list of targeted leads is VERY valuable.

- **Email marketing** - Email marketing is the most tried-and-true method for nurturing leads and developing relationships with your customers.

Once you've captured the contact information using your squeeze page, the next step is to load up your auto-responder with a series of Know-Like-Trust email messages to nurture those leads and develop relationships with them. For effective and profitable email marketing, follow each KLT series with a product/service pitch.

Simply rinse and repeat this process.

**\* TIP:** It's a good practice to segment your email marketing list between those prospects who are "just looking" and customers who have actually purchased a product or service from you.

## Implement innovative marketing methods, such as mobile:

- **Mobile marketing is innovative** - It seems as though new mobile marketing tools are being released constantly. And not only are a number of tools available to choose from, there are many ways to use each tool to connect with your customers.

For example, mass messaging, through either text or a voice broadcast, can be used to re-engage former customers, provide incentives to a specific group of customers, announce new products and services, or send event invitations and reminders.

- **Mobile marketing is interactive** - With features such as text-to-screen, multi-channel voting, and mobile loyalty programs, customers get to interact with your marketing methods. Today's consumer is more involved with gathering his or her own information and making decisions to buy rather than passively being sold to. Because of this shift in purchasing power, interactive marketing has become a popular way to reach even the most savvy prospect.
- **Mobile marketing is fun** - Largely due to its interactive nature, mobile marketing is fun. It's not only fun for the consumer, but for the company owner as well.
- **Mobile marketing methods** - Some of the popular mobile marketing methods include loyalty programs, mobile coupons, mobile eCards, mass messaging, text and/or voice reminders, multi-channel voting, QR Code marketing, shuffle auto-responders, text-to-screen and voice broadcast.
- **Mobile websites** - Don't forget the importance of having a website that is responsive, meaning it automatically re-sizes when displayed on a mobile phone or tablet. If a prospect can't view what they're looking for on your site from their mobile device, it's likely they'll move on to a site where they can.

## Include traditional print advertising in your plan:

- **Drive traffic to your site** - Many marketers who sell services to offline clients spout off “facts” and figures to get potential customers thinking there is no place for traditional advertising in your marketing plan. That’s probably due to the fact they’ve way over-priced their services, so if they can get you to cut out your print advertising budget, they can charge you more. Be wary of anyone who attempts to coerce you into putting all your advertising eggs into one basket.

The truth is, print advertising is NOT dead, old school, out-of-vogue, or whatever other label it’s been given. But, as with anything, you need to determine the best use of your print advertising budget. Don’t just blindly place an ad and mail a check to the local paper - talk to a sales representative and have him or her help you place your print ad in the most targeted area of the newspaper for your market. Be sure to include your website address in your print ad.

For example, if you own a guitar store, those who enjoy music will likely read the entertainment section. Newspapers often have special promotion sections relating to holidays and special local events. Find out what’s coming down the advertising pike and reserve your space early. Ask your consultant to help you plan out an annual advertising calendar so you can lock in fixed pricing and better plan your budget.

Discuss bundling ads, including strategic placement of banner ads on the paper’s website. If nothing else, you’ll get a high-quality backlink to your own site, but it’s more likely that you’ll get a good click-through-rate to your website.

Use that print ad wisely by including a specific call to action. Have readers go to your website and perform your most desired action, such as opting into your mailing list in exchange for a free information download, etc.

# The Small Business Marketing Guide

- **High pass-along rate** - Newspapers have a high pass-along rate because printed products have a high perceived value, so people are hesitant to throw them away. People share their papers with friends and family who don't subscribe when the edition contains an announcement (such as wedding or engagement), an obituary, or a story about someone they know. The more sets of eyes that see a newspaper, the more sets of eyes will see your ad.
- **Reach a segment of your audience that may not be active online** - Although online search is the first point of contact for the majority of today's market, some people still aren't comfortable with searching online for what they want as the first step in their shopping process. But a well-thought-out newspaper ad with an enticing call to action may be the tipping point that gets them to open up a browser and type in your website's address.
- **Newsprint ads reinforce your brand through visual recognition of your company name & logo** - Visual presentation of your logo and company name never hurts. In fact, it's one of those "the more the merrier" marketing methods. Major corporations understand this. Just ask the parent of any young child where the kid wants to eat every meal. Pre-schooler's can't yet read the word, but they recognize the logo of their favorite eatery, (and it's likely a large yellow M).

## Ensure printed materials are produced professionally:

- **Speaking of visual brand recognition** - Reinforce your brand's image by making sure you have a professionally designed logo and include it on all of your printed (and digital) marketing materials.
- **And yes, clients can tell if your business card is homemade** - Your company's reputation and image is too important to risk ruining over the few extra dollars it takes to have a professional create your logo, brochures, business cards, and letterhead. It's not worth the risk.
- **If you're unsure what you need** - Ask your local commercial print shop what printed marketing materials are available and what works best for your type of business. You may simply need business cards and letterhead, but then, depending on your industry, you may need an entire array of printed products. Your professional printer can help you decide.

## Other ways to connect with customers:

- **Community involvement** - Join a service club, sponsor community events, participate in local trade shows, volunteer at a nonprofit organization. The point is, being seen as an active member of your community places you in a position of respect in the eyes of your prospective customers.
- **Public relations** - Don't underestimate the power of publicity. It can boost your business growth. Submit press releases to area media whenever your company reaches a milestone or participates in an event of local interest. When writing your release, be sure to focus on the newsworthiness of your story rather than pitching your products or services.
- **Networking with those in your industry** - Don't think of your competition as "the enemy," but rather learn from each other and, when appropriate, work together for the good of the community. For example, medical professionals volunteering their services at a free clinic, etc.
- **Incentivized referral program** - Word of Mouth Marketing is one of the most effective methods to grow your business. This goes for both online (typically via social media) and offline. Thank people who help spread the word about your business by offering them freebies or discounts.

## The key to marketing success:

- **Outsource all tasks that can be performed by others** - This leaves you the time to run your business, and ultimately will increase your revenue. Yes, marketing is an expense, but in today's consumer-controlled market, companies have to make themselves stand out in the crowd.

Social platforms are busy. Just having a Facebook page or Twitter account isn't enough. You have to spend time to get your market's attention. And every minute you spend doing something you could outsource takes you away from the parts of your business that only you the business owner are best at.

By the time you (1) learn how to set up your social profiles, (2) understand how to properly engage your audience, and (3) keep up the bond between you and your community, you've spent a lot of hours away from creating new products or providing the high-quality service your clients expect from you.

It's true: Outsourcing your social media management is not some new idea - it's becoming the norm for small business owners.

- **Who can you trust to perform your marketing tasks?** The key to success with outsourcing is to find someone you trust to handle this task. Your social media manager represents your voice, so you must be able to find someone who is not only trustworthy to speak to your audience the way you want them to, but to be reliable - someone who will be there now and in the future.
- **Need some help?** If you're looking for someone trustworthy to create a mobile-friendly, optimized website, manage your social media, or handle your online reputation management, send me an email and I'll get you information about the digital services I provide - [mail@lindafulkerson.com](mailto:mail@lindafulkerson.com).