

PAYCHEX GUIDE

Startup: Market Your Business

Learn more about the different tools and techniques you can use to market your business online.

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Start-Up Guide: Market Your Business

Whether your business has been on the internet for years, or you're just beginning to sell products on the web, there is always room to improve how you market your business online.

This Start-Up Guide includes a high-level summary of different tools and tactics to help you get more from your online marketing efforts.

Topics Covered Include:

- How to Get Your Brand Online
- Government Loans
- Getting the Most from Your Web Site
- Social Media
- Marketing Planning
- Selling Products Online
- Next Steps After Launching Your Web Site Other Online Sales Channels
- Putting Online Marketing to Work 24 Hours a Day The Importance of Metrics

Getting the Most from Your Brand

Who here has seen Friends? You know how every time Joey Tribbiani walks into a room you just know he is going to say something hopelessly and gloriously off-color and inappropriate? He is consistently, cutely dim-witted.

Think of your business as a character on a television show. Who is your character? What are their identifiers? What is their personality like? Your brand is, essentially, the personality of your business. It is the way people identify you – it's how you interact with customers, handle problems, convey your professionalism, and market yourself. Just like Joey's personality seeps out of his character and is hard-to-miss, your brand should be easy to recognize.

Here's a few tips to help you out:

1. **Pick a logo that resonates** — Pop quiz: what is McDonald's logo? What about Nike's? Apple's? All of these companies have logos that are easy to remember and stick in the mind of the consumer. When you think of McDonald's, you think of the golden arches (...along with dollar Diet Cokes, crispy fries, and stomach aches). When choosing a logo, choose something that will help you to stand out and that will look professional and clean on your website, cards, letterheads, etc.

2. **Repetition, repetition, repetition** — For something to truly stick in the minds of consumers, you have to be somewhat repetitive. Slap a logo on the end of all your emails, constantly remind your customers of your mission statement and business goals, share your slogan at any time possible.

3. **Dear Customers, We love you** — Your customers are valuable pieces to the puzzle of building a brand identity. Let them know how much they are appreciated and leave them with a good impression. Having killer customer service is an easy way to build a brand identity that will resonate.

4. **Your website should enhance your company** — Have you ever visited a restaurant only to be immediately turned off by the messy counters or water-stained cutlery? Think of your website this way— is your website conveying the right message about your company and projecting your professionalism? Take a hard look at your website and ensure that the graphics, fonts, text, and design are all reflecting your company positively.

5. **Embrace and utilize social media** — Using social media allows your customers and potential customers to see you in a multitude of lights. You can further build your brand by communicating and engaging with potential customer. It will also give your brand dimension and more opportunities to share your personality. Create a Twitter account, activate a Facebook page for your business, start a blog, make a YouTube channel...just get connected.

6. **Keep it consistent** — Whether you are using words or not, your company is constantly saying something. Keep it consistent! If you offer a customer great customer service one visit, aim to provide the same caliber of service time after time. Keep your tone and language consistent when interacting with customers, too. Get everyone on your team on the same page with the personality you want to exude. Remember: you are a character – now play it!

7. **Be yourself** — We know, we know – being yourself is such a cliché line used by mothers far and wide, but they have a point! Let your personality seep through your content and service! Nobody wants to talk to a robot (well, actually... that would be pretty cool...).

8. **Listen to your customers** — Say it three times: The customer is always right. They are! Responding to your customers' feedback can be tricky and, really, there is no exact science. But adapting the motto we repeated can really transform your business and help you to be more customer-oriented. It's human nature to think we are never wrong, but the customer knows what they want and should be valued. Plus they have a little something called money, sound familiar? Ultimately it's the company's responsibility, not the consumer's, to bridge the gap between brand expectation and satisfaction.

Here's a few tips to help you out: (continued)

To make sure you meet consumer expectation, you need to analyze all the feedback you're getting and ask yourself if there is a common tie or string between them.

