

successful web presence. Here are 7 easy ways to promote your local business online, and they don't cost a lot of money.

YOUR URL EVERYWHERE (you do have a website, don't you?)

Any and every thing that may come in contact with a customer should have your URL on it. Business cards, bags, flyers, newspaper ads, your store window, free giveaways --as you re-order your stationery and promotional items, just add your URL. Simple and painless.

NETWORK WITH OTHER LOCAL BUSINESSES

One of the most powerful strategies for promoting your business is to team up other business owners, especially those who already have websites. You probably can learn a lot from their experiences, and there are all sorts of ways you can work together to benefit all. For example:

Link Exchange - each website can have a special page just for links to other (non-competing) businesses, giving each business a chance to pick up new customers at no cost. These links should NOT be on your main page, unless you want your visitors to click away the minute they hit your site.

Coupon Exchange - every week or two, each business owner can send a special mailing to their list with coupons from all of the businesses. Each business has a chance to get some new business without spending a cent.

Local Guide - if there's no local business guide in your area, why not team up with some other business owners and create your own? You may be able to find a web designer that will go in on it with your group, just for the exposure and the chance to sell his services to individual business owners later. He could help promote the website in exchange for referrals or the right to sell ads on the site later.

LOCAL BUSINESS GUIDES

Whether you're selling a product or a service, local business guides can be one of your best traffic generators. People are increasingly turning to these local directories to look for goods and services. Get your site listed in as many local guides and directories as you can find. Some charge for a listing, but many are free because they're just starting out and need to get listings. So get listed for free while you still can. Many businesses are still not taking advantage of this great source of traffic, so you could easily be the only listing in your category. I've heard more than once about consumers who patronized a business because it was the ONLY listing in its category.

ONLINE NETWORKING

You've heard that "It's not what you know but who you know." Nowhere is this more true than on the Net. Whatever your business or interests, there are others out there just like you, networking and exchanging information. You might even be able to find a local message board where you can meet other business owners and prospects. Join in and share, and you'll find yourself getting customers and referrals without really trying.

ASK FOR REFERRALS

Here is an easy, but often overlooked source of new business...ask existing customers to tell their family and friends about your excellent products and services. If they're happy with you, they'll be glad to make referrals. But don't expect them to think of it - remind them. And make it easy for them - put a tell-a-friend script on your website, so they can do it while they're thinking about it. You may even want to offer some sort of reward - one local business offers \$25 worth of free dry cleaning when customers refer 3 people who open an account.

E-MAIL

This is a real no-brainer. Almost everyone has an email address, and once you get it, the cost of staying in touch with them is minimal. There are so many ways you can use email marketing that a slew of books, software and businesses have been developed to help you. But it all boils down to persuading your customers and prospects to give you their email address, then building trust through repeated contact.

FREE PUBLICITY

What could be better than free publicity for your business? If you can find a public interest or news angle to tie into your business, you should write a press release, including website and email address so people can get more information. Or your business can sponsor a local event or volunteer resources to charity, giving your business (and your website) valuable exposure while you give back to the community. There are lots of free resources for creating press releases, and entire websites devoted to helping you get free publicity.

These are only a few of the many ways you can promote your business locally. You never know how someone is going to search for a business like yours, so you should use a variety of methods to get your name out there where they can

see it!

Remember, the consumer is just a mouse click away from your store - but only if you're online. And with today's technology, the targeting capabilities and options are unlimited...even if your bank balance isn't.

Sharon Fling is the author of "How To Promote Your Local Business On the Internet" and Editor/Publisher of the electronic newsletter "Promote Your Local Business Online."
To join her mailing list, visit <http://as.localbizpromo.com>
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