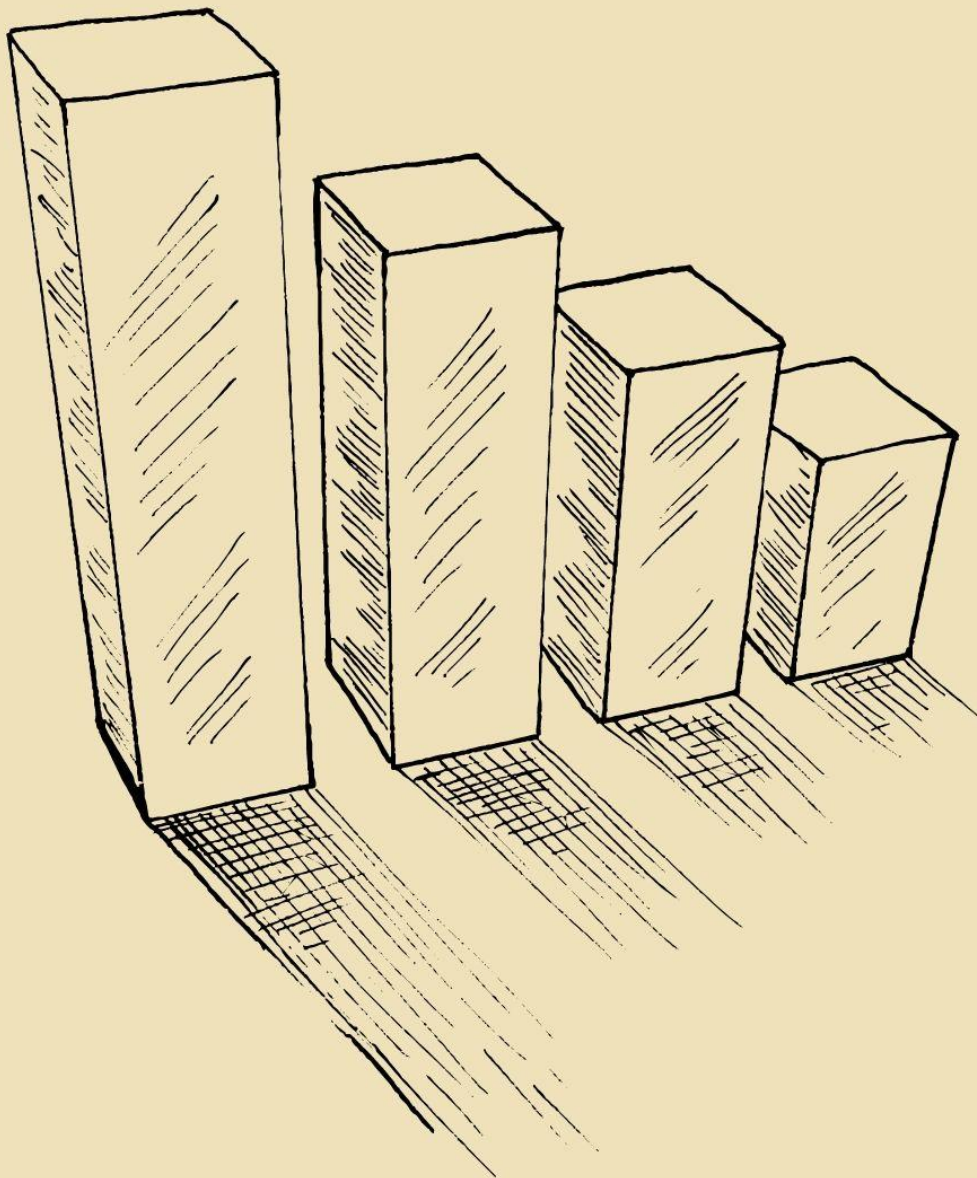


Small Business Marketing Tactics



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A overview of the online and offline marketing tactics available to your small business. The advantages and disadvantages of each. Where you should (and should not) use them and the costs you should expect.

Tactics are the tools you decide to use to deliver on your strategy. For example, if your objective is to increase sales by 'X'% by 'Y' date and the roadblock is you don't have enough sales leads you need a strategy to overcome that.

You might decide your website is so convincing all you need to do is drive traffic to the site and prospects will get in touch. There are several possible ways to drive traffic including paid ads and SEO. These are your potential tactics. You choose one (or more) tactics, set expectations, deliver them and measure the result.

You could find out you were wrong. You might drive lots of traffic to your website but it does not convert. Why not, what happened? Find it, fix it, and try again.