- Do most the surveys point to disappointment with your layout?
- Confusion with your check out process?
- Where does it seem that you are continually falling short?

Using this data and brainstorming changes can help you to provide consumers with the experience you promised to give them. (But! Don't drive yourself crazy trying to to implement every change that's suggested. You can't make everybody happy while sticking to your budget and maintaining sanity!)

Getting accustomed to your brand identity can take time, so be patient.

Make sure to always measure how people are responding to your 'personality' through page views, frequent visitors, and new customers. By extending a consistent brand image online, you'll be able to introduce your business and what it stands for to larger and potentially more lucrative new markets.

Having a Website that Works

Roll with this here:

You are in the middle of a sweltering hot 4th-grade summer and you decide that you need a dog in your life. All your friends have dogs, after all, why shouldn't you? (This is all going to lead to one great metaphor, promise!) After searching and searching (and some serious pleading), you stumble upon a dog that would fit the bill. Or so you think. This dog, named Samson, was big enough that he wouldn't yip but small enough that your parents had to oblige.

Then, reality sets in. Your first day together was...different than you imaged. You dreamed of a companion, you see. A dog to play fetch with– a dog to chase around in the park and cuddle up to under the stars. And this dog, this Samson character, was anything but a companion. He went to a bathroom constantly and was painfully slothful and slobbery. He was not exactly what you were dreaming up and after your week-long 'test-drive' was over, you told your parents that maybe, just maybe, you weren't suited to own a small pup. Or any pup. Ever.

The lesson you learned that week is that you didn't want just any slobbery dog, you wanted your perfect dog.

Now get this (and congratulations for getting through three paragraphs about a hypothetical canine), 75% of small business owners have a Samson for their website. They have a domain name and piece of real estate on the internet...but they positively hate it. Their website simply does not work for them, either functionally or aesthetically. Most of these people probably wish that they would have been granted a week-long test drive period, too.

So, how do you avoid this? How do you create a perfectly hyper dog that will chase you around the park and lick your face when you get home from work but will calm down to cuddle? How do you not get left with a Samson?

Here are some questions to ask yourself before publishing your site:

1. **Is my site too trendy?** Sure, a neon background and blinking text may be cool now (or never... seriously, blinking text?), but how will you feel about it in a year? Five years? Ten? Aim to design a site that will stand the test of time. Strive to keep the layout professional and simple and avoid anything too...loud.
2. **Do the graphics on my site enhance my business?** Have you ever been to a site only to be greeted with outdated and irrelevant pictures? It's an instant turn-off. Avoid any graphics that don't contribute to your site and business and avoid anything too trendy or slow-loading.
3. **Does my website connect with other sites?** Make sure to test that you are able to send a newsletter, gather stats, or post a forum on your website. Your website should be able to work functionally and help you in doing business. It should be able to connect with other sites like Google Analytics, Twitter, and your email.
4. **Does every button work?** Often times businesses forget to test out every part of their website—click on every button and make sure that you are led to a real and working web page. When you click 'home', make sure it sends you there!
5. **Is it cool?** Ask your friends and ask yourself if you honestly and truly love your website. You want your website to be something that you are proud of. Pretend that it is being shown to 1,000,000 people...now what do you think?

By answering these five basic questions about your current website, or one you're planning on creating, and you'll be in a better place to start taking full advantage of your business's presence on the Web. You'll also be more likely to love the end result. And having a website that works—and that you love—is not a lofty or unrealistic goal.

No matter the size of success of your business, you can build a beautiful website that will stand the test of time and not make you cringe every time you log on (blinking text, really?). Have patience while you are building your website and seek other opinion besides your own. Remember that your website should be a tool that helps to enhance your business and properly display your products, mission statement, and professionalism.

