

Five Tips

For Creating Buzz About Your Business



THE
Homesteader

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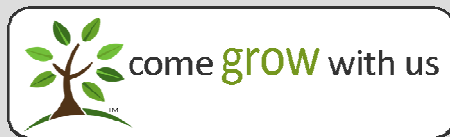
Getting consumers talking about your business can be a challenge. You are vying for the attention of individuals who are inundated every day by radio, television, newspaper, and electronic communications. They live in a world where it seems there is more and more to do in a constantly shrinking amount of time in which to do it. If you're going to stand out, you have to make a plan - make sure it's original - and then make it happen!

This booklet, "Five Tips for Creating Buzz About Your Business," is meant to help you brainstorm different ways to gain and keep consumer interest. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but is a compilation of our favorites.

Our recommendation - read through the tips we've included more than once and give yourself time to digest the information. Don't let the variety of avenues available to market and brand your business overwhelm you! Instead, learn what you can and get started! The more consumers hear about you and your business, the more likely they will be to call on you the time comes.

Remember, in most cases, the only bad advertising is NO advertising!

For more information about business marketing, visit us online at: www.ComeGrowWithUs.biz or visit The Homesteader's website, and click on the "Business Services" link.



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Five Tips

For Creating Buzz About Your Business

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If you would like a copy of this booklet to circulate to your customers or are interested in co-branding options, please contact us using the information on the previous page.

Tip #1

Craft Your Message Wisely

I can't count on the fingers and toes of our entire staff the number of business owners I've talked to who have said, "I advertised in *such and such* and it just didn't work," and then found upon further investigation that it was highly likely they didn't receive a response from the ad because it just wasn't the right type of message.

What you say and how it looks MATTER! Here are some ways to make sure your message is crafted well.

1. Be sure the message applies to the largest possible audience. If you want people to talk about your business, you've got to tell them why your services apply to the majority of your target population. I recently saw a children's store ad that read, "A One-Stop Shop for Today's Parents," If, instead, it said, "The Place to Shop for the Children in Your Life," the message would extend to grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and more - which would give them a wider audience of prospective customers.
2. Don't use acronyms or technical terms. You are very accustomed to the "lingo" utilized in your industry but others may not be. Most people have an underlying fear of "looking dumb" and aren't going to ask what something means.
3. Proofread, proofread, proofread, and then have someone else proofread, proofread, proofread. Yes, I'm serious. It does not matter what type of business you operate, when a potential customer looks at your ad, brochure, website, etc., and sees misspelled words, **it's an instant turn off**. It causes them to question your professionalism, the quality of your work, and your attention to detail.

4. Think carefully about what makes your particular business stand out from others in your field. If you can't think of anything exemplary about the way you do business - you need to think of something and start doing it NOW! You are never going to be the "best" in the eyes of your customers if your company doesn't have a special quality that makes it stand out from the rest. Most companies have a standout quality but don't identify it clearly enough to themselves, their employees, or their customers. Being "part of the pack" doesn't create buzz - customers buzz because they see something unique and want to tell everyone about it.
5. After you have formulated your company's message, let at least 10 people read it. These should be individuals who have little or no knowledge about your business and who have different backgrounds, ages, levels of experience, strengths and weaknesses. If you have to explain the message to more than 2 people in that group, work on it some more. This step may seem a little excessive - but if you can write a message that at least eight individuals (in a group of people who are dissimilar) can understand and relate to, you've got a message that the majority of consumers will understand. Perfect!
6. An increasing segment of the U.S. population speaks English as a second language. Many businesses cannot afford to have a translator on staff. It is possible, however, to either (1) focus on hiring at least one hourly employee who speaks fluent Spanish, or (2) have your message (and some of the resulting brochures, etc.) translated into Spanish. Once you have these materials, add a string of text to print ads, etc., that says, "Gratis, informaciones sobre nuestros servicios disponibles en español." (translation - Free information about our services available in Spanish.).

Tip #2

Sculpt Your Corporate Image

As was mentioned in Tip #1, it is important to focus on what you say AND how it looks to consumers. A well-defined corporate image - complete with logo, color scheme, and standards for layout and design of all marketing and advertising materials - is important to every business, large or small. Approximately 60% of the population is comprised of “visual learners” - individuals whose primary means of learning about your company is through your image!

1. You have ten seconds to make an impression. In that short space of time, a potential customer is going to decide if they want to know more about your company.
2. Choose your color scheme carefully. It should be appropriate to your business. Too many business owners choose to use their favorite colors instead of considering what the chosen colors will convey about their product and services. Companies in the “professional services” industry (i.e., doctors, lawyers, insurance agents, etc.) should use colors that feel “established” - such as neutrals and deep blues or greens. Child-related businesses and others whose business is supposed to feel “fun” can often use brighter, sunnier colors. Decide how your business should feel to consumers and then do a color study. (The internet is a great resource for this - simply search for “color psychology.” Many Book stores and libraries also have appropriate resources.)
3. Decide on three fonts to consistently use in all visual advertising: (1) your impact font [typically the font used in your business name], (2) your main body font [used the most], and (3) your accent font [used in subtitles and phrases you want to stand out slightly from the main body of text]. It is advisable to choose a main body font which is Internet friendly (Arial, Arial Black, Comic Sans, Courier New, Georgia, Impact, Times, Times New Roman, or Verdana).

