

# A Yearlong Guide for Small Business Growth

**JAN**

**FEB**

**MAR**



**APR**

**MAY**



**JUN**



**JUL**



**AUG**



**SEP**



**OCT**



**NOV**



**DEC**

# Are you ready to boost your business growth strategy?

What you're reading now is a 12-month course to turn strangers into customers, customers into clients and clients into advocates for your brand. Your small business is a machine: a complex engine with lots of moving parts that also provides a living for your family and the families of your employees. This year-long plan address the marketing engine of that machine, helping it run more smoothly and efficiently to give your small business a boost for the new year.

## What's in this guide:

What follows is a list of suggestions and assignments for each month that, if applied correctly, will net positive change in your small business in twelve months. Not all of them will work, but if you stick to it diligently, enough will pay off that you will be in a better position than you're in right now.

It's also likely that you'll make changes to the plan as you go. You'll decide that one suggestion doesn't work for the specifics of your small business or that another suggestion needs to be "turned up to 11." That's absolutely fine. No small business is the same, and you are the only one truly qualified to fine-tune any plan for your growth.

THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS?

Find us here:





JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

## What to keep in mind...

This is a thorough small business growth marketing plan. Here's what you should know up-front:

- **The plan is general.** We won't give you industry-specific advice because we want it to be useful to every small business owner who decides to read it.
- **The plan is progressive.** This means that programs you set up early will establish routines and systems you'll use later. Because of this, the last half of the year may feel repetitive and simple. That's an intentional part of our design. We want to make this plan simple enough for you to run your small business seamlessly and efficiently.
- **The plan is only a suggestion.** The steps we outline are what you should do, not exactly how you should do it. If there are any steps here that you don't know how to do, ask an expert, check out our [blog](#) or consult with an SMB marketing expert. Feel free to take liberties in adding your own creative spin as well.
- **The plan is flexible.** You might be executing some of the steps already. If you are, we recommend replacing that part of the plan with another initiative you're excited about. That way you still get explosive growth by the end of the year.
- **You can navigate this guide** by selecting the month on the sidebar.



## January

While the guide starts in January, none of this is time-dependent. You can start this guide at any point in the year. For example, if you start in June, use January's suggestions for June, February's for July and so on. You might have to make a few adjustments (for example, focusing on the holidays earlier than the guide says), but overall, use this guide in a progressive order.

- **Create a mailing list** of everyone who's ever bought something from you or asked about buying something from you, plus everyone you've ever bought something from.
- **Create a mailing list** of past and potential customers as well as businesses you've purchased from. Use your email records and invoices payable and receivable to discover these names. Compile them in an email list.
- **Look at your social media profiles** and make sure they are professional and engaging. Include photos of both your team and the benefits of your products or services.
- **Review your entire website** with a fine-tooth comb and note which pages need to be updated and what sections may need a formatting change or link update. Are you missing pages or information? Put yourself in your customers' shoes when they view your online presence
- Use your memory, your employees' memories and the mailing list you created to **triage existing customers** into three categories:
  - C customers:** those you might lose
  - B customers:** those who have potential, but are not loyal
  - A customers:** those who are loyal and advocates of your business

# FEB

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

## February

Starting this month, you'll be doing both new activities to build out your marketing platform and tasks that leverage the work you've done before. Attacking the problem with "combination punches" is one key to creating surprisingly rapid growth.

- **Send an "opt-in" email** to everyone on your mailing list. The tone and specifics will vary based on the realities of your small business and customer base and what you're trying to accomplish with each email. However, it should always include the following elements:
  - A sincere "thank you" for being involved or interested in your company.
  - An announcement that you'll be sending out company news and special offers each month.
  - Instructions that explain they only need to ask once to be removed from the list, but if they're still on the list in February, they will receive an exclusive offer.
- **Repair your website** in all areas that need to be updated after your January audit.
- **Research the charities** that are most active and respected in your community. For the best results, use a locally-based charity (think: local food bank). Choose one to three that are linked thematically with what your small business does.
- Spend the week before Valentine's Day **posting one teaser daily** about a special you're running on the day itself. On Valentine's Day, offer a discount for any order placed by those who follow your social media accounts. You can also keep this to specific social channels instead of all of them – whichever account is most important for you to grow.

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JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

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## February

- Choose a day in March to **invite your customers for an after-hours appreciation event**. If your customers are widespread, make it an online live event. If most are local, arrange a behind-the-scenes tour or an appreciation event.
- **Call each of your C customers** and invite them personally.
- **Announce the event** to your B customers via social media and email.
- **Contact your A customers** by email and ask what they would like to see at the event. Confirm that you can count on their presence at the pre-party one hour before the general event begins.