Making Social Media Work for You in Only 5 Minutes a Day

Many businesses don't dive into the social media circle because they think they do not have the time or believe that it will not help their business to grow and succeed. However, in this day and age, social media outlets are helpful. Many businesses don't dive into the social media circle because they think they do not have the time or believe that it will not help their business to grow and succeed. However, in this day and age, social media outlets are helping businesses to flourish all across the globe. Social media outlets are an excellent way for you to tap into a huge customer base without having to spend a single dollar. How nice is that? Furthermore, social media does not take much time. In fact, you can make social media work for your business by allotting just five minutes a day to playing with it.

That is right, five minutes.

That's only 1/288th of your day. That is one coffee break, bathroom break, or quick-nap break forfeited to better your business. And how easy is that?

Here is how...

1. **Make a schedule**

   Social media shouldn't be something you squeeze in when you have time. Social media should be a scheduled part of your day. Set apart a chunk of time each day to plug-in and connect. Write out which social media outlets you are going to do that day; for example: Mondays use Twitter, Facebook, and blog; Tuesdays use LinkedIn, Twitter, and blog and so on.

2. **Analyze and prioritize**

   Do you have 56723 followers on Twitter but only 13 on Google+? Prioritize your social media outlets and analyze what customers are responding to. Don't completely neglect your less-loved outlets, but perhaps only use them once or twice a week.

3. **Know what you are going to say**

   Did you see some totally rad article over the weekend that you just know your Twitter followers are going to dig? Know what you are going to say and have a clear and concise plan. An example of this would be perhaps focusing on marketing products through social media on Tuesdays and Thursdays and engaging with customers all other days. Having a plan will decrease your time spent at your computer trying to brainstorm what to say next.

4. **Push notifications to your inbox**

   On most social media sites, you can push notifications to your inbox. This means that every time someone posts on your wall, retweets you, follows your blog, or comments on your page, you will see it in your email inbox. Pushing the notifications to your inbox will decrease the time you might spend perusing your notifications and checking back on your page. You will also be able to reply and connect with customers more quickly this way Aim to get back to customers in a short amount of time to keep the conversation fresh and alive.

Now do you see how easy that is?

Social media should be something you use to enhance your business and connect with potential customers. While it's true that a business selling directly to consumers may get more from social media than one selling to a corporation, it's important for any business to establish itself in social media as part of its overall online strategy.

No matter the size or success of your business, social media is open and free for you to use.

While it may seem daunting, it is time to get over your qualms and fears and join the millions of users on these sites. Through these sites, you will be able to share your company's motifs and inner personality, spread the word about your business and ongoing deals and steals, spy on your competitors and see what they are doing and how they connect with their customers, and build lasting relationships with a potential target audience.

Marketing Planning

A lot of businesses, particularly smaller online businesses, are hesitant to begin marketing right away. Many hold the belief that marketing is only about selling services and product and that they must be relatively well-established before marketing. And to those businesses, here's the hard-truth: you are wrong.

Marketing is about connecting with people and creating a loyal following. Businesses that market themselves early on get a head-start on their target audience and success. And who doesn't want that?

It's important to remember that marketing doesn't have to be an expensive investment. In this day and age, there are many free resources that make it easy to build a brand identity.

Here are 12 ways your business can use online, offline, and social methods to promote your brand - as well as your products and services - without breaking the bank.

1. **Start a Twitter account and use it** — Retweet, 'favorite', and follow people – plus you can start your own hashtag and cross your fingers that you'll 'trend'...how cool is that? For example, you could use #supersweetbusiness or #yourgreatbusinessname.
2. **Offer an online 'class'** — By offering an online 'class' on YouTube, you can provide people educational tips and information each week. It will give you the opportunity to connect with customers, share your expertise, and promote your business all at the same time. A trifecta of happiness!
3. **Self-promote shamelessly** — It's not tacky, promise! Slap a bumper sticker on your car with your site's URL, post the link to your site on your Facebook, hand out business cards at local events...be annoying, it's effective. Well, sometimes.
4. **Master the art of Google+** — Google loves Google and so a relevant, updated Google+ will help you to get to the top of the search-engine totem pole and get your name out there as a company.
5. **Pin pictures and how-to articles from your site on to Pinterest** — But make sure they are worth pinning! Generally, people on Pinterest are attracted to content that can help them save time and money. They're also attracted to beautiful and unique images. Update your site and make sure you have both then Pin away!
6. **Collaborate with other online businesses** — 'Advertise' on their site and vice versa (ask them to give you referrals, name-drop your company, etc.). Perhaps create a badge or button for your site or blog and ask to swap?