Digital marketing could be a complete waste of time and effort for your business. If so you need a different set of tactics. Perhaps direct mail will work for you or local advertising or networking. The principles remain the same – select, deliver, measure, adapt (or not), repeat.

Your tactics depend on where your customer is in their journey. Refer back to the Learner, Shopper, Buyer, Referer model in the strategy guide. The important point to note is everyone does not follow the same journey.

This all has an impact on the tactics you choose. If you are trying to pick up learners then your website and content will be important. You might also need to invest in SEO. If you are chasing those in shopper or buyer mode online Ads (in their various forms) might be more appropriate.

Note the importance of your referrers (happy former customers). They influence prospects via word of mouth. They provide reviews and they are a valuable input to many of the tactics outlined below.

Finally, be aware of consciousness. People may be exposed to your business (your brand) long before they become potential customers. If they are, and that impression is favourable, then your chances of making a sale increase significantly.

A Summary Of The Options Available

A short overview of each of the main marketing tactics follows. Choose the ones that best fit with your strategy AND where your prospect may be in their buying cycle. Remember prospects will be at different points in the cycle. The learner, shopper, buyer, referrer model is not linear.

Do not discard all the work up to this point to simply chase whatever the most fashionable tactic of the day may be. Tactics follow strategy; they are the means to an end. The tactics you choose should work together in a well thought out process to achieve your goal. What follows is a summary of the tactics available to you. Choose wisely.

Whatever tactics you pick must fit with your product (or service), price and your chosen method of delivery. Let's first look at online promotional tactics.

ONLINE MARKETING

Google My Business

Remember the importance of geography (refer strategy guide). If your target customer base is local to you then a strong Google My Business (and Bing Places) presence is vital. If you operate nationally they are not as important.

Those searching for a supplier of goods or services in their local area will often turn to friends or family for a recommendation. Failing that they will probably scan the first page of the search results. They may even drop down to page2 but are unlikely to go any further.

There are only 10 organic positions available on page1 Google. To secure one of those positions using local SEO (see below) is tough and time consuming. One tool that can level the playing field at a local level is a Google My Business page as it appears near the top Page 1. The trick is to appear as one of the three listings below the map.

Most prospects clicking through the Google my Business listing will be in shopper/buyer mode. They are looking for a solution.

Website

Whatever you do, you will need a website for brand building and/or lead generation. Your chosen promotional tactics should drive prospects to the website to learn more and (hopefully) convert.

The key is to deliver the information prospects need at whatever stage of the buying process they may be at. Consumers need to build a level of trust before they will buy. The website should deliver the information they need to build that trust including reviews and recommendations.

In many cases, a simple website of only a few pages will suffice. The website must be technically correct, be easy to navigate, and deliver a positive user experience. The design is important but failing on the technical, content or useability part of the equation means the website will not rank well. Which leads us to our next topic.

Search Engine Optimisation

For a business with a national customer base SEO is a complex, expensive, long term operation. Focusing on potential customers in a limited area simplifies the process. This requires a Local SEO process that is similar (but different) to SEO at a national level.

Think carefully about the objective of your website, your geography and how you will drive traffic to your website. Local SEO might be your main focus, you might need it to work in parallel with other tactics. You might not need it at all.

SEO is a moving target. It can take months to learn and even then it takes time to generate results. Don't believe the 'all you need is quality content' myth. You also need backlinks to rank well and that takes time and effort.

Email and Nurture

If you can generate useful information that prospects will download in return for their email address you can stay in touch. Over time you can build trust and hopefully convert. That's the theory, but in practice to make this work you need to build a large list (high hundreds minimum) and that takes time.

You need to think through where your prospect is in the buying cycle and how you will progress them from one stage to the next. You need a process.

PPC Adwords

If you have a very specific offer and a well-defined target customer then Pay Per Click can work well but it takes time to learn. You will make mistakes and you will need to accept that as a cost of entry. There is always a learning/testing process involved and that can be costly.

Online advertising works with some messages and not others. It tends to work best with those in shopper/buyer mode. You can also use it to build your brand or to build email lists (learner mode) but you will need deep pockets.

Remember the Ad is only part of the mix as you will also need landing pages. You will need to consider what you count as a conversion and how you will achieve that conversion. There is lots to think about.

PPC - Display

Display Can work well for branding and, over the medium to long term, generate leads if (again) you have a well-defined offer. If you can generate a relatively high amount of traffic to your website display advertising is a powerful retargeting tool.

Display is about getting eyeballs on your offer. Most of the click throughs (especially in the early weeks of your campaign) will be rubbish. Generally, display ads require a higher level skill set than Adwords. It will take time (and money) to acquire those skills.

