

TELL US ALL ABOUT IT...

BY NEIL OGDEN

So you want to set up your own business, but how do you tell all your potential customers what you're up to? You need a marketing plan. This may sound obvious, but it's amazing how many businesses put little effort into marketing themselves and getting their business known to their customers. At the end of the day, this could mean the difference between profit and loss!

First of all, you need to get to know your product and your market in great detail. You need to be able to explain in simple terms what your business or product is all about so you know and your potential customers know exactly what you are offering.

You also need to work out who you are selling to. Is it business clients, tourists, families, teenagers? Its not very realistic to hope that customers will start to come to you as soon as you open the doors - you need to find them which is what a good marketing plan is all about.

It doesn't have to be a long expensive process to embark on a promotional campaign. All it takes is a little thought and planning.

So, how can you improve your marketing strategy and get your business known? Decide what different forms of marketing you have available to you. You probably need to decide how much money you have available as well although advertising is something that should always be seen as something which will benefit rather than cost your business.

You could choose advertising, perhaps in a trade magazine or possibly in your local paper. Choice of outlet is important. Get hold of a sample copy if you are going for a magazine. Try and find out how large the circulation is and the sort of people that the publication is aimed at. Think about your target audience - are they likely to be reading the publication where your ad appears? If not, then you are wasting your money. Targeting your audience is important. Do you have a product or service which local businesses would be interested in? If so, then putting an ad in a local paper which is delivered to mostly personal addresses is possibly not going to be best thing to do.

The best way to appear in magazines or newspapers is in editorial. Exposure like this is gained by sending out press releases perhaps detailing a new product development or new service - very simple yet it often brings in better results than an ordinary advertisements. Some businesses send out monthly press releases. This form of publicity is often overlooked yet is very simple and inexpensive to put into action. You won't get a mention for every press release you send, but when you do, the response can be very good.

Some publications take "advertorial" a mixture of an advertisement and editorial feature, perhaps presented in the form of an advertisement feature. They may be willing to offer you a special deal on this form of advertising.

Direct marketing by mail is another popular form of marketing. It can be expensive though and results are not always great. Average response is 1-2%, maybe less than that, so you need to send a lot of letters before you gain a significant amount of business. The response you get depends on several factors: quality of mailing list and quality of what is being posted being two of these. Give the contents of your mailing as much thought as you can. Stuffing a bundle of circulars in an envelope is not going to provide much response. A letter and nicely presented brochure has more chance. Presentation is all important, so it's worth spending time getting it right. If you can afford it, ask for the help of a Copywriter who can write sales letters and press releases for you.

What about a form of publicity you may not have thought about before - radio. More and more radio stations are going on air, and this means that the cost of radio advertising possibly isn't as expensive as it was. Even if you don't try advertising, think about sending a press release to them - you might feature in the local news bulletin or even be offered the opportunity to be interviewed about your business or the industry you are in on air. You probably won't be talking about your business specifically, but all publicity is good publicity, and you will at least get your name mentioned.

Once you have an established customer base, a mail shot is a good way to stay in touch. How about producing an occasional newsletter with details of your latest products or services and special offers.. If your list of customers has taken a lot of time and expense to put together, why not make as much use of it as you can. It is easier and cheaper to resell to existing customers than having to spend more time and money gaining new ones.

Finally, don't ignore word of mouth as a way of spreading the word. Getting a business card printed is cheap enough these days. Pass them round your friends and colleagues. Ask to leave some in the local library or perhaps in the local doctor's or dentist's surgery waiting room. You never know who might see it and it may just be your next customer! Make sure you have a supply of your business card with you all the time.

Lastly a quick analogy. My main hobby is Hospital Radio. Although we get to meet quite a lot of our audience, you still never know who might be listening. A few years ago, one of the managers of the local branch of Marks and Spencer's was a patient and heard one of our programmes and soon after, made Hospital Radio Basingstoke the good cause to benefit from that year's staff fund raising activities (presumably because he enjoyed what he heard). As a result, we were able to buy what at the time was one of the best hospital radio studios in the country.

That demonstrates how important promotion is. If he hadn't of known of the hospital radio, he wouldn't have tuned in and we wouldn't have benefited from his custom. If you don't promote your business you will also lose out on lots of future opportunities.

1074 words

Neil Ogden

63 Franklin Avenue

Tadley

Hants

RG26 4EZ

Tel: 0118 981 9556