12 ways your business can use online, offline, and social methods to promote your brand

7. **Use Facebook and encourage people to 'like' your Facebook page** —Make sure you keep it updated and fresh, too! Your Facebook page should be a place for you to push your relevant content (like your articles, blog posts, and YouTube videos), connect with your customers, and show off your personality to potential customers.
8. **Create promotions and deals for referrals** — Remember all those articles about people digging free things? Well, yeah. They do. Create an incentive for people to use your service, subscribe to your newsletter, or write a review – perhaps a giveaway or coupon codes?
9. **Offer a weekly newsletter with cutting-edge articles and content** —Think of how many newsletters you have sent straight to your trash can or junk mailbox? Don't just chat about the happenings in your business (engagements, promotions, etc.), but talk about trends in your industry and articles that you've found interesting.
10. **Sponsor a team, charity, event, etc.** — People love nice people. It's true. Sponsoring a charity or event will let your business be seen in a good light and it will most-likely give you some warm fuzzies. Win-win!
11. **Wedge your business ventures into conversations... organically** —You don't want to lose friends over this! But when the opportunity arises, talk about your business, your mission statement, and your goals. This will help you to feel comfortable promoting your business and will also help people to know more about it.
12. **Join LinkedIn and connect** —Just like Facebook, Twitter, and other social mediums, LinkedIn will only be effective if you use it. Connect with like-minded people in your industry and promote your business. You can also ask for tips, create relationships, and spy on your competitors.

A little marketing planning can go a long way toward helping your business succeed. Marketing early allows you to assess what your market needs, what you can offer to them, and how your product stands out from the others. It will help you to refine your marketing plan for the future. It also helps you to better know your target audience and their response to your business venture.

Selling Your Products Online

Selling your products online can be seriously tricky. It's easy to feel like a little (yet important!) fish in a huge, huge sea. You have probably created the most killer and innovative product that has the potential to completely transform the world and yet you just aren't getting a steady flow of business. Sound familiar?

Well, keep with it. In today's online-centered and tech savvy world, the internet marketplace is an excellent place to be.

Customers from all over the world are able to see your products and learn about your company. People who sell online do not have to invest thousands of dollars finding a place to set up shop and are able to set their own work hours. They are also able to employ their creative-minds and develop new ways to market their business, display their products, and engage with customers.

Yes, it may seem like a daunting task and seemingly endless fight—there are so many sites on the World Wide Web, after all, how is yours ever going to stand a chance? Fear not! Your spirits may be downtrodden and your efforts may seem wasted, but you can only go up!

Here are a few tried and true ways to pick them back up and start selling your product on the internet (successfully):