If you have not built an audience then you can use pre-built audiences to attract attention to resources or offers but use them with care.

Social Media (Organic)

A branding exercise at best. Unless you have (or can build) a very large following or you are hyper-focused on a local customer base it will be difficult to generate leads. The organic reach (the number of people who will see your post) on all social channels is awful. More and more you need to pay (boost/sponsor) to play.

LinkedIn is a special case and it can be useful in B2B markets if you have a clearly defined target customer.

Social Media (Paid)

There are lots of options and more alternatives are introduced all the time. It can generate results but the number of options can be bewildering and it is difficult to keep up. It is best to focus on one platform and take the time to learn how it works.

As discussed with Adwords you will need a "learning budget". You should not expect immediate results. You will need time (and money) to refine your approach.

You need to be sure of your audience, your offer and what sets you apart. You also need a well thought out process, particularly with Facebook Ads. You can use social ads at all stages (learner/shopper/buyer). Audience building, targeting and a process are crucial.

Content

Content is the fuel for the process. Many of the above techniques rely on a consistent supply of quality content. This is an activity that can be sub-contracted at a relatively low cost but be careful your key messages are not lost in translation between you and your content creator.

To succeed you need a plan and a process. For more on this subject, refer to our content guide.

OFFLINE MARKETING

Networking

Networking works well for some businesses and is a complete waste of time for others. It all depends on what sort of person you are, your social skills and your attitude. If it's not for you don't push it, find something else to do.

Some people love networking, it fits their personality and they can make a great success of it, for others it is their worst nightmare. If it doesn't fit, don't do it.

A lot depends on the make up of the networking group, any cliques within that group and personalities of group members. Some groups are good, others awful.

Exhibitions

Well-chosen exhibitions, seminars and workshops can be effective. Target customers are likely to be there or you can invite them. It is possible to interact with them and deliver the information they need. They can ask questions and you can deal with objections.

Attending the right exhibition, with the right audience can be a powerful awareness and brand building technique.

Planning and follow up are key and it can be expensive. You will need to either deliver or give out content in some form. The time and costs involved in content creation should not be underestimated.

You need to promote the event. That is crucial.

Direct Mail

If it is possible to deliver a simple message then it can work well but mailer design and targeting are crucial. Success depends on the type of business, the quality of the list and execution. A multi-step process rather than a one-off hit tends to work best.

Advertising

This could be in print, on the radio or on TV. Again the message (including tone of voice if TV or radio) and design are all important.

TV is expensive and tends to be most effective for branding but can work as a direct response medium for the right product. Radio can be effective for branding and for generating interest in events. Think carefully about what you can afford and the fit with strategy and your marketing process.

Sponsorship

Related to advertising is sponsorship. If your customer base is local this can be cost-effective although it tends to be a branding and/or awareness building exercise.

PR

To generate a single piece of coverage in the media is relatively easy but not particularly useful. Generating consistent coverage over the long term is best but much more difficult.

For some businesses, particularly those with a local customer base, PR can be a useful awareness-building technique.

Cold Calling and Doorstepping

Don't waste your time. Consumers (and businesses) have grown increasingly hostile to these techniques in recent years. Using them is often counterproductive.

That said, warm-calling (when you have at least had some prior interaction with the prospect) remains valid.

What Should You Choose?

Infuriatingly the answer is – It depends. You need to start with a marketing strategy. Please, please (we'll say it again – please) do not decide on which promotional tactic is right for you until this is in place.

The next step is to understand what you can afford. Estimate your customer lifetime value and lead conversion rates. You can then calculate what you can realistically pay to generate a lead. This analysis is essential as it will probably blow some potential marketing tactics out of the water.

It is worth keeping an eye on what the competition is doing. What marketing techniques are they using and are they successful? Be careful, just because competitors are investing in technique X, Y or Z does not mean they are generating a return on their investment.

Then decide who is actually going to do the work. If it's you then which technique are you comfortable taking on? Don't try to spread your efforts across multiple techniques – focus.

There may be techniques you need to learn. Most are a lot easier than it may first appear but they can suck a significant amount of time initially while you learn the key steps. Your time is limited so pick your tactics carefully.

Don't Forget Existing Customers

All the hype about growing business seems to be around online marketing. Don't forget referrals. That is a big mistake. They are vital to the success of any small business.

Can you reasonably expect repeat business? Even if it is a year or more down the road. If the answer to that question is yes then you need the means to stay in touch with past customers. But remember you need to deliver something of value otherwise you will just be an annoyance. You need a process to stimulate reviews.

About the author:

Phil Smith is an experienced small business marketer and digital marketer. Learn more at <https://findmorelocalcustomers.co.uk>

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