Business Questions at a Farmers Market

Do you enjoy going to a Farmers Market? What an interesting place filled with a fantastic variety of products, services, and ideas! I love the visit. All of this collection was brought in that morning by a variety of entrepreneurs which represented their offering and demonstration of special skills, interests, hobbies, and opportunity. But what I also found was a commonality of business quest by several small business folks who desired to take their efforts to the next step.

As the morning sales were coming to a close, several, folks who had become friends over the weeks, gathered for their closing ritual of “how did it go today” discussions. One of the group (a regular reader of this column) offered me a cup of coffee and asked, “Dean, how can we use the internet to increase our visibility on a shoestring budget?” As many know, a cup of coffee is enough to stop me and get my interest and a question like that is enough for me to offer some thoughts and suggest that “I’ll write about that in next week’s column”.

Marketing a business online can be a bit tricky with cost being a concern to most small business owners. Some have to work with a low budget with most opting to find a free way to market their trade online. With that in mind it may all boil down to where to start and which tool is best used first. Consider these suggestions for your shoestring budget.

1. The best way to get started is to create credible content. Blogs have become indirect tools for helping create awareness for the business. A modern practice is to add some videos to articles. Try telling your story with video sharing sites with YouTube and Vimeo offering embed codes, a simple copy-and-paste of embed codes can go a long way. You can use them in an email or a social media post. For example, I see many of my Facebook friends paste a short video in their posts and it didn’t cost them anything.

2. Look for and connect with other businesses and customers through on line directories. Many such sites do charge, but many solutions are still available for free. Search for them.

3. Integrating social with your websites. Facebook is more than just a site where folks can share pictures on personal levels. Social plugins are available which can be integrated into websites through plugins or hard codes. They are flexible and can even be cross-promoted with other social media and content for better marketing results.
4. Share product screenshots with CamStudio Open Source, for example. Articles are fine but with visual appeal could ramp up interest all the more. Screencasts can produce tutorials or presentations, something that can, in turn, be shared to build an audience.

5. Use the power of interaction. For example, make use of a site called Slideshare to share your PowerPoint slides. This is commonly used by marketing professionals when they show clients something. Show your products in PowerPoint format.

6. Promote your products with email campaigns with MailChimp. While there are tons of sites that can do this, try this for starters. Once you get some experience with this and have built your business contact list, you may wish to move to a provider that offers a greater variety of options and capabilities like Constant Contact for example. You will have to pay for this, but the value that this type of service could bring to your business may be well worth the cost to you as you use related strategies from that company.

Small businesses looking to connect with their target audience have endless opportunities that enable them to use the internet to show your stuff on a shoestring budget. The most important thing to keep in mind is to ensure that you’re using the right strategies to truly build a community with your target customers.

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