

## Marketing

# Use Social Media And Internet Marketing To Grow Your Business

By Ron McArthur

You have decided to take the plunge and open your own business. Congratulations, but the hard work is far from finished. Now come the tasks of hiring, scheduling, managing, and attracting and retaining customers – the list could go on forever. But these lists are long for good reasons – each and every action brings you one step closer to achieving your business potential.



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Perhaps one of the most important ways to help get a business off the ground or to introduce an established business's concept to a new audience is through an integrated marketing program.



Initiatives have traditionally been focused on print media outlets, but with the rise of the Internet, marketing in this form has proved to be an effective addition to traditional marketing programs in reaching a wider variety of potential customers. Here are a few ways to utilize the Internet to your business's advantage.

**Target ideal customers.** Ask yourself who the ideal customers are and how a business can benefit them. This will help you determine how to most effectively get your products and services in front of them.

For example, if the ideal customer is a 30-something female with an executive-level career, think about what she is going to need to keep her wardrobe of expensive suits, skirts, pants and blouses in top condition. Utilize these keywords to your advantage. The more often these keywords appear in advertising materials, the higher the likelihood is that these ideal customers will come across your business in their search and patronize your business.

**Tap into social media.** It is hard to go a day without hearing someone talk about Twitter or Facebook. Use this to your advantage. Set up a fan page or group page on Facebook that features information about the company, before and after photos of your work, and even ongoing and upcoming specials. Send existing customers invitations to join the group.

Chances are, if customers are satisfied with the work you have done for them in the past, they will let their friends know. Eventually, your business's network will grow through word of mouth, and this maximizes the potential for new customers.

Twitter is also an excellent resource, because you can see what people are talking about in real time. If you run a search for specific words or phrases pertaining to your business, you will see who is talking – or "tweeting" – about those topics at that particular moment. You can then reply to comments with a link to your Web site or with details about a related promotion your business is running.

**Think about related industries.** Keeping one's wardrobe in fashion and in pristine condition takes work, as well as a number of different vendors. Talk to proprietors in related industries, such as retail clothing and accessory boutiques, about joint promotions to be featured on both their Web site and yours. This way, you're accessing an entirely new group of potential customers that already know and trust the company you're partnering with and, given that level of familiarity, will be more inclined to give your business a second look.

**E-mail in moderation.** Collecting e-mail addresses from your customers is a great way to stay connected and keep them abreast of any new happenings at your business.

A newsletter at the beginning of each month detailing drycleaning deals, announcing new team members, highlighting a few regular customers or inviting customers to connect with you on Twitter or Facebook shows that you value their business and are thinking of them.

Be wary, though. Many cus-

tomers are hesitant to provide their e-mail addresses because they fear doing so will mean an onslaught of spam. If you assure them you will only be e-mailing them once a month or after they come in for service, they will be much more receptive to opening the lines of electronic communication.

**Monitor and reply to feedback.** Portals like Yelp and Citysearch are invaluable ways to monitor what customers have to say about your business. If the feedback is positive, send a thank you e-mail and a coupon for free shirt laundering and pressing during the next visit.

If the comments are unsat-

isfying, however, do not just sit idly by – take action. In April, Yelp began allowing business owners the opportunity to publicly comment on reviews about their businesses and provide additional context around specific reviews.

This has proved to be extremely useful for countless business owners in several ways. Replying shows that business owners care about their reputations and are willing to go the extra mile to ensure that customers are happy.

Because this is done publicly, people searching the site see the vested interest that these business owners have, and they may give the business a chance.

Whether you are just starting out or are looking to expand, the Internet can play an integral role in growing your business. If used properly, you can gain access to a wealth of new customers, build lasting relationships and ensure your business's success now and well into the future. **DCN**

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