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CREATING A SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING PLAN – IDEAS, SOLUTIONS AND PRACTICAL ADVICE

General Points

A Budget is not the Same as a Plan

A Marketing Plan is something you get on and do, or make happen. It involved thinking and figuring out beforehand, and then action to make it happen, or at least finding someone else to do the work and paying for it to happen. But the decisions about what gets done are down to you, the business owner/manager.

A budget spreadsheet is not the same as a business plan. In the same way, setting aside some money, your “marketing budget”, is not in the least the same as making a marketing plan.

As with the business plan itself, the *thinking phase* is the most important.

Marketing Will Cost You Effort or Money or Both – But the Plan Must be Yours

You could do it all yourself and not pay for your marketing work. Or you could outsource the whole thing and just pay money for the work. The best way however is likely to involve doing some of both. The more work you can do yourself, the less it should cost you right? Well. Maybe, but remember your time and effort are scarce and expensive. It may be “cheaper” to make your plan and then outsource the work.

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You can get someone else to create the plan of course – only you must be sure to have a lot of input into that plan, especially about the detail of what you want that plan to achieve.

So whether you create the plan yourself, or get someone else to do it, it must be your plan, written around exactly what you want, who your prospects are, who your target market is etc.

Target Market – Write Down as Much as you Can About Them, Who They Are and Their Behaviour

Why do we target our marketing? Because reaching people with your message costs effort and time and sometimes money. It's not free, by and large. Because of this, you want to reach the specific people who might want what you offer and who might part with some cash, or whom you want to influence.

If the cost of reaching each person is low, for instance if you have a good position in the free Google searches, then it doesn't matter if you hit a bunch of irrelevant people with your message, so long as you hit the target group. On the other hand if you are paying for each one, for instance with pay-per-click Adwords, then you need to be *tightly targeted*. The same goes for social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ or YouTube: these are "free" but they cost you in time, so make sure they are tightly targeted.

All this means that you need a profile for your target market. What else are they interested in? Where do they go? What do they do with their time? Age, sex, demographic, average work day, pleasures and pains, annoyances etc etc. Write these things down as part of your plan and it will make them easier to target.

Key Messages

What messages do you want your marketing to get over? What do you want to achieve?

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This is not the same as “I want them to pay me money for my service”. The aims you write down should be more like:

I want my business to be the first one they think of when they are ready to buy...

I want them to know we are here...

I want them to know we are better than our competitors because...

I want them to know our quality is better...

I want them to know we offer the best service...

I want them to feel good about us...

I want them to remember our web address...

Write down the key messages you want to get over. It will help you when you are thinking of what you need to include in your plan.

And you should write down in one short sentence what your business does, because that is always going to be part of the Key Messages. (This needs some work of course. Getting down in one sentence what you are there for, in a clear way is a subtle task. Make it so they instantly get what you’re about.)

This does not mean you just repeat these key messages of course. These messages are for you, to remind you what your marketing is for. The ways you get these messages across, the delivery, can come in different forms: direct or indirect, obvious or subtle, “does what it says on the tin” or touchy-feely. The message can also be in words, in images, in video, as a personality, or any of these.

Tone

Did I say touchy-feely? Don’t let that turn you off. A lot of small business people regard marketing as an artistic black art, full of weird terminology. I

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know most small businesses will want to be direct if they can. They simply do not have the resources to be too indirect, except perhaps when it comes to PR and press coverage.

However, the touchy feely bit I am talking about is *TONE*. Think about how you want to be perceived. *Professional? Fun? Stylish? Different?* The images, colours and words you use, and the décor of your shop if you have one, should always reflect the image you want to present to the target market.

Brand Building and Prospect Building – The Concept to Aim For

The idea is for target market individuals is to have your business in their minds for when they next want a product or service like yours. You should come into their minds as the natural first choice, or one of the first.