# MAR

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

## March

- **Create a social media content calendar** through June using your Valentine's Day event as a model and national and local events as inspiration for themes. Think about your weekly and daily posts, but leave room for topical and timely content too. Make sure only 20% of your posts feel promotional, and 80% provide value or drive community and engagement.
- **Contact the charities you researched** and identify two with whom you want to work. Find out whether they are willing to work with you.
- **Repair broken links** and correct other problems with your website so it's professional, simple and functional. Cross-link to related pages within your site.
- In this month's newsletter, **offer a discount offer or small free item** for customers who post on social media their favorite aspect of your business. Ensure they know they must tag you to receive the offer. Also, include one piece of industry and/or local news as well as one insider-peek as to how your business operates.
- If you haven't already, **design a formal client reward program** for bringing in referral business.
- **Host your party.** Have A clients show up early to establish a good tone before the B and C-listers arrive. Share ideas, and center the event on showing a behind-the-scenes look at your business. Answer questions and deal with complaints honestly and openly. Don't mention the referral program just yet. You want them focused on how your business works and how much you appreciate your customers instead of feeling like they're at a sales pitch.
- **Send out a post-part email** highlighting these three topics:
  - Sincere thanks for attending
  - A request for one area of improvement for your business
  - Details of your referral program



## April

- **Improve your social media content calendar** by making at least one post per day, per platform according to your plan. You can schedule these ahead of time so it doesn't take up too much energy. Your social media accounts should be engaging and active with relevant content. Remember that it's quality over quantity. It's better to have a few social media channels with semi-regularly posted strong content than multiple channels with frequently posted poor content or no content at all. While you're at it, comment and share on posts of other companies that are associated with your industry. They'll appreciate your attention and may reciprocate on your channels.
- Plan with one of your partner charities to **have a joint event in May**. Mention it on your website and social media channels. When the details are figured out, send a press release to your local paper. You can also create flyers or signs to put up in your store as well as an informational banner on your website.
- **Send your monthly newsletter** to your mailing list. As always, it should include a special offer for loyalty or social sharing, a bit of industry news and an insider peek at your small business (like an op-ed piece, an employee profile or a description of one of your processes).
- **Review the suggestions** you received after your party. Meet with your team and decide which changes to make and how to make them. Send a quick email to those who came to the party, thanking them for their advice and including some bullet points about your plan.
- **Reach out** to all C Clients who attended your event and suss out what it would take to convert them to B Clients or A Clients.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

# MAY

## May

- **Work your social media content calendar.** Remember to plan content ahead each month, being timely and relevant. May is a great month to focus on spring-related content or offer your fans and followers a spring promotional deal.
- Plan with one of your partner charities to **have a joint event in May.** Mention it on your website and social media channels. When the details are figured out, send a press release to your local paper. You can also create flyers or signs to put up in your store as well as an informational banner on your website.
- **Send your monthly newsletter.**
- **Run your joint charity drive.** If possible and appropriate, your joint charity drive should raise funds and awareness for several weeks. Consider ending the event with a ceremony presenting a large check to the charity. Remember to alert the press. Consumers will enjoy the message that you've given back rather than a sales pitch.
- **Invite a few select clients** to your charity event to celebrate the partnership. Connect with each meaningfully when they arrive.
- **Send a reminder** out about your referral program. If necessary, up the ante with a special bonus for new clients brought in this month.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

**MAY**

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC



## June

- **Review your social media plan.** While you're at it, make a Twitter list. Twitter lists are a great way to publicly or privately keep track of important fans, customers and accounts you want to track. These can range from your competitors to customers to companies wanting to help you succeed. You can easily make shorter lists of a portion of your followers, making it easier to follow and converse with accounts you find important (like VIP Customers).
- **Send your next newsletter.** At the end of this newsletter, include a call for questions or a discussion on a certain topic. Offer a small discount or giveaway those who send in a question about your small business or the industry.
- **Connect with the other charity you've selected.** Set up an event for July. Promote it just as enthusiastically as you did the first.
- **Work on your summer-themed marketing plan** aligned to trends and topics for the season.
- **Send an appreciation gift** to your B-listers. This can be a small coupon or branded item. Generally, you get the least return on your investment from this population, but it's still worth a small gesture to bring your brand top of mind again.
- Choose one client from each of your A, B and C lists, and **make it your life's mission to wow each of them**. Whatever it takes, make it happen. This is how you turn clients into enthusiastic advocates for your brand. For example, we showed our appreciation for a customer by offering her a vacation for her and her family!

