



HOW TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH CREATIVE PUBLICITY

Small businesses sometimes fail because their owners fail to use creative tools and techniques to get the added exposure they need. The following ideas are geared toward the smaller business, but would work for larger businesses as well. Some of the concepts are simple, and they have also proven to be effective over time with millions of small and large businesses.

1. Put your business and your name in highly visible places, no matter how unusual.

We all see billboards, Yellow Pages ads, and ads on the place mats at local restaurants. Try putting your business name and or logo on bus stop benches; stadium walls; city buses; pens people sign charge card slips with at your business (often they take the pen anyway...might as well have your advertising on it!); T-shirts you, your friends, and clients and relatives wear ; symphony, auto show, or concert program "inside ads;" plastic cups or mugs you use for your guests/clients in your office, etc. Keep the ads neat and the message clear. People DO remember names from events and places they go where they have personal or special interests.

2. Join or volunteer time to a few good local business organisations.

This can be the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, Variety Club, BNI, small business clubs, breakfast clubs, business associations, your neighbourhood business groups; anything that will expose you and your face and name and services to others who might need it, know someone who needs it, or even be your competitor. Knowing your competitors, what the "successful" ones are doing, and where THEY "mingle," can help you strategize where you might get some exposure of your OWN! If you can see what your competitors' strengths are, chances are you can also see where they have weak areas. If you can, use YOUR business and your expertise to fill in where they are weak.

3. Speak or write publicly about your profession or your business.

This sounds self-serving. Of course it is! The key is to make it very subtle! Media folks will accept a story if they see it is interesting and about something where there is an "angle" that would appeal to many people. They will NOT be drawn to interview you or publish an article strictly on your business! Famous authors do not travel the country signing books in small town book stores to learn geography! Any good, honest exposure you can get through an article in a trade journal, one of the clubs you have joined, or a charity function, puts your face, your name, and your business name, its services & results, in front of the public. If you dislike public speaking, write an article for a business magazine related to your speciality or the service or products you sell. Most of those trade publications are looking for contributors with knowledge who will write for free or little money, to fill space and keep their readers interested. It's FAR better than having an ad in the same magazine! It gives you ten times the credibility to WRITE for a magazine than to have an ad in one! Make sure your name and all other pertinent short author "bio" copy is current and accurate. The "pen is often mightier than the ad."



4. Get with the times and get "online!"

Sure there are millions of people competing with one another on the Internet! Turn it around and know that there are many times the same number of consumers, looking for the best deal, the best service for the money, and the most qualified person to meet their needs. Here you can spend next to nothing or you can spend a lot. Learning how other people in your business use the "Web" will give you ideas as to where you might "beef up" your services, the quality of your goods, and the way you present your business and yourself as the owner to the public, who can either help your business sustain itself and grow, or not. See what other similar businesses do not offer that you could or do and play on that. The information is right before you. You have but to learn to access it and then the world and all of the world's businesses are in front of you!

5. Sponsor or be a co-sponsor for a local charity event.

Pick an event that is well-attended, and also one in which you might already have some interest. Taking the time off to man the telethon phones, attend a dinner or party or play or gaming event for a charitable function serves you in several ways. The two most important are that you are doing something for the benefit of others, which helps you spiritually and will give you a good feeling, and it gives you and your business some public exposure within a very positive and a very humanistic environment.

6. Get involved with civic groups and committees.

Pick your interest or one that you feel would be of interest to potential clients or current customers of yours: school boards, hospitals, libraries, art centres/museums, city council, neighbourhood watch groups, PTA, Boy Scouts, church groups, etc. Depending on the size of your city, you will have more or less choice. If your town is very small, get involved with something in the closest large town from your home. The more people you know and meet, the more people will know about you and "what you do" and what you have to offer. Simple truth.

7. Voice your opinion in print.

This "attention-getter" has pros and cons. If you send a letter to the editor or write an article for your local paper's "editorial page," you are sure to have people who agree with you and will possibly give you some business or mention your name, as well as people who disagree with you BIG time and who you might even LOSE as a customer. If you write about something that is light-hearted, not related to religion or politics, and something you feel certain most of the people you really would want or already have as clients or customers would enjoy or be "neutral" on, you're safe. Again your name and maybe your business (many people use their business address in letters to the editor to keep their private address private) will be where many people from town and out of town might see it. Careful thought on the right topic, well phrased, can affect many people in a positive way for you.



8. Advertise or offer to give your clientele more than your competitors are giving.

Reason number one why to check out what your competition offers, gives, sells, and is all about with their business! It sometimes takes only a few cents less, better value for the money, extra courteous service, or other services or options, to make a client or customer choose you over one of your competitors...including the much larger ones! Develop or hone some skill or special "extra" you can offer people if they use your firm or buy from your company. Advertise that special extra! Small but thoughtful or useful gifts or services can actually make a difference in the kind of highly competitive marketplace. Know your strengths and play them up. Know your competition's weaknesses or things they simply cannot or do not give and find a way to fill some or all of those weak areas and voids yourself! Provide the best and most comprehensive and professional services or merchandise for the best prices, delivered in the best manner, on time, and you will be ahead of all but the very TOP people in your field. Much of what you can do will cost nothing but an investment in time and some extra "personalised" effort.

9. Send out a newsletter to clients and potential clients.

Simple newsletters can be done at home or office and copies can be made and sent out to mailing lists of your current clients/customers and other mailing groups. Don't make the mistake of filling the newsletter with ads and specials like everyone has in newspaper inserts! Write about what your business offers, what you do and how you do it, your staff, special features or skills your business or firm has to offer. Give the reader free hints, advice, etc. Let them see you are knowledgeable, friendly and not just out to send them junk mail filled with coupons or ads for products or services you are selling. They will be pleasantly surprised and they will remember you and your business if you do things with thought and good intentions. It's also a form of advertising, so it is a legitimate business tax deduction for most people.

10. Give free workshops or seminars to draw your special interest "target group."

If applicable and possible, decide on a topic or an aspect of your business, product line or knowledge gained from your business or the skills you sell. Advertise a workshop or seminar open to the public at your store or other appropriate place. (If demonstrating a skill, you may need to be in a place where you have the equipment to do so and where people in attendance can all see you doing it.) It can be all day long or last 1-4 hours, depending on your topic and your business. Again, the point is to offer some free, useful, interesting value and information to people who are used to paying you or your competitors for it! You need not tell them all you know so they would never need you again! Just give them enough to let them see that you know your business and are personable. You'll be surprised how many people will walk in the door or call you the week following a free weekend seminar or talk! Cost to you? Nothing but time, unless you pay to rent a room for your seminar or speech. If it is well publicised, and on a topic that you know, you will bring out the crowds; it will pay for itself with one or a few new clients or customers within a short time.