These target people should:

- Know that your business exists
- Know your strengths and reputation
- Trust your business

That is they should have the BRAND established in their minds when they next think of buying. We can call these people your “community”. Another way would be to say they are your prospects

The numbers required to build up a Community may be large for small value consumer buys, or small for higher spends and higher margins. You will know the numbers of customers you are looking for. If you have fifty regular clients, another fifty may be your target. The number of prospects (sales leads) you need in your community will be a MULTIPLE of that – say 250. Your prospects and customers are part of your prospect community. The aim of your

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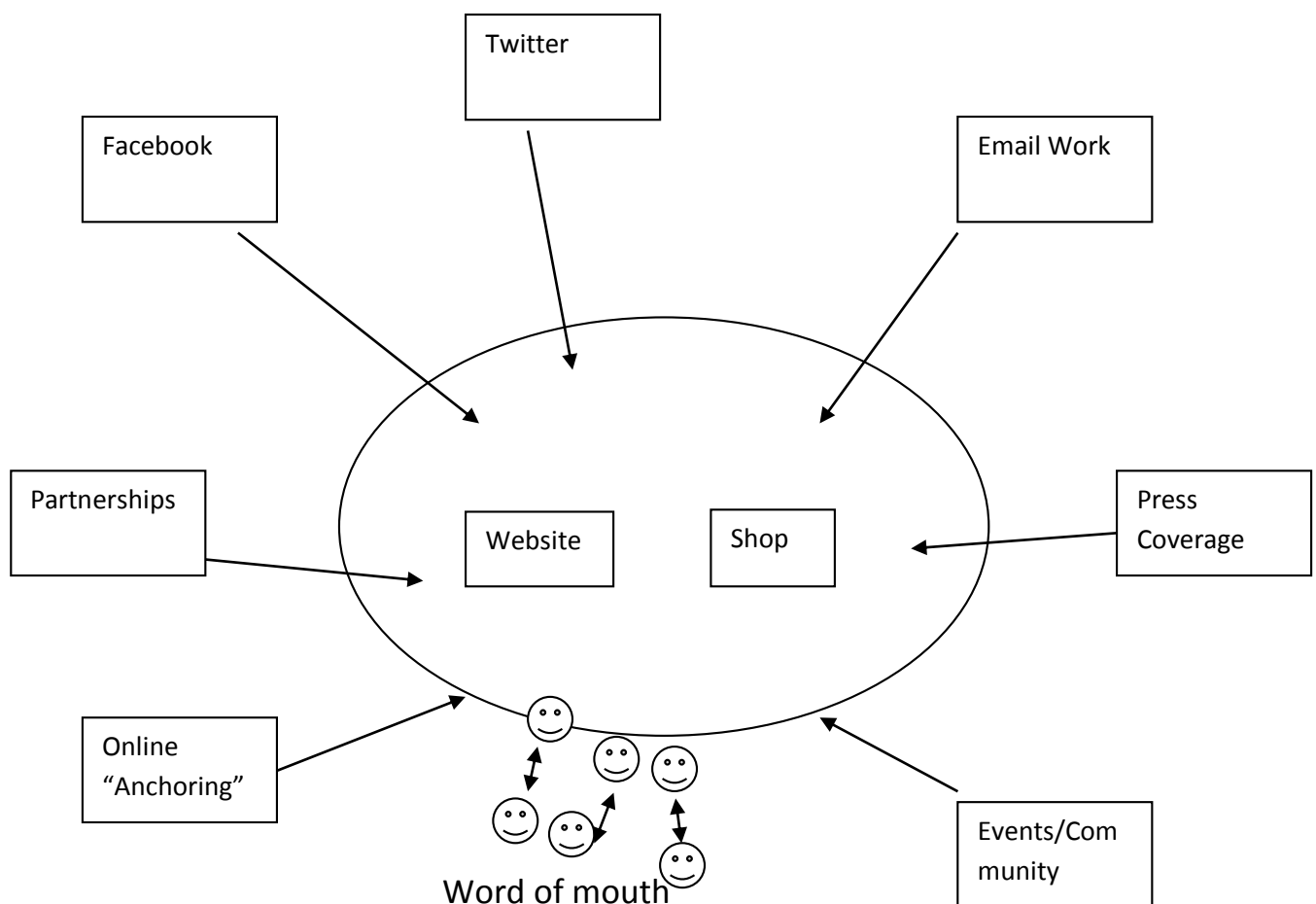
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marketing is draw more and more people farther and farther into that prospect community.

THE PROSPECT COMMUNITY

All the marketing activities push people into the community, making the community grow. Word of mouth “organic growth” is the most powerful type of marketing, but it only works once you have begun to build up a community of buyers and prospects. So the aim of your marketing is to accelerate people into your prospect community.



