



Marketing Articles

Ten Common Small Business Marketing Mistakes

How do you judge the effectiveness of your small business marketing efforts? Easy...does it produce results? Great looking ads, fancy logos and flashy web sites are worthless if they don't bring business to your door. This list of 10 common marketing mistakes can help you produce better results.

Not having a clearly defined USP

Do you want to fit in or stand out? In order to thrive in today's cluttered marketplace, every business owner must be able to clearly articulate an answer to the question, "Why should someone do business with you rather than your competitor?" "What makes you unique? Your answer to these questions constitutes your Unique Selling Proposition. Do you offer 24-hour, 7 day a week service? Do you offer the lowest price? Do you offer a no risk guarantee? A strong USP helps you to stand out in a crowded field.

Selling features rather than benefits

Someone once said, "No one ever bought a drill bit. Millions of people have bought a hole." People don't buy features, they buy benefits. They are tuned into Radio Station W.I.I.F.M. (What's in it for me?) Tell them clearly how the features of your product/service will help them, make their life easier, etc.

Not using headlines in print advertisements

You have at most a couple of seconds to grab someone's attention when they read a newspaper, magazine, etc. Using an attention-grabbing headline ensures that the reader will continue to read the rest of the advertisement. The headline is an ad for the ad. Take a look at some newspaper ads. Which ones attract your attention? You will probably find they have utilized an effective headline.

Not testing headlines, price points, packages, pitches, everything

How do you know what ad, what price, what offer most appeals to customers? By putting them to a vote. Test everything. Rather than running one newspaper ad for three weeks, why not run three different ads for three weeks and measure which draws better? Rather than putting all your advertising into newspaper, why not split between newspaper and direct mail and measure the results? Why not price your products/services at different points and see which sells more? Is cheaper always better? Not necessarily. Each situation is unique. One price may outperform another for a myriad of reasons. Your job is not to know why, but to find what works. Test, test, test.

Making it difficult to do business with you

Are your sales staff knowledgeable about your products? Does someone answer your phone promptly and in a friendly manner? Can people find your phone number, location? Can customers find things easily in your store? Put yourselves in your customer's shoes. Don't make them work - they won't. I've seen a web site that undoubtedly cost the company thousands of dollars and NOWHERE could I find a phone number or e-mail address. Your customer has better things to do than struggle to do business with you.

Not finding out what your customer's needs are

What is the first step in filling your customer's needs? Discovering what they are. What's most important to them? Don't even try to guess. You may think price is most important when what they really want is fast service. You may believe fast service is what they want when what they desperately want is a friendly, personal touch. How do you find out? People won't tell you unless you ask. So ask.

Not maintaining an up-to-date customer database

Your customer list is pure gold. Rather than always working to bring new customers in the door, why not take advantage of the goodwill you have already built with your existing clientele? Experiment with extending special offers to your customer base. Ask for referrals. Send them a card on their birthday. Call and ask what they most enjoyed about doing business with you (or what they disliked doing business with you). You worked hard to develop these relationships. Recognize their value and work hard to "re-delight" them.

Not eliminating the risk

What prevents a customer from buying from you? Are they unsure that your offer is worth their hard-earned money? Make it easy to decide to buy from you. How can you reduce their risk? If you are in a service business, let them try your service at no cost. If you are a lawyer or consultant offer them a free consultation. Offer them a money back, no questions asked guarantee on any product they buy. Why not? Are you afraid people will take advantage of you? Give it a try for a month. You may be very pleasantly surprised. Not confident in your product or service? Then go to work on improving your service.

Not educating your customers

Don't just claim that your service is better. Explain why. Are your staff better trained? Do you utilize a technology that increases service turnaround or quality? Don't expect people to just take your word for things. Quality, Service and Value mean nothing. Everyone claims to offer these. Make these claims real for the customer by offering credible explanations why they should do business with you.

