

Business Marketing Tips

10 October 2008



It is always best to seek the expert advice of an experienced marketing professional when deciding on an advertising strategy for your business. But exactly how you promote your company will depend on things like the location of your potential market and the message you need to communicate. This is a definitive guide to business marketing options.

Remember, image is everything and everything that carries your name projects that image. So you should really go out of your way to ensure that your vans, stationery and offices all reflect the right one. For instance, in order to give your business a more professional image you could use QuickBooks Accountancy Software to customise your invoices, stationery and forms.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO ADVERTISE:

BY WORD OF MOUTH

The vast majority of small businesses employ this method. And it is certainly, by far, the most economical method of effectively spreading the word. Friends, relatives and current customers should all be positively encouraged to tell everyone else all about your business and the services that you offer.

WRITTEN MATERIAL

First impressions really do count - your premises, vehicles, stationery and personal appearance all say something about you, and in today's business world image is everything. Using professional designers and sign writers can often be a very worthwhile investment - ask to see previous examples of their work and talk to existing customers to choose which designer/agency is right for you. Wherever appropriate, use your company name, address, website, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address, VAT, company and licence registration numbers on all printed material.

DIRECT MAIL AND LEAFLET DROPS

Direct mail involves buying or renting up-to-date mailing lists from specialist companies so you carefully target your ideal audience and then send them copies of your promotional material. Door drops are a cheaper alternative since there's no postage costs, and while you can't target your audience quite as carefully, you can arrange door drops by geographical region. For instance, if you have retail outlets, they can be delivered within a two-mile radius of your shops.

While door drops are relatively inexpensive you need to counter this benefit with the knowledge that wastage is incredibly high. A response rate of around two per cent is the average. However, as with all advertising, if this small figure generates more income than the cost of the activity then it is worth doing.

ADVERTISING

Advertising in local newspapers, magazines, trade publications, cinemas and so on is always a useful exercise. Local radio reaches a very wide audience, but costs more than, for example, a leaflet drop. Using an advertising agency can give your communications a much more professional look and they should be able to help you plan and implement an effective advertising campaign, but they can be expensive, so ask for a quote at the outset and shop around. Plan where your advertisement is going to appear and how frequently - one-off advertisements do not have as much impact as a co-ordinated campaign.

EXHIBITIONS

Taking an exhibition stand allows you to reach people directly, but the time and money required is not always worth the return. To avoid this, choose your exhibition carefully and find out as much as possible about the attendee profile before committing yourself.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Press stories are free and can give you a high level of credibility because they involve an independent third party. It is important to develop relationships with the local media - send local newspapers and radio stations regular updates about any newsworthy developments in your business: charitable donations, sales promotions and new jobs. While coverage isn't guaranteed, if you don't send press releases in they will not get published. Remember that local papers can struggle to source enough interesting stories to fill their pages - you can help them out and at the same time get free publicity for your company, so make your story distinctive!

TELESALES

Telephone sales and door-to-door selling can be cost effective in local markets but it is important to make sure these methods are appropriate for your business.

THE INTERNET

The Internet can provide you with a wider, even international, audience for your products and services. Potential customers can extract information from your website and request further information by electronic mail. Internet web site design and hosting can be relatively inexpensive for a simple 'shop-front' site of three or four pages with an email contact facility. Costs increase for more sophisticated sites where on-line payments, site searches, interactive chat sessions and a sophisticated product catalogue are required.

You can save money in brochure reprint costs if you have a 'core' brochure about your company and include price details on a copied insert and publish them on your website.

Free help and advice is available from UK online for business. UK online for business is part of the government-wide initiative UK online, a major partnership to enable everyone in the UK to get online and fulfil the many opportunities offered by the Internet. This programme offers expert, impartial, jargon-free help, information and support on the best use of technology for small and medium-sized business (SMEs).

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