

Small Business Advertising Tips

Small Business: It's Time to Review Your Advertising Efforts.

Our office has been getting many phone calls the past few months in regard to the current business environment. "To advertise, or not to advertise. That is the question." I wrote that last line hoping you would speak it aloud in your best Shakespearean accent.

We all know proper advertising and promotion is essential for a business to keep a steady flow of customers and prospects entering their doors, calling their phones and purchasing off their Web Sites. The problem that a small business faces is that they are working on such a tight budget. They are hesitant to incur any additional expenses to their bottom line. If you own a small business please review the information below. My hopes are that you can use these guidelines to help ensure that the bulk of your advertising dollars are considered an investment not an expense.

What makes your business unique? - Look in the mirror and ask yourself what separates your business from your competition. Don't just focus on a general term such as "service." Explore this question more deeply. What aspects of your customer service sets you apart? What is your competition *NOT* doing for their customers that you *can* and *do* for yours? What extra value can you add to your current services or products that will strengthen your offer? Take the time to research your competition. Narrow down your list of added value points that you can offer and your competition can't offer on a regular basis. Keep your focus on just one or two key points; remember you can't be everything to everybody. After doing this, you will now have an advertising message that shows the benefits of dealing with you. A message is much more effective than throwing your name and location out and hoping that people will give you a try.

What are you currently doing to promote your business? - You now have identified the message you want your prospects and customers to receive. Are your current efforts delivering that message? Are you reaching the people that this message will appeal to? Is it causing a person to take action to contact or visit you? Whatever methods are in your budget, whether it is newspaper, radio, phone book, web advertising or promotional products, make sure that they are all delivering your added value message. If you need help doing so, then don't hesitate to call the sales department that represents the methods you use to advertise. They should be happy to help you improve your efforts. Remember you are their customer.

Track your advertising! - So many businesses throw away money on what's not effective and don't spend enough on what is effective for them. They do this simply because they don't track their efforts. This doesn't have to be some an

elaborate system. It can be as simple as training yourself and your staff to always ask, "Where did you hear about us?" Please realize that you should display a level of patience while you are performing your tracking. Different forms of advertising take time to mature into effectiveness. So give your message a chance to "get around." Over time, because of proper tracking, it will become clear which advertising vehicles are working and which ones are not.

Don't forget to say "thank you" to your current customers. - This is very important. Many businesses fall into a trap in which they are so focused in obtaining new customers that they fail to recognize their current customer base effectively. I recommend promotional products to say thank you to your loyal customers. Mugs, shirts, pens etc. to make your customers feel appreciated. This will also generate "word-of-mouth advertising" for you. Think of how many conversations begin with: "Where did you get that mug? How is that place? I was thinking about calling them. Other thank you offers can include frequent purchase discount cards or direct mail coupons exclusively for your customer base. Chances are that a good "thank you strategy" will lead to a greater amount of referrals, and most importantly, will keep your customers returning.