1. **Dress it up** — Dismiss everything your sweet grandmother told you, looks do matter. Dress your product up like it's a celebrity going to the Oscar's (that's a thing, right?). Pick nice packaging, fancy up the online-description, and give it a spiffy title. Make sure youaccessorize your products with heavy keywords and tags so people using search engines are able to find it. Don't be modest!
2. **Set the stage** —Have you ever been to a site only to be greeted with outdated and irrelevant pictures? It's an instant turn-off. Avoid any graphics that don't contribute to your site and business and avoid anything too trendy or slow-loading.
3. **Test it out** —Countless websites don't successfully sell products because they simply don't work. When you try to order something, you are led to a page that doesn't exist or are left dazed and confused. Either the business hasn't configured their e-commerce system or it will not accept credit cards (who don't accept credit cards online?). Make sure to give your site a few test drives on different computers—are you able to navigate your site properly? Can you order something? Does it accept payment?
4. **Do your homework** —You may be the 1,000th person selling sweatshirts online, but you can be the best if you do some homework. Find out who your competitors are and check their prices. Offer discounts or coupons for frequent visitors or considering lowering your prices.
5. **Be painfully nice** —Okay, not painfully. But offer killer customer-service. I know, I know—how does one even translate customer-service online? Send your customers a 'thank you' email after they've ordered something or offer online support if any bugs are discovered by your visitors.
6. **Spread the word** —Encourage your customers to write a review about your product. Use social media to engage with a potential target audience and advertise your product for free. Squeeze your product into conversations with people and encourage your friends and family to do the same. Make sure that people know exactly what you do, where to find you, and what you are all about on the internet. In order to gain a steady following, you might have to start advertising and promoting your business by yourself. Be relentless! Another way to spread the word is to get lots of affiliates. This will help you to spread the word about your product and cover more bases on the internet. People from different sites all over the globe will be able to share your product for a small incentive.

Keep up the effort

and continue to invest time and faith into your online business. You will get out of it as much as you put in.

So You're Online. Now What?

You have spent hours upon hours writing a well thought out and thorough business plan, invested your time and money into a fancy website that pleases you both functionally and aesthetically, and...you sit there. Time passes and you pluck out a few gray hairs (don't fret, they are inevitable), refill your water bottle, and even take a long three-hour lunch break, but still nothing.

Sometimes having an business can feel like a bad day fishing. You sit there all day long in the middle of a huge lake in your sleek new fishing boat with all of the proper gear and apparel... and not a single fish bites. You catch nothing! Not even an old shoe! So how do you avoid the dreaded uneventful day on the lake (that seemingly drags on for hours on end), and catch a nice, pretty bass?

Here are a few tried and true ways to take a more active role in driving customers to your site by conducting some basic maintenance and good old-fashioned promotion:

1. **Confirm that your hyperlinks are useful** (and aid people in finding helpful content where applicable) – Have you ever been to a site and clicked on a link only to be led to... nothing? Avoid that. Before clicking publish, test out every link and button on your site and make sure that it leads you to the intended destination.
2. **Ensure that your site is fast-loading** — Just like most internet-users, Google digs speed. They value sites that load quickly and easily. Sites that load slower get pushed to the bottom of the totem pole and are difficult to discover in search engines. Ensure that your images and content are able to load quickly and that they don't slow down your page's speed.
3. **Evaluate the titles and tag lines of your blog posts** — Ensure that they are relevant and something your target audience would be searching for. And make them interesting, too! Generally, people are not too hasty to read a blog post that does not have an attention-grabbing headline. And remember that people skim! Keep your post short and to the point!
4. **And update the tags, too** — Tag each one of your blog posts with pertinent keywords that apply to the post and your industry. Brainstorm all of the possible relevant terms that apply to your posts, articles, and site and begin to tag away.
5. **Create a LinkedIn page** — And use it to connect with potential customers, partners, investors, and drive traffic. It is kind of like Facebook for professionals and will help you to cover more bases on the Internet. If you do not already have an account, get on there!
6. **Encourage happy customers to write reviews** — Yelp, Judy's Book, and Trusted Places are all sites where your customers can rave (and rant) about you. Encourage customers to review your business...especially the happy ones.
7. **Check if your keywords are beneficial** — What do you think your potential customers are searching for? Play a word-association game and brainstorm all the words that could potentially be linked back to your site. Be thorough! Ask your current customers, friends, and family what they think too! Update your keywords to fit their needs.
8. **Publish articles** — You can do this on sites like Wikipedia, CNN, and Delicious. Write about happenings in your industry like trends, advice, and how-to's – be creative and be consistent. Remember to always link back to your site! (This is also an excellent time to show off your company's personality and flare)

9. **Start a Google+ page** — Google loves Google. Which makes sense, right? Therefore, a good, relevant Google+ page can only help.