4. Make sure your layouts have clean lines. Too many font or color changes, too much text, and too many photographic or clipart images all give a broken, dated, unprofessional appearance. Use a maximum of three fonts and three colors. Stand back from your finished product and see how it affects your eyes. If you find your eyes jumping from one spot to another, try again. Your eyes should be able to gently and comfortably flow through any marketing piece.
5. There are generally two types of logos. These types are (1) a logo that is primarily made up of your business name without a graphic item or (2) a logo centered around a graphic item with your business name as the secondary focus. Again, which you choose depends on your industry. For businesses that require an extremely professional corporate image, it is often better to use the first type of logo.
6. For Franchises - Owning a franchise often means you don't have to formulate your own corporate image. Most of that work has been done for you. Keep in mind, though, that every item you use in conjunction with your company should maintain that image. Using the colors, fonts, logos, etc., that consumers recognize reinforces the fact that your business is part of a brand with which they are already comfortable.

Tip #3

Build a Web Presence

Too many business owners assume they don't need a website or, if they have a site, don't use it effectively. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2003 almost 55% of households had internet access. Industry experts estimate that 65% - 75% of households in the United States now have access. The internet offers an inexpensive form of advertising which is available around the clock to current and potential customers.

1. At the minimum, your site should include, (1) a home page with 200 - 300 carefully chosen words about your company and its products or services, (2) specifics about your major products, product lines, or services [including pricing - even if its approximate], (3) all of the contact information for your company in an EASY to find location on the site, and (4) detailed information about the primary owners or executives who run your company. If you have a storefront location, you should also include directions and a map, if possible.
2. Make sure your site is user friendly. If someone has to search for the information they are trying to find, they are likely to become frustrated and move on to another company's site. Navigation bars (the buttons website visitors use to navigate from one page to another within your site) should be prominent, easy to read, and included in the same location on every page.
3. Include photos on your site. This simple step will increase readership of your site by 75% and will cause visitors to stay on your site 3 - 4 times longer. Preferably, these photos should include an exterior picture of your business location, an interior picture of your business, pictures of some of your staff, and pictures of your products or happy customers receiving your services. If you are in an industry where it is relevant, "before" and "after" shots can also be extremely effective - they help readers imagine what your service can do for them!

4. Keep the site simple. For most readers, black text on a neutral background is the most visually pleasing. Don't include flashing text. Use CAPITALS or **bold** words sparingly. Minimize the amount of text on each page. A good general rule is that main pages should include no more than 500 words.
5. When choosing your domain name (the address of your website; i.e. www.mybusiness.com), choose a name that will be easy for others to remember.
6. Give visitors to your site an easy way to tell friends about what they've found. Having a "Tell a Friend" link can drastically improve the amount of traffic your website receives and thus increase the number of new people that are hearing about your company. (Note - Include something that indicates to visitors that you do not share or record their friend's e-mail address when they send a referral to your site. Many people are wary of sharing someone else's personal information without this guarantee.)
7. Make sure to include your web address on every print item your business uses. Even printing it on the back of your envelopes can be helpful! Also, if at all possible, change your e-mail address to one received at your domain (for example - bob@mybusiness.com instead of bob@yahoo.com). That way, anyone who receives an e-mail from you, immediately recognizes that the e-mail is from an established business, and does not mistake it for "spam" (junk e-mail). In addition, if the person wants more information about your business, you have just provided them with your website name.

Tip #4

Be Media Friendly

Having friends in the media can result in increased publicity for your business. Media relations can take time and a great deal of effort to develop, but the resulting buzz about your business can be well worth the effort. There are some key things you should do to make your business easy for any reporter, blogger, or writer to cover - whether they know you personally or not.

1. **Reveal your background.** Your brochures, website, etc., should include information about the key owners or executives within your company. Don't just make this the normal, boring "So-and-so went to XYZ University and holds a Master's Degree in such-and-such." It is important to establish your credibility by including what professional or industry certifications you possess. But, this should be balanced by a warm "fuzzy" description of what led you to start your business or get involved in your current industry, and what makes you passionate about your business and customers.
2. **Build a media kit.** A media kit acts as your "envoy" to the publishing world and to potential clients. In the kit, you should include:
 - Facts about your business: what makes you unique, your philosophy, mission statement, and frequently asked questions about your company and your response.
 - The history of your business.
 - Information about your products or services: no more than one page, using bullets or small paragraphs. It should enable the reader to get a good idea of what you offer in a few minutes or less.
 - Short, friendly bios and photos of the key leaders in your organization.
 - Current news about your company: customer testimonials, industry articles you've written, publications you've been featured in, etc.

