

Maximum Marketing - Minimum Budget

By Bonnie Jo Davis

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Two years ago I started my small Virtual Assistant business with a non-existent marketing budget. I borrowed marketing books from the library, read countless articles on the Internet and joined a professional trade association of my peers. I learned hundreds of marketing techniques and one valuable lesson. The lesson I learned is that the financial ruin of large companies is often achieved by incredibly expensive and glitzy marketing plans that do not take into account the company's ability to earn a profit. Over time, I found that the most effective marketing techniques that allow a company to make a profit are those that are inexpensive or free. What a fantastic discovery for me at that time! This knowledge, combined with hard work and excellent customer service, enabled my small business to expand at a phenomenal rate.

When developing your marketing plan be aware that frugal marketing techniques take more time and a great deal of personal creativity but they DO produce results! Following are a few of my most successful frugal marketing techniques:

Website

It is not necessary to spend thousands of dollars on a beautiful website. Some of the most effective and interesting websites I have seen were built on a frugal budget. Far more important than the cost is the content of a website. At a minimum your website should include your company name, contact information, tagline or slogan, company/owner biography, a list of services, a client list or list of testimonials, articles or press releases you have written and any interesting information related to your business that might be of help to your visitors. It is essential that you use a paid web host and not a free service. Free hosting may exclude you from search engine listings and may brand you as a neophyte in your field when that impression may not be correct. Inexpensive hosting is available and many hosts provide free or low cost web templates that will give your site a polished and consistent look. For a list of affordable web hosts visit the [Web Host Directory](#) and [Host Review](#). Having a well-developed website will help you leverage the results of your other frugal marketing techniques and, in the long run, will save you money by reducing the overall cost and shipping of your marketing materials.

Public Relations

Create a press release and submit it to your local newspaper. Highlight the unusual aspects of your business and educate the reader about your business and your industry. Do not simply promote your own company, but promote the industry as a whole. Position your business as unique in that industry by explaining, for example, how your company takes a novel approach to delivering

products or services. Take the same press release and format it for the Internet. Submit it to as many free press release sites that you can find such as LocalBusiness.com, PRWeb.com and USA News. For added impact, search the Newslink website to find other community newspapers in your state that might be interested in your business news. Follow standard press release formatting and be sure to add that you are available for interviews in your contact information section as this opens the door for feature interviews during slow "news" weeks for local papers. Send out a press release every quarter or at least twice a year. Always include your website's URL in any marketing materials and press releases. For more information about press releases including formatting visit the Netpreneur Exchange, Infoscavenger and Pertinent Information.

Contests

Sponsor local or on-line contests by providing a prize. This could be one of your products or a coupon for two or three hours of your services. In return you will receive valuable free publicity. Find local contests, which would welcome your participation by scanning your community newspaper. Target on-line contests by surfing for well-established companies that compliment your own. For example, if you sell wine glasses, you should seek a company that sells wine and offer a set of wine glasses as a contest prize. Another option is to search for e-zines (on-line newsletters) that cover a topic related to your business and ask the editor about partnering to offer a contest to readers with your product or service as the prize. You can find e-zines by searching on-line directories such as BestEzines.com, The Ezine Directory or Ezine Search.

Publishing

This is my favorite technique. Write an article about an interesting or timely topic related to your business that would be of interest to your target market. Ask a friend or loved one with editing skills to proof your article for you. Create a four or five line biography at the end of the article that includes your contact information: your company name, e-mail address and company URL. Add a copyright statement at the very bottom of the article. Then submit the article to on-line article archives, e-zines and appropriate websites. This technique helps establish you as an expert in your field, publicizes your business, and creates incoming links to your website to increase your link popularity and search engine rankings. You can begin submitting your article to: Article City, Expert Articles and GoArticles.com. These three resources will get you started but a quick Internet search will provide an extensive listing of thousands of venues on-line.

Networking

Research your local chamber of commerce and start attending their networking events. Develop and rehearse an interesting "elevator speech" that summarizes your business and your talents in less than thirty seconds. Introduce yourself to as many people as possible, give your elevator speech and hand out your business cards and collect the business cards of prospects. Take the business cards you collected, use the back of the card to write down what you discussed or other important information about the prospect, and FOLLOW UP! Write and mail a quick note on your business stationery to say how nice it was to meet them and mention something memorable you discussed. Keep in touch with them on a regular basis.

Join on-line communities such as newsgroups, discussion boards, e-mail lists, etc. where your target market and peers congregate. Introduce yourself and your business if introductions are allowed by the community guidelines and encouraged by the list moderator. Establish your credibility and promote yourself by responding to questions in your field of expertise. Join an affordable, well-known and professional association of your peers on-line or locally. If it is permitted, announce your availability to take on sub-contracted work from your peers, but read the guidelines and do not "spam" these lists which will result in a loss of your credibility and professionalism.

Become involved locally with a worthy charity by donating your time, products or services.

Over time, as your business grows, you can and should add a few paid marketing techniques to your marketing plan. But you must continue to use the most rewarding of your free and inexpensive marketing techniques to maximize your profit. Never forget that creativity, hard work and excellent customer service are the keys to growing a successful business while keeping your marketing costs in check.

Bonnie Jo Davis is the author of a new e-book "Articles That Sell." She is a Virtual Assistant (<http://www.davisvirtualassistance.com/>) and specializes in helping her clients succeed using frugal marketing techniques. For more information about Bonnie and her favorite frugal marketing techniques visit <http://www.ArticlesThatSell.com> .

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