10. **Create an educational video on YouTube** — Preferably about something useful in your industry. Perhaps you are an expertise on how to clean your car's windows? Maybe you have tips and insight that are worth sharing? Create a few each month and always link them back to your site.

11. **Activate a Twitter account** — Then Tweet about happenings in your industry, link to other articles, and start a hashtag for your company. Post your URL on your profile and connect with potential customers.

12. **Create a Facebook page for your site** — Then link it back to your site. Push your relevant-content on to your page and update it frequently.

13. **Be deserving of a high rank** — If your site is top-quality and publishes useful relevant content, you will eventually wind up on top. Eventually. Strive for professionalism and create your website for your customer...not for search engines.

In summation, be big.

The bigger you are, the more likely people are to see you. That makes sense, right? Cover ALL of your bases on the Internet, like Yelp, LinkedIn, and Facebook, and you are more likely to be noticed by potential customers.

Succeeding Online is About More Than a Website

Besides a Website, What Online Sales Channels Should I Use?

Succeeding online is about more than having a domain name and a Web page. These five guidelines can help you make the most of your site, and give potential customers a good impression of your business "brand."

Raise your hand if you have experienced this fatal tale: you are browsing online or sifting through your inbox and stumble upon a website selling...chocolate-covered cinnamon bears. Yeah, chocolate-covered cinnamon bears. You love chocolate-covered cinnamon bears and are relatively eager to buy an entire case...and then the page loads...

"What is this," you think to yourself. "Was this person even thinking when they created this website?". The text on the page is hardly readable (navy background + black text, really?) and the content is so very vanilla that you just know their chocolate-covered cinnamon bears are going to stink. You exit the page and shake your head... how does a website discourage one from buying chocolate-covered cinnamon bears, anyways?

Now, here's how to give potential customers a good impression of your business "brand" and NOT turn them away:

1. **'You can't judge a book by its cover' is a false, false statement** — How very rude of your mother to lie to you! Let me set you straight: looks do matter. Your website might have the best personality or be brilliantly smart... but no one cares if it's ugly (well, someone will; 'every jar has a lid,' after all). While you don't need to become too overwhelmed by design, make sure that your website expresses how professional and established your company is. And for the loveof Pete, don't use Comic Sans MS.

2. **Don't be so single-minded** — There was once a boy in high school who was the anti-thesis of 'well- rounded.' He was extraordinarily good at sports...and that's it. Conversations about anything not involving a ball were painfully uncomfortable. Don't be that boy. In other words, aim to have more dimension on the website. Yes, your website may rock but you can be so much more. Dive head-first into the world of social media and embrace the World Wide Web (it's really a glorious place!). Add a blog, sign up for LinkedIn, start a Facebook page, create a Twitter account...and use them. Not only will using social media sites drive more traffic to your site and convey that you are hip and with it, but it will add more dimension to your site. It will let current and potential customers see you in a multitude of lights.

3. **Don't be so blatant** — Have you ever been to a store where you just know they are trying to convince you into spending hundreds of dollars? "Your hair is very nice... but it could be better with our sparklerazzmatazz hair straightener!" Yeah, those kinds of people (and your hair probably was nice!). Promise yourself that you aren't going to be that kind of business. Your content on your page should be professional and persuasive, but never pushy. Convey how top-quality and worthwhile your products or services are subtly. Furthermore, produce interesting relevant content for people to peruse. Publish how-to articles, create educational videos, and write blog posts about subjects pertaining to your field. You can publish these on your website or online – this will give your website more dimensions and a less pushy vibe.