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC



## July

- **Post questions and answers** from those sent in response to your newsletter questions in June to your social media channels. Draw attention to your social media pages by tagging each person whose question you answer.
- **Send your next newsletter.**
- **Hold your charity drive** with the same trimmings and client invites as the first charity drive.
- **Evaluate your summer-themed marketing plan** and start to think about your one for fall/winter.
- Remember when you wowed one customer from each list? **Do it again** with three more clients. Ensure to impress them.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

# AUG

## August

**It's halftime:** A month that tends to lag a bit because everybody's on vacation or holding back because it's the beginning of the school year. Don't do anything new this month, but take time to work on your social media plan and send your newsletter. Also, look at your metrics to see which initiatives have performed the best so far.

While it's slow, it's a great time to start thinking way ahead and start planning for the upcoming holiday season. Digging into your analytics for last year to see traffic spikes aligned to key marketing activities is effective for holiday pre-planning.

If you work in an industry where August is busy (for example, resort hospitality or a swim center), consider turning this calendar on its head and treating September as January. Your year runs from September to August anyway.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

**AUG**

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC



## September

- **Work your social media plan.** It's fall, and the holidays are approaching, so your social media content should be rich and relevant. Post fall-related content or pre-planning holiday content for your company blog. Holiday content allows you to take advantage of SEO and keyword opportunities early.
- **Send your monthly newsletter.** At the end of your newsletter, include a call for suggestions about how people like to spend their fall months as well as the upcoming holiday season.
- Contact the charity that you had the most successful partnership with and **schedule a third charity drive** for late October/early November.
- **Reach out to at least 10 local or related small businesses** and find out which ones would be willing to do some shared, reciprocal holiday marketing.
- **Announce a VIP event** for your "top clients" that corresponds with the charity drive. In the same email, ask for volunteers to help with the charity collaboration.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

# OCT

## October

- **Work on your social media plan (again).** It's the month of Halloween. What kind of discounts or interactive, entertaining promotions can you think up for your social media accounts? Maybe host a Halloween-themed contest for your customers and post pictures on your Facebook page for followers to vote on.
- **Send your monthly newsletter.** Include a small section of the most interesting answers from last month's question.
- **Begin your charity drive** in mid-October since Halloween is a highly social holiday. Plan the wrap-up and celebration for the second week of November.
- Sit down with the local small businesses you contacted and **come up with a plan for cross-promotion** in November and early December. Help each other out with referrals, packaged promotions and shared advertising. Promote each other on social media, your websites, your email newsletter and anywhere else you can think of that is appropriate for cross-promotion. This will help you be seen as a community leader.
- **Coordinate with everyone** who offered to help with the charity collaboration. Give each a small but important task to help with, and thank them profusely. Invite each to attend the wrap-up event as a guest of honor. A great way to go the extra mile is to highlight them on your small business's social media accounts. Post a picture of them on your Facebook page and publicly praise the help they gave your charity and small business.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

# NOV

## November

- This is one of the biggest shopping months. It's also a month of gratefulness and appreciation. Your customers should be thinking about holiday gifts by now, and Black Friday is near the end of the month. **Define a promotional plan.** Be sure to keep it to 20% of your sales content, and make the other content fun and engaging for your customers, giving thanks to them during Thanksgiving!
- **Send out your monthly newsletter.** If you like, repeat one of the calls to action from earlier this year or come up with a new one of your own. Work the coordinated plan you set up with your friendly local small businesses.
- Go through your client list again and **reassess all of your clients.** Put them in the A, B and C lists as appropriate. For the C-listers who haven't responded to your attention, seriously consider no more investments in them going forward. They're probably 10-20% of your client base.

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

# DEC

## December

End the year with heartfelt thanks in your newsletter and social media pages for the outstanding year your clients helped make possible. Spend the rest of your time handling the sales rush, seeing to your family and assessing what worked best out of the implementations you tried this year. Use that information to formulate your new plan for the up-coming New Year, combining those that worked well, those that you've seen improve and the big ideas that came to you over the course of working this plan.

And don't forget to celebrate your successes over the past 12 months! We hope you see a positive change in how your small business connected with your customers. More importantly, we hope you see the growth you deserve. Send us some of your wins to us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#). We'd love to share them!

JAN

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

## Moving forward...

As with any plan, you'll need to spend time with these general ideas, turn them into goals and then turn those goals into action plans with specific tasks assigned to key people. Maybe all of them will be your job. Maybe the whole program will be run by a single member of your staff. Maybe you'll create a team specifically designated to helping your marketing and growth efforts. Find what works best for you to see the best results possible.

Come December, you'll see some serious momentum from this program if you stick to it. Be sure to measure results to see what works best for your small business (and what doesn't get any traction) and change course where necessary. Armed with that information and the extra funds to invest, you'll be ready to make your new year even more impressive!

## Want to learn more?

Kabbage is here to help you grow your small business with success.