Marketing Options

Business CEOs need to continually look at their “marketing” efforts. In my last column, I suggested that one place to start looking at this is to do a competitive market analysis. Some readers wanted me to say a little more about the term “marketing collateral”. By this I mean one should ask: What marketing message are you trying to convey? Is this marketing message up-to-date, effective and attractive? What target market is this marketing message tailored for and is this in line with your current clients and those that you want to reach? Marketing collateral includes your marketing message and the various tools/pieces and strategies that you use to convey that message.

There are many marketing methods and tools to choose from, depending on your needs and resources. Today the website is the primary marketing tool for most small companies. But there are other, more traditional marketing materials that might need a makeover, including your logo, signage, business cards, brochures and fliers. As you look at your existing marketing collateral pieces, ask yourself:

- Do they still reflect your business’s brand and image?
- Has your business’s focus changed so the current marketing materials no longer fully convey what you do?
- Do your visuals look outdated? Maybe it’s time for new colors or designs.

There are several local marketing companies that help small businesses with design etc. Also there are websites that offer low-cost templates you can use to create your own marketing collateral. Here are just a few: 99Designs (www.99designs.com), CrowdSPRING (www.crowdspring.com), Elance (www.elance.com), Freelancer (www.freelancer.com), Guru (www.guru.com), Inkzoo (www.inkzoo.com), Logoworks (www.logoworks.com), Vistaprint (www.vistaprint.com).

Your advertising options are many but generally include both online and offline advertising, print (newspapers, magazines, community publications), radio, cable and broadcast TV, and direct mail (postcards, letters). And don’t forget the whole big area of social media.

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Each media outlet has demographic information about its readers or viewers. Ask for this information to see if an outlet’s audience fits your target customer profile. For instance, if your target customer is mothers with young children and a household income of $50K or more, each outlet can tell you if that demographic makes up a significant portion of their audience.
For a small business, the key to successful advertising is targeting it narrowly. If your customers are mostly local, you probably don’t want to advertise in a major national magazine. But you might want to advertise in a regional or city publication, or a community publication, such as a church bulletin or neighborhood newsletter.

There are several online advertising options. One online advertising method that doesn’t cost anything is doing a link exchange with a site that has complementary visitors to yours. Offer to post a link to (or ad for) their site in exchange for their posting a link to (or ad for) yours.

You can also advertise in email newsletters that reach your target market. For instance, if you sell baby products, you could take out ads in email newsletters targeting mothers or pregnant women.

In pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, you pay for the online ad only when users click on it. If you’re advertising on a search engine like Google or Bing, you usually have to “bid” on the keywords you want to appear for. When a user searches for those keywords, your ad pops up. Using the same example, a baby products company might buy the keywords “baby clothes.” PPC can get expensive since popular keywords can often cost several dollars per click.

Facebook offers similar PPC ads served up based on demographics. If you buy an ad targeting women under 35 with newborn babies, for instance, your ad will appear on those users’ Facebook pages. You can also run banner ads on websites that reach your target audience. The baby products company, for example, could advertise on parenting websites.

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