4. **Lalala...I'm not listening** — Your cringing just reading the aforementioned taunt; but seriously, don't cover your ears! Businesses all over the globe spend thousands on research and test groups to give them feedback on their product...only to not listen. Encourage feedback about your site and pay attention. What are your customers looking for? Is your website clear and easy-to-use? What changes need to be made to make it more aesthetically pleasing? Evaluate what your customers or target audience are searching for – what search terms or keywords will drive more people to your site? Ask these questions...and then act on them. Make the changes.

5. **Make them fall in love with you...over and over again** — Here's the hard truth: there are thousands and thousands of sites on the World Wide Web. Competition is tough and customers aren't scared to site-hop. Earn your customer's loyalty by providing them with top-quality products and services, pushing relevant content, and offering the best customer service this side of the Chattahoochee... and then keep it. Reward your customer's for being loyal with discounts and coupons. Hold promotions, deals, or giveaways. Support a cause you know is close to the hearts' of your customers. Keep your customers interested and treat your relationship with them as a courtship.

In summation,

succeeding online is about constantly putting in effort (doesn't that sound tiresome?). Encourage feedback, gauge how your customers are responding, confirm that your website is clean and professional looking, publish top-quality content, and embrace social media (it really is a beautiful thing!).

Tools that Make Your Business Work Online, 24 Hours a Day

Hats off to you, business owner, running a business is hard. If your company is still in its baby stages, or even if you are well established, you probably already feel like this is far more than a full-time job. It is a twenty-four hour commitment!

Well, sleep, families, and leisure time is precious so it is time to start finding tools to alleviate some of the workload and do the work for you. Yes, you read that right. There are actual strategies and tools that are available at your disposal, no matter the size or success of your business, which will keep your business moving while you sit back and relax.

One of the major benefits about marketing your business online is that it's in operation all day and all night long, without you needing to stay up to operate it. You just need to choose the right tools to help you stay connected 24 hours a day...and you might even get a nap in!

Here are six tools to consider to lessen some stress...

1. **Newsletters** — Have you ever received a newsletter at the crack of dawn and thought to yourself, "Shoot, those people over at Company XYZ must never sleep!" Well, here is a little secret: the people over at Company XYZ do sleep. In fact, they were probably just starting to open their eyes for the day and stop dreaming of swimming in all of their money while you were opening that email. Newsletters can help you because they let you inside of peoples' homes (and you don't even have to ring a doorbell!). They help you to develop a connection with your customers and keep in contact. Newsletters are also nice because you can schedule them to send out when you aren't even in your office.

2. **Blog posts** — Just like newsletters, blog posts allow your business into people's homes. Your target or current customers are able to read your blog at their own leisure—they can read it on their tablets, phones, and computers at any time of day. And just like newsletters again, you are able to schedule your blog posts to automatically post when you aren't at your desk. Type a few during the week, and schedule them to blast every couple of days. It's foolproof, effective, and will make you seem like a super hip company (which you are, duh!). Remember to always consider your current or potential customers and all their interests. Blog posts are an excellent way to share your company's personality and motifs.

3. **Giveaways** — Hosting a giveaway or promotion on your site is never a bad idea. For starters, it rewards frequent site visitors and gives people an incentive to shop from you. Secondly, it keeps people interested at any time of day. Giveaways are an easy way to drive traffic to your site and get people talking about you...and all you have to do is say the word free.

4. **Coupons** — Schedule coupons to activate at different times during the month. Just like giveaways, coupons reward frequent customers and are an incentive for target customers to buy from you.

5. **Tweet, tweet** — Okay, okay. So you have to do a little work here, but hardly! Firing off a Tweet is a simple (simple!) way to say, "Hey customers, I'm still here!" Don't make it extravagant or haphazardly slap together a tweet; promote a deal that will be happening the next day or breaking news in your industry. Example: Is everyone watching the Rachel Ray show? That recipe would taste better with our sweet + salty sauce...what do you guys think? Bam. It's short and sweet and not the least bit pushy—plus it engages your customers. And it took you, what? Five seconds?