- Company logos, photos, guidelines for reproduction, and a list of potential story ideas.

When your kit is complete, you should have hard copies available as well as an electronic PDF (portable document format) version posted on your website.

3. Always make it as easy as possible for media members to access information about your company. From a “publishing” perspective, I can’t list the number of times one of our writers or staff members has been frustrated by the lack of information available about a company, etc., they were attempting to feature.
4. Send out press releases for every key organizational event. Sometimes this will pay off, a lot of times it won’t, but keep doing it! Press releases in today’s digital age are essentially free to send (via e-mail or fax), and the act of keeping yourself and your company before the eyes of the media will eventually pay-off. Issue press releases for new employee hires, to announce new products or services, to tell about a new or newly renovated location, to tout special events, to tell about community or charity events in which you are participating, etc. (Entrepreneur.com has a list called “30 Reasons to Write a Press Release,” written by Al Lautenslager. It is definitely worth reviewing.)
5. Include a “Media Only” section or page on your website. In it, include your media kit, current and past press releases, and photos. These items should be easy to download and kept current! Not only will these help your company be more “media friendly,” if you include the text of some press releases, etc., on your website they will enhance your website’s keyword rankings (you’ll appear closer to the top of an Internet search list).

Tip #5

Demand & Keep Their Attention

Creating buzz is a consistent, ongoing process - and if you don't consider it such, you're going to waste your time and effort. In order to make the most of your hard work, you will have to take steps to get people talking and then plan to keep them talking!

1. Pull a stunt. Getting the attention of your current and potential customers is a challenge. Do something unexpected. A easy example of this is the many "mascots" you see, dressed in silly garb standing outside tax provider's offices during March and April of each year. While this may not be appropriate for your image, it is a good illustration of a stunt that demands attention. You can plan stunts around current events, popular television shows, industry-specific topics, holidays, seasons, and more. Brainstorm with your partners, employees, and even a few customers, to come up with an option (or several) suitable for your business.
2. Give away samples of your product or services. This serves several purposes. First, it automatically creates buzz. People enjoy getting free "stuff"! They're going to tell their friends, family, etc., about the neat item they received and encourage them to go get one for themselves. Second, it helps you build a following of people who have had a positive experience with your business. Having a large group of clients who have favorable things to say about your company is invaluable.
3. Hold regularly planned events. For some, this may mean annual or seasonal sales, for others it may be special offers or "customer appreciation" events. Giving customers something for which to plan, tell others about, and (best of all) bring people to attend is a great way to create ongoing buzz. Make sure your customers and employees know when these events occur and promote them well in advance! The benefit generated will grow exponentially the longer the event is consistently held.

3. Build an e-mail or postal mail marketing list. Statistically, in order for your organization to be actively remembered by customers, they have to be reminded of your presence at least once in a four week period. Industry experts often recommend going a step further by following the 1-1-4 rule: one general contact and one special offer contact within each four week period. The most cost effective way to accomplish this is via e-mail. If you haven't already, you should build an "opt-in" e-mail list (a list to which people choose to subscribe). To build this list, include subscription information and a few tidbits about how recipients will benefit from inclusion in every electronic and print marketing piece you distribute.
4. Advertise as much as possible. With a limited budget, this can be a challenge. However, when your customers see your logo and information about your business on a regular, sustained basis in several different places, it makes a difference. First, it allows you to seem like a major industry player (even if you're not yet). Second, it makes it a challenge for competitors to convince your clients to use their services instead. Third, it helps ensure that the buzz you've worked so hard to create is sustained!
5. Don't kill the buzz! The quality of your products and level of customer service must remain the same or improve as time passes. If you receive a customer complaint, address it quickly, carefully, and completely. If a customer starts promoting your company and then becomes disillusioned, you risk not only losing that customer but creating a hostile, embarrassed individual who regrets telling their friends and family about your company. That sort of negative publicity in today's world of e-mail, web blogs, online forums, text messaging, etc., can spread very quickly and haunt you for a very long time.

Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. We hope that you found it informative and already have found some ideas to help grow your business!

If you have questions about any of the information contained in this booklet, or would like us to help you form a “buzz” plan for your business, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,

Come Grow With Us Family & Staff

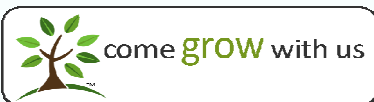
P.S. We're also including a few coupons below that we hope you'll find useful. Enjoy!

20% Off Any of Our Business Services[✕]



*Except HTML E-mail and Monthly Web Hosting Fees.
May be applied to website set-up / design fees.
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50% Off HTML E-mail Program Set-Up Fee




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