



SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING GUIDE



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Small Business Marketing Guide

Running your own business is like living a dream. You're the boss, and your thoughts and ideas matter. Being an entrepreneur can be rewarding and challenging all at once. Small businesses don't come with an owner's manual, but you don't have to make it all up as you go along, either. From marketing and social media to brand presence and saving money, there are several things that you can do to expand your network and grow your business.

Branding

Your company branding plays an important role in your success. When people recognize your brand, they are more likely to consider using your services or buying your products.

- **Quality Counts** – Have a brand that stimulates positive conversation when people are talking. Referral by word of mouth is an essential part of building a brand and a positive reputation. Quality products and services are critical. Make sure that your customers can count on your company to deliver what you promise, whatever it may be.
- **Unique Value Proposition** – Your potential customers will want to know what makes your company unique and better than the competition. Identify what that something is. It's called a unique value proposition (UVP). It's what makes you stand out. For example, your UVP could be quality products, customer service, location or a combination of things. Once you decide what your UVP is, make sure that you identify it with your branding.



Marketing

There's more to marketing than running ads in the local newspaper or running an Internet marketing campaign. Find creative ways to grab the attention of potential customers. Use a variety of marketing platforms, from print to digital to word of mouth.

- **Create an Elevator Pitch** – Imagine if you were in an elevator with someone and they asked you what your company does. Could you spout it out in 30 seconds or so and pack a punch? In marketing terms, it's called an elevator pitch, you only have a minute or less to engage your potential client. Create an elevator pitch, then memorize it – and have your employees memorize it, too. Next time someone asks you what you do, have an answer prepared.
- **Free Samples** – People are more likely to try something if it's free. If you have a new product, try giving away small samples. If it's a service you offer, provide coupons for a free consultation or attend a trade show. If you're a restaurant owner, offer patrons a free cup of your best soup.
- **Provide Help** – You're an expert in your field. Flaunt it. Share your knowledge with others. Offer a free workshop on a common industry-related topic. Host a live chat online or conduct a webinar. Contribute helpful and accurate information in forums.



Social Media

Social media interaction can be a great marketing tool when managed properly. Decide what social sites and circles will work best for your company.

- **Manage Your Profiles** – Develop guidelines for those running your social media marketing campaign. Be consistent with your posting and be vigilant with monitoring comments and responses. Make sure that all of your company's information is accurate on all profiles.
- **Introduce Your Team** – Make sure that people know who your employees are, especially if you have a sales team. Promote who they are and what they do through social media, whether it's a company account for Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter or Linked In.
- **Social Buttons** – Add social media icon buttons to your website. This will help your potential customers find you quickly on social sites. It will also help them to share anything you post on your website.
- **Build a Following** – Let people know that your company is on social media sites. Include the site locations so that you can be found. Share quality relevant content to attract and build a following. Don't be shy about sharing other people's content if it's engaging.



Saving Money

As the old saying goes, it makes money to make money. But don't forget that you should save money when you can, whether it's simply spending less or getting things of value for free.

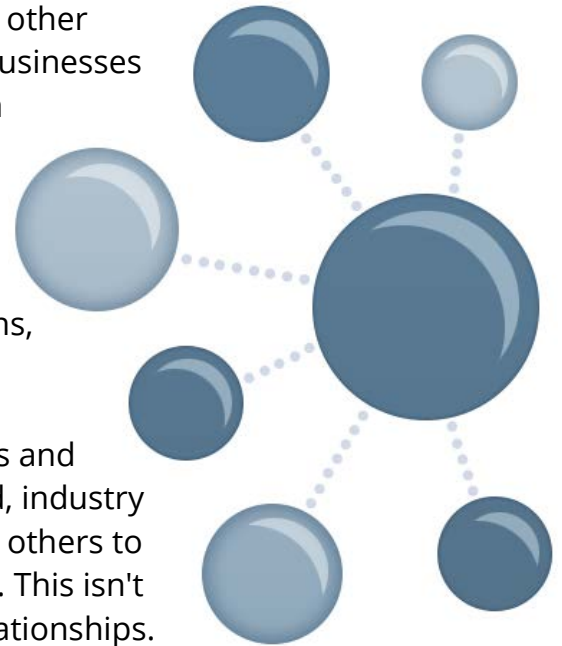
- **Tools and Apps** – There are plenty of e-commerce and business tools available to save you time and money. Do some exploring, and find the ones that make sense for your business. Embrace automation. For example, use automated scheduling tools to help you stay on top of your business expenses.
- **Fee Reduction** – Shop around for small business services that offer competitive pricing or waive fees based on what type of business you have. For example, look for reduced fees in merchant services. Some debit and credit card processing companies offer lower rates based on your industry.
- **Look for Deals** – Pay attention to discounts for small businesses and rewards programs. Opt in to the ones that make sense. If you're placing an order for supplies, look for free shipping or bulk quantity pricing. Consider buying second-hand items, such as furniture and office equipment to minimize expenses.
- **Do It Yourself** – There are some things that you can do yourself and save money. For example, having a courier service deliver your orders locally might save you time, but cost you money. If you can deliver some yourself or send them through the U.S. Postal Service, you could save some money without compromising customer service. Another option is to clean your own office space.
- **Extravagant Spending** – Keep an eye on employee expense accounts and unauthorized spending. Review all expenses, and consider cutting anything that doesn't provide a return on your investment. Take the time to go through company credit card statements and make sure that the expenses are both legitimate and necessary. Set guidelines and make sure that your employees understand their limits.



Expanding Your Network

Take the time to expand your online and offline network. Be genuine when you do it, and don't always bring your business into it. That will develop naturally.

- **Meet Your Neighbors** – Take the time to visit the other merchants in your neighborhood. Support their businesses if it makes sense. Let them get to know you. Join a neighborhood development group and your local Chamber of Commerce.
- **Join Professional Organizations** – If your industry has related associations and organizations, become a member on a local and national level.
- **Foster Your Network** – Attend networking events and host your own. Whether they are business related, industry related or support a local cause, it's important for others to get to know you as the face behind your business. This isn't a sales opportunity, but a natural way to build relationships. The referrals will come in time.



When it comes to running a small business, it's important to make decisions carefully to ensure your success. When you are able to achieve your company's fundamental goals through marketing, branding, networking and managing your money, you can grow your business.

About Aliant Payment Solutions

Aliant is a merchant services company that provides debit card and credit card processing to small, medium and enterprise businesses. It enables mobile, brick-and-mortar and e-commerce vendors to accept a variety of payments from their customers, including credit cards, debit cards, electronic checks, gift cards, loyalty cards and recurring billing. To learn more about Aliant Payment Systems, visit <http://www.aliantpayments.com>.