6. **Update your Facebook** — Again, you have to do a little bit of work here, but not much. Updating your Facebook keeps your customers interested and reminds people who have liked your page exactly why they liked it in the first place. Share your opinions about a new product in the market, post a funny video you found on the Internet that relates to your field, ask your Facebook fans a question and encourage them to answer in the comments—just be creative and be present. Remember to reply back to your customers to keep the conversation alive and fresh.

Tracking Your Results and Improving

Wouldn't it be nice if the business world was mom's refrigerator? No matter what work you produced or products you offered, it would be prized, treasured, and displayed proudly for the world to see on the fridge. Everything is great! The best yet! Do you want a cookie? It's your favorite!

Sadly enough, the world does not operate this way. As a business-owner, it is important to keep this in mind. True and honest evaluation through gathering and analyzing credible statistics, asking outside resources (not your sweet mother), conducting market research, and seeking valuable feedback can completely transform your business in a variety of capacities.

Doing so will help you to:

- **Better identify and understand your customer** — The surveys can point to trends and interests in your customers and help you to tailor your marketing, products, or service to them and their needs. Perhaps your site visitors always visit at a particular time? Perhaps they are primarily from the Pacific Islands? Maybe they are interested in a certain product of yours or learning about some sort of tip or trick?
- **Conserve effort** — What if you are working too hard in a certain area and not hard enough in another? If you don't ever do market research, you will never know where you can conserve your efforts and relax. Maybe your survey suggests that your customers respond terrible to your constant Tweets about weekly product reviews but positively love your YouTube videos? Now you will be able to focus your attention more on efforts that are effective and worthwhile.
- **Discover business opportunities** — Your research will possibly show you the holes and gaps in the markets and help you to find new opportunities and prospects. Your research might point you to a new idea or innovation—perhaps your customers are desperately craving a new product of some sort? Or a cheaper service?
- **Set new goals** — After conducting and interpreting your research, you will be able to essentially start anew. You will have the chance to brainstorm new ideas and steps to success, determine where you want to go and what you want to do with the new knowledge, and set entirely new goals. How exciting and invigorating is that concept?

So, how exactly do we do this? How does one go about tracking their results? Here's some ways to do some market research without breaking the bank:

1. **Conduct surveys** — If you have questions to ask (Is my site clear and concise; Is our customer service satisfactory?; Are our services top-quality?), ask them! Create a concrete and clear survey and email it out to your email-list or encourage site visitors to take it.
2. **Pay attention to stats** — Your Facebook page and online site give you statistics that are meaningful... for free. How sweet is that? Pay attention to these stats—they mean something and can lead you to answers to questions and help your online business flourish. Pay attention to who is visiting your site, what is driving traffic, what time of day people are visiting, and what exactly they are clicking on (links, advertisements, etc.). These aren't just useless numbers; they are keys to unlocking relationships and understanding your customers.
3. **Create a focus group** — Grab some donuts and sodas, gather a group of potential or actual customers, and conduct a focus group. Perhaps it won't be that easy, but focus groups and people are always available to hire for your company. Have the group review products or experiment with your site and determine its functionality and user-friendliness. Determine what you want to know and how your focus group will be able to help you accomplish this before starting.
4. **Ask your brutally honest sister-in-law** — Sometimes all you need is someone who isn't afraid to hurt your feelings. Ask a relatively disconnected third-party (again, not your mom) questions about your site and services—do they think it makes sense? Do they find it user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing?

The next step is perhaps the easiest and most important tactic: listen. Sometimes this can be the trickiest part! There are skyscrapers full of market researchers employed by companies who, after it's all up and gone, don't listen. Value the feedback that you receive and make the changes that people are suggesting. Change can lead to improvement and growth...which are beautiful, beautiful things!

Conclusion

Good marketing is the lifeblood of every successful business.

Fortunately, the online and social tools available today make these efforts more accessible and affordable than ever before. For the start-up business owner, the key to success isn't just monetary investment. Instead, it depends on consistency – in image, in message, and in commitment.

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