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People inside the community are the ones who know about your business and one or two of its key messages. The people in the centre are your paying customers.

The aim of building the community is to drive paying interactions at the centre.

Action Points –

Community All your staff must be aware of the value of expanding the Community, and to look for opportunities to do so.

Data Gathering – this is at the heart of building a community, since it allows hugely increased communication. Staff to look for ALL opportunities to gather email addresses especially.

Data Gathering

You have no alternative but to gather data about these prospects, because it will make it so much easier and cheaper to communicate your key messages to them, and to do this into the future. Data gathering is critical and should be

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built in to all your plans. Names, email addresses, mobile numbers – you need these. *No ifs, no Buts...* It will make your life so much easier.

Should you do all this yourself? How much should you “outsource”?

You can do most of it yourself if you put your mind to it – it’s cheaper! However, remember, your supposed to be running a business here, and your time is limited. So is the time of your staff.

On the Free Downloads page of my site I have a useful guide as to why you should outsource, under what circumstances – and what you should not outsource.

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Marketing Activities

Finally! So what marketing activities can you actually do?

Website

It goes without saying that all businesses of whatever size should have a website.

Websites are a very useful thing. They can not only represent you and tell people all about your business. They can do a lot of the work for you. They can gather prospect information. They can take orders. They can answer questions. They can ask questions. They can establish your brand values in the

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mind of the customer. They are the Swiss Army knives of customer and prospect interaction.

In that respect they are somewhat like a shop, except they do not require staff and they are open 24/7. Ideally, ALL the information you would be happy to supply to a customer in person or on the phone should be made available on the site. This may not be possible, but that is the ideal.

HOWEVER – Businesses still need people to come into their shops, get on the phone, book meetings etc. So be clear about what your web site is there for. Is it there to sell? Or just to drive people to meet with you or come into your shop? Regardless, one of its functions will ALWAYS be the gathering of prospect data.

Key Point: although web sites CAN do many things, it doesn't mean that they should. In my view, ANY website should focus on two things:

1. Give a clear idea of what the business is all about.
2. Collect details for further contact, especially email addresses.
3. Move visitors towards a further interaction, maybe a phone call, further research or a purchase.

For point 2, the gathering especially of email addresses is critical, since it facilitates so much else of what can be done in terms of local marketing. In my view this is a must. There should be a compelling reason to put an email address into a form and this must be on the home page.

The site must also be tied into other outlets the business has such as any shops, plus Facebook, Twitter etc.

Action Points – these are probably in hand already, but:

Data gathering on the site

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Clearly but concisely say who you are and what you do. Use of testimonials if at all possible

Email Marketing

Email marketing may seem old fashioned, especially considering what can be achieved with Social Media. However, email can make a big difference in building up a community because of its ability to keep messages in the minds of the prospects.

No opportunity to gather email addresses should be missed. These could include:

- Website form
- Getting visitors to the shop to quickly fill in a card
- Competitions
- Online surveys
- Inserts magazines or in local shops with a reason to pop a card back to your shop
- Events at school fairs, sports events etc – gather email addresses at the same time
- Freepost reply cards.

There are many, many other opportunities, depending on your business. Email is very powerful. It can be used not just for offers, but for feel-good stories,

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comment related stories in the press, and establishing you as an expert in the customer's mind.

Email is the best way of promoting events, special offers and other activities, do surveys and so forth. Once you have the names, it is almost free.

For the style of your emails, the two watchwords are "Personal" and "Expert". Make it feel like someone has sat there and typed them out for the love of it. It feels more personal and one-to-one. The feel of a one-to-one email should be replicated if possible.

Separate lists should be kept for different types of prospects/customers.

Action Points –

Email address gathering!

Follow up emails after orders, purchases etc – a good way to keep in customers' minds AND to elicit positive testimonials

Facebook/Twitter

Many businesses already use both of these social media daily to good effect. It is a matter of increasing followings and likes on both as well as keeping up daily activity if possible.

In both cases the aim should again be to drive people to the website and the shop or the phone, but the selling messages should be outnumbered by more general and engaging messages, especially anything in the press related to your business. Selling messages should be at a minimum. Use these media to keep yourself in their minds.

With Twitter especially there is an opportunity to gather more followers by going through the "following" lists of other local businesses with similar

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customer profiles and judiciously picking some to follow. Many will follow back and you can then market your ideas and offers to them effectively.

