

“...there are ways to market your business without breaking the bank.”



Promoting your business means getting the word out. Though word of mouth is effective, you can't rely on other people to do it for you, no matter how great your product or service is. The first rule of business promotion is that you have to do this consciously. Business guidelines say that owners should spend at least an hour a day promoting their business. The second rule of business promotion is that like every other aspect of your business, it should be included in your budget. Fortunately, there are ways to market your business without breaking the bank.

Use Every Outgoing Correspondence

Each day, your business probably sends out dozens of letters and other correspondence in letters that only have a name and return address. Why not put that space to good use and put your company logo and slogan on it as well? By using your logo and company slogan on outgoing mail, you make those receiving your correspondence more aware of your company and its services. Additionally, try squeezing in your company's URL on the envelope as well. The more accessible you make your company information to your customers, the more interest they will show in your company. Also, by typing your correspondence on company letterhead, again, with company logo, and URL visible, the easier it is for your customers to respond to your business. Why not make all this correspondence work for you since you're sending them out anyway?

The same should go for outgoing faxes, bill payments, receipts. You should make it a habit that whatever paper you send out should carry your full company message. And don't forget to make sure that your email has a complete signature that provides all your business information and a promotional tagline.

Electronic documents, such as e-mail, are also easy to update with your latest business promotion information, whether it be a special price on your product or

service, or letting people know that your company has won an award.

Press Releases

The limitation to using press releases as a business promotion tool is that your press release has to actually contain information that is newsworthy, and be engaging enough to get people's interest. Some things that may be newsworthy are things like a recent business expansion, new products, or your business being involved in some promotional activity like sponsoring an event or receiving an award. These are all "newsworthy" events that can be featured as press releases.

While many business people send press releases to newspapers as a matter of course, the Internet is always a tool that can be used for press releases as well.

Freebies

We've all heard radio spots promising a free product or discounts to the first 50 customers, or buying a product, and getting a free gift with purchase. Studies show that 85 percent of consumers respond to freebies. The bottom line is that everyone loves to get free things when they can.

By using this technique, you leave a lasting impression on your customers. For instance, I've been going to the same art-framing store for years. Why? Because they go the extra mile to throw in freebies for me - anything from free mounting and matting on one occasion, to a 20 percent discount the next; and they always include a handwritten thank you note. These things certainly don't cost them much, but it leaves a lasting impression on me, their customer. And in turn, I patronize their business, and refer my friends to them for their framing needs. The possibilities of small freebies are endless, but they keep customers coming back for more.

Business Seminars and Trade Shows

Your business is based on a certain knowledge and expertise. Believe it or not, people will come to you for this knowledge. So why not share that expertise and promote your business at the same time? For example, a local paint company advertises a free seminar on techniques of painting. Participants not only learn how to achieve the techniques, but are also offered a special discount on the paint they need to do the technique they wish. This not only establishes one-on-one relationship between customer and employee, but also gives customers incentives to give you their business. You can promote your products or business by giving seminars on a broader scope to students or other working professionals. For instance, if you are a small software company, you can give a seminar on how to start your own business and the advantages of using your software. The more you talk to people, the more networking happens. The more networking that happens, the more business you will get.

Advertise Through Your Leisure Activities

A friend of mine likes to run in triathlons. Each time he wins a race, he mentions the name and address of his business. He also wears his company shirt during the race. There is nothing wrong with promoting your business by wearing a shirt with your company logo prominently displayed while golfing, fishing, or rock climbing. These are subtle ways of advertising that will catch people's attention.

It is a good habit to get into promoting your business wherever you go. This means leaving your business card or dropping your company name in almost everything that you do. This will get your company name out there, and helps to boost your already thriving business and its wonderful products. **VBJ** 