

Attracting New Business on a Shoestring Budget

In a recent marketing workshop I attended, I discovered that most business owners rely on just two or three strategies to attract new business. Even well-established companies tend to rely on one or two strategies. However, there is a multitude of ways to drive new business to your door. Here are a few:

Networking. Perhaps the most commonly used approach by small business owners. However, it is often poorly executed. Many people attend a networking function and take the wrong approach by trying to meet as many people as they can. They bounce from person to person, handing out business cards like it is an Olympic event and they are vying for the gold medal. They fail to realize that the most effective way to network is to cultivate relationships and give referrals to other members first.

Referrals. This marketing strategy places a close second in preferred methods of generating new business leads. The key here is to develop a systematic approach to ensure that you take proactive approach instead than a passive one. Rather than assuming that satisfied client will refer someone to you, ask for that referral. Tell people who your ideal client is and ask for their help in finding these types of clients. The real estate agent who represented the seller when we bought our house, sends us a card every year and reminds us that she loves referrals. It is not pushy, does not sound like she's begging, and I'm confident it helps generate new leads.

Writing. This often under-utilized strategy is an excellent way to become recognized as an industry expert. Every industry has trade magazines and most are hungry for good content. The Internet is also filled with websites and e-zines looking for material to send to their subscribers and customers. I now write at least one article every month and send it to more than two hundred publications. This strategy alone has helped drive more traffic to my website more than anything else. It is sometimes challenging to come up with ideas and to write an 800 word article but the investment of time and effort is definitely worth it.

Newsletters. This is another powerful technique to keep your name in front of your customers and prospects. Provide key insight into business challenges and offer solutions to them. In other words, help your prospects and customers solve problems. Some newsletters are nothing more than advertising so be sure to provide valuable information to your customer. Although it is less expensive to send a newsletter electronically you can issue it in paper format. A local real estate agent regularly sends out a one-page update of the housing market in our neighborhood.

Cold calling. Without a doubt, this is usually the most challenging way to market a business - I know very few people who actually enjoy cold calling. However, it can be a good way to uncover qualified prospects in a relatively short period of time. Be sure to start your conversation with a good opening to capture the other person's attention.

Give free information. At the marketing workshop I attended, the facilitator suggested to give information to interested prospects. I have used this approach on my website and have quadrupled the number of subscribers to my newsletter in the last year. You do not need to give away ALL the information relevant to your product or service. Instead, offer information that will help your target market with their problems. For example, when people sign up to my e-zine, they receive a report that outlines 100 tips they can use to increase their sales.

Offer a guarantee. A concern many people have when changing suppliers is the risk associated with the change. They may not be completely satisfied with their existing supplier but the risk of choosing a supplier who may be worse can prevent them from changing. Eliminate this concern and offer a guarantee.

Advertising. This can be a great strategy if you know how to create a good ad. The best marketers know that great sales copy is what makes the difference; I have experienced this first-hand. When I began selling my book on my website, I generated mediocre results for the first two years. I eventually changed the copy on my site and sales have soared every since. Glance through the ads in your trade magazine and you will quickly notice that most ads focus on the company's product features instead of on the customer's problem. Create a great ad by concentrating on the problem you can solve.

There are many other ways to market your business and generate new business leads. However, the ideas I mentioned in this article are effective low- or no-cost options. Use them consistently and watch your sales grow.

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