Action Points –

Keep up the good work

Make a systematic plan to keep the activity up – delegate this as a responsibility, or set aside time to do it. (At least read through the Social Media Strategy Plan Template on www.TheAttentionBusiness.com. Making the right choices and getting organized will massively save you time and effort.)

Partnerships

Where do your potential customers shop, dine or visit? Get to know other local businesses and make agreements to carry each other's cards, flyers etc. Most people will be happy with this. *I'll hand out your flyer if you hand out mine...*

Partnerships are an excellent way of anchoring into a local community, since the users of local services are by their very nature local. Then remember there will be other local businesses with email lists. If you find the right partner with the right kind of offering, you can even send offers for each other, though of course you have to be careful doing this and it has to look genuine.

I would recommend perhaps three things here:

1. In fact there is a wealth of partnership opportunities, even in your immediate locality. It would be difficult to reciprocate to all of them. Therefore the partners should be chosen with care as those with the most similar customer profile, and who can do most for you.

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2. It would be good to have some sense of how effective the partnerships were. To this end, the flyers or whatever which are placed in a partner store should be marked somehow or some system put in place to allow tracking of effectiveness. This is easiest when there is a response mechanism. I.e., “hand this completed card in to receive your free magazine/5% discount/etc”, and the card is somehow marked to identify the source.
3. These partnerships should if possible be used for gathering addresses or more likely emails. A mystery competition could be a good idea here, with cards handed back to you, and the answer to be found in your shop window for instance.

Online Anchoring

This is simply doing all you can to make sure that your business comes up in an impressive fashion when local Google searches are made which are relevant to you.

The search results should also look as good as possible.

This is not as quick or as straightforward as it sounds and I generally recommend a 12 Week programme for this kind of thing. A Google local listing plus one or two positive reviews are a great help, and if possible you should include in getting an image for a full right hand side listing.

Again, this work has been often been done quite effectively. But it needs to be done. Separate Google Local listings should be done if you have more than one outlet.

Reviews and testimonials should be “encouraged” at local listings. Get friends and loyal customers to put these review up for you. They are invaluable. You will likely find at least 10 local directories which will help anchor you locally.

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Press Coverage

This should prove a rich source of free publicity if done right with a little effort.

- It is FREE advertising
- It is far more trusted than any paid advertising you will do.
- It has an immediate effect.

I not saying that local press and radio coverage will just fall into your lap, and you do have to get off your butt for this one and make it happen. However, please read Public Relations and Press Coverage Plan at www.theattentionbusiness.com/free-downloads, to put you in the right frame of mind. It's full of advice and practical ideas. It CAN be done, and you don't need an expensive agent to make it happen.

Events and Local "Feel-Good"

Are you aiming at customers locally? How many customers or prospects are you aiming to acquire? If the answer is in the tens or hundreds it may be worth having events or parties at local venues.

Sounds expensive, but it need not be so if you can partner with a supplier of yours who is happy to foot some or all of the bill in return for the exposure to your market. Larger firms often have far bigger budgets than you have, and you might find the your sales rep is happy to support someone like you who is prepared to get out there and make things happen.

You might find the expense is minimal and the feel-good factor you build up is huge in comparison.

Example:

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A travel agent recently opened in Warwickshire held a Caribbean themed evening at a local pub near the shop. He invited existing customers and prospects and got customers to bring a friend if they wanted. The evening was paid for by a tour operator who wanted more exposure in that area. To the tour operator, a few hundred quid for this kind of feel-good and exposure is nothing, and in any case he enjoyed the evening AND could tell his boss about his pro-active good work. The goodwill gained with customers, prospects *and the supplier* was invaluable.

Clearly this is not going to work for everyone, but it does have the huge plus of:

- cementing you in people's minds,
- creating personal relationships
- helps you get the customers' opinions
- making you feel a bit special to them

This even works if you start with family and friends and get them to invite other people. Family and friends will know much more about your venture and they will tell others about it. It's so much better than just saying "please put the word out". Again, email and address gathering at these events is critical if they are to have long term benefits.

This is an old fashioned way of doing things but it can be very effective where the feel of a business and the personal touch is valued. You ignore this personal approach at your peril. It ties in very well with digital efforts and it is proven to work. The feedback and the feel you get for your market is also invaluable.