

first steps

BUSINESS PROMOTION

Spread the word

Any fledgling firm needs to get the word out to potential customers about who they are and what they do. **Alex Wright** explores the different ways of doing this



STARTING A BUSINESS CAN BE

daunting at the best of times. First, you need to put together a watertight business plan. Then you need funding to get it off the ground. But one of the most important elements, which is often overlooked, is effective promotion. There are many ways to do this, yet most small businesses don't have a big budget to spend on advertising and marketing campaigns. Here are five ways firms can get their name out there, attract more customers and increase sales.

Develop a website

Think of your website as your shop front to the world. It's key to structure and write the content so that it's easy to read.

Use keywords that your target audience are most likely to look for in search engines, and that will distinguish you from the competition. Determine this by carrying out thorough market research to find out what their interests are.

"The more competitive the market you are in, the more effort needs to go into making sure that your business is easily found by your target market," says Charlotte Sheridan, Director at The Small Biz Expert. "So, first and foremost, you need to understand your customer and what is likely to be of value to them when they are searching for something they want or need."

Include details about what your business does and the products or services you offer, making it easy to find what they're looking for. And keep your website regularly updated with topical blog posts and links to your social media.

Make use of social media

If you are not on social media, you're missing a big opportunity to engage and build your network, and/or sell your product or service. With so many

platforms, it's crucial to research them to see which are the best for your business and where your target audience is.

Once you have set a profile, it's vital to interact regularly with connections or followers. Provide relevant news and updates, comment on subjects in your area, and answer their questions, as well as joining and participating in relevant industry and consumer groups.

"This is great brand-building activity, and offers your audience the ability to speak with you on various platforms through the direct message inboxes," says Debbie Porter, MD of Destination Digital Marketing. "Consumers are increasingly turning to this method of communication to speak with brands and so once you are on social media, embrace it by joining in

with conversations and sparking your own topics."

Digital marketing and advertising

The key to strong marketing is getting the right product, place, price and promotion. Digital marketing and advertising needn't cost the earth and can be powerful tools for promoting your business if you get them right. Again, you need to target the best medium, whether that's email marketing campaigns or social media advertising. To work effectively, you need to sell your value difference and give customers a reason to buy from you.

For email marketing, Hollie Whittles, owner of Fraggelworks, says: "Get people to sign up to your mailing list and grow it organically. Data is your biggest asset, so

once you've captured their details keep them engaged with regular and relevant content, such as special offers and deals."

FSB has a marketing and PR hub to help promote your business, featuring a host of guides and videos from experts to get you started. Find it at fsb.org.uk/skills-hub/knowledge/marketing-and-pr.html

Local marketing, advertising and PR

While digital is a core part of a promotion strategy, marketing and advertising locally in newspapers and magazines, and on radio, should never be overlooked. With print advertising revenues being cut in recent years due to the advent of digital and advertisers dropping their rates, there are many opportunities out there.

Staying local

Taking out an advert in a local magazine may seem old-school. But for Simon Barker of S Barker Electrical, based in Pudsey, West Yorkshire, doing so in *On Your Doorstep* and *That Leeds Mag* has led to a six-times return on investment per month. "Advertising in local magazines makes up about 30 per cent of the revenue I bring in," says Mr Barker, who goes by gingerelectrician. "In the last month, I spent about £500 and brought in £3,000 in work."

To get the most out of your advertising you need to find a magazine relevant to your industry and/or location. Then try different advert formats to see which works the best.

Deby Jackson, owner of *That Leeds Mag*, says: "Local magazine advertising is a great way to raise awareness of your brand in the wider community. The more regularly you do so, the more noticed your business gets and the more traction you can build."

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If you take out an advert, make sure you include a link to your website so that readers can go online to explore your offering further, as well as your contact details. Advertorials are a good way to tell your story and engage the reader, rather than giving them a hard sales pitch.

Press releases are a way to get your story out without paying for advertising. Keep it simple so the journalist can write it up easily or use it on a radio news bulletin.

"There's nothing better than the good old-fashioned press release," says Merewyn Sayers, owner of Sayers Solutions. "Pick up the phone and call your local paper or radio station and see if they are interested in your story and, if they are, send them a press release."

Don't ignore networking

One of the oldest forms of promotion is networking. Just like social media, you need to figure out which are the most valuable events to attend for your business. There are many different formats, from corporate face-to-face meet-and-greets to online events, and hybrids in between.

"There are three key considerations to bear in mind when networking," says Kevin Horlock, performance coach at Reigate & Redhill Referrals. "The technique you need to adopt for the type of event you are attending; the time you are willing to invest; and how to get the most out of it."

When you meet someone, listen carefully to what they have to say before telling them what you do and the products or services you want to promote in as succinct and interesting a way as possible. Over time, look to develop these relationships and win their confidence to get referrals for your business.

Some events have a slot for speakers, which is an opportunity to engage a wider audience, provide an insight tailored to their needs and get them to take action. Whichever route you choose, make sure you have done your homework and that you're fully committed to make it work. 📌

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