Not knowing what works, and sticking with it

Do you know which ads are effective? What media pulls best? What offer gets the best reaction? By testing (see above) you will. When you find something that works, don't change it until you find something that works better. Just because you're sick of an ad/offer isn't a good enough reason to change it. You can supplement with other ads and offers. If it works, keep it.

Effectively Using Your Business Cards

A business card is a first impression to potential clients and prospects and is one of the least expensive forms of advertising. While you have their attention provide them with the information they need and never knew they needed. Here are some basic things to keep in mind for your business cards.

- Important stuff: your main contact information is a must: name, address, phone, fax, email and website.
- Company description. Sometimes a company name doesn't describe the business (what does Pepsi mean?) therefore a one-liner about the company helps clear up any confusion.
- Stay away from fancy print: although you think it looks great it's often too difficult to read. ALL CAPS is also considered hard to read so use it sparingly.
- Less is more: you only have a limited space but don't cram it all in. Too much information can be distracting and the reader may lose interest and leave your card behind.
- Don't forget the back: Most business cards usually leave the backside empty - however that's a waste of valuable advertising space. You can use the back for notes, list of services/products, photos or important industry information. The more important the information the longer it is kept.
- Color: use color sparingly and use it to your advantage. Use color on items you want to stand out (your name, website, logo.)

Postcard Power!

Postcards are more than a vacation souvenir, they can be vital marketing tools for small businesses. Postcards are an inexpensive yet effective way to promote products and services, notify customers of a sale or discount, or generate awareness or interest in a company.

Easy & Inexpensive. You can print basic postcards yourself on cardstock paper or get them professionally printed. Xplore can [print full-color cards](#) from 8-20 cents each (depending on quantities).

Postage Savings. Although the first-class letter rate went up to 34 cents, the postcard rate remained the same at 20 cents, which can be a drastic savings.

Easy on the eyes. Postcards are seen without the barrier of an envelop - all the recipient must do is turn the card around. Even if recipients discard your postcard, chances are they've still looked at it!

Choose your words carefully. Space on postcards is limited therefore make your wording clear, simple and memorable. Use bullets to make it easy to scan and don't go below a 10pt or 12pt font.

Simon Says. Follow the rules of the US Postal Service to make sure it will be processed. Each card must be (1) rectangular, (2) not less than 3 1/2" high and 5" long and (3) not more than 4 1/4" high and 6" long. Make sure there is no address on the bottom because USPS machines read from bottom up.

Perfect Press Release

Public relations is one of the most effective ways to get the message out about your business. Take every opportunity to celebrate your successes. This may include new employees, new product lines, or simply a new office or retail location. If you are handling communications efforts for your company, familiarize yourself with the local media and what type of news they are likely to run. You may only get a line or two in the business section, or you may be contacted for a feature story.

Use the following tips as you prepare your press release: Determine the relevance of your news:

- Does it relate to the community, a hot issue, or a prominent person?
- Timeliness: Does your news relate to a holiday, an event, or a time of the year?
- Uniqueness: Is there any part of your news that is unusual or thought provoking?
- Readability: Will people want to read about your news?
- Don't compete with big news stories or the holidays: For example, it may be best to wait until

January for news that is not in some way related to the holidays.

Create a template for your releases to save yourself time later. Keep in mind the following tips when creating your release:

- Include a release date if the news is time sensitive. "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE" works well for most releases.
- List a contact name and phone number.
- Use a strong headline (sometimes called a slugline) to call attention to your news. The headline should be only one line, all capital letters.
- The lead paragraph should tell your story in a nutshell, limited to three sentences.
- In the next two paragraphs, use quotes from spokespeople.
- Keep your language simple.
- If you are rusty on punctuation for quotations, brush up before preparing the release.
- Limit the release to one double-spaced page.
- End the release with "###" or "-end-"
- Include a black-and-white photo whenever possible. A photo can greatly enhance your chance at publication.
- When distributing your release, consider your media and select carefully. Don't waste your time on media that aren't a good fit for your news.
- Decide on fax, e-mail, or mail.
- In some cases, you will want to follow up your release with a short phone call, especially if the release is about an event.
- If you do not already have a media list, check out New Jersey Press Association website... they have a complete list of NJ media.

Design Your Logo Like A Pro

by Eileen Parzek, Net Profit Magazine, 1997 ©

A logo is the image which represents a company or its product. Its function is to create a memorable, recognizable impression on the mind of a potential client or customer. A logo is essentially at the heart of a corporate identity.

So what makes a "good" logo? Most people would answer "I just know it when I see it!" and this isn't so far from the truth. A good logo catches the eye - it makes the observer curious or engaged, if only for a short moment... a moment in which an image and the existence of your company is embedded in the mind rather than filtered out with a million other daily stimuli. But even if a good logo 'just is', there are elements for making it happen ... and we will look at some of those. I will also discuss some of the issues designing logos which work in two distinct worlds - print and online.

There are three basic types of logos, which can be used alone or combined within one design:

- illustrative logos (a logo which clearly illustrates what your company does),
- graphic logos (a logo that includes a graphic, often an abstraction, of what your company does),
and
- font-based logos (a text treatment which represents your company)

Creating a logo is always a process - though different designers have their own methods. Many designers will begin by sketching thumbnails or playing with shapes on the computer screen, until something "clicks" and they follow that path to see where it leads. One way to start is to select a shape which represents the concept of the company, and begin playing with it. The idea is to come up with something interesting or clever, whether a viewpoint which is different, or an unusual combination of shapes. Perhaps it will be something which will require some guesswork on the part of the viewer, but then be crystal clear when they look at it another way.

Many designers prefer to developing logos beginning with, or consisting entirely of text. By experimenting with fonts, size, shapes they seek to find an interesting way to represent the company using the form of letters. Again, simplicity is extremely important - this is not the time to use fancy decorative fonts. Whether alone or combined with graphic elements, the text in a logo must be easily readable at small sizes.

Once a form for the logo has been defined, color needs to be considered. Again, color for a logo should remain simple. You can always get fancy with the web version, but a good logo must work well in one color and gradients of that color. The color should enhance and support the form of the logo - for example, various shades of blue on the sides of a 3D box should be the same as they would in real life. Contrast is another powerful concept in the creation of logos - you can contrast size, color, fonts, textures - to create visual interest.

A logo should be simple and abstract, not be complicated or confusing, and again, all elements must be discernible when reproduced in small sizes. A good logo works in the simplest form. With the advent of the Web, it is common to see logos which contain gradients, 3D effects, animation, and other visual effects. But if the logo can not also be reduced to a simple one color flat version for use on faxes, your checks and photocopied documents, it is functionally useless. As tempting as it might be to create a

whiz-bang logo, a designer must always consider all the ways your companies identity will be disseminated. Once this is successfully accomplished, you can always jazz up your logo later for the web!

As mentioned before, size is a critical issue when having a logo designed. A good rule of thumb is that if the logo works well in a business card size, it will scale up nicely to other sizes. Always make sure your logo looks pleasing on paper and in a wide range of sizes before committing to it.

Web and print are two entirely different mediums. If you are having a logo designed for the first time, it is essential that you be aware that your logo must be designed for print FIRST and web second. Without getting into the intricacies of print and web resolutions, suffice it to say they are very different. What might look great on your computer screen will likely print out at the size of a postage stamp and be entirely muddled. If the logo is designed to look great online, depending on the graphics format, it might not scale easily up to a printable version, so it is best to create it in a way that can be downscaled.

When choosing a color for your logo, you might want to consider using those in the universal 216 color palette supported by all web browsers. This will ensure that the colors of your corporate identity can be used online without a hitch.

On the flip side, the web will allow you to take your simple 1-2 color logo and do great things with it - and it won't cost you thousands of extra dollars to add colors to it, make it 3D or animate it, like it would in the print medium. Once your logo is created for the lowest common denominator, the same form can be enhanced in a myriad of ways to look more exciting for your web site. Just be sure you don't get carried away with the possibilities until you have a logo which will present a strong image for your company on a simple business card!