



GROW YOUR BUSINESS

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Reducing Marketing Costs While Gaining Exposure

For many business owners it can be a difficult exercise to identify the most effective marketing strategies that gains exposure while minimizing the required investment.

Taking advantage of free marketing ought to be a given. Social media is proving to be a lasting trend that not only reaches far beyond the regular scope of a simple marketing campaign but is also constant, versatile and universally accessible.

Bolster your campaign with your firms best perceived strengths - use this opportunity to give your brand a signature that marks you as different from your competition. Hone in to specifics creating a distinctive message.

We have got special tools and resources that can help you with this winning technique. Be your own marketing analyst. With some simple research techniques you can determine what is best for your firm, even more important when funds are scarce.

Re-evaluate your target or niche markets. Utilize simple strategies that help to

distinguish where you need to be spending your marketing dollars.

“Focus on quality rather than quantity when it comes to marketing.”

Once you have identified your key audience and defined your message the next focus is on representation. Employ both direct (more costly) and indirect (less costly) measures to deploy your message. Consider offering seminars or teach courses that mutually benefit sales for your industry, sponsor events or promos that may engage your target audiences or consider a partnership with a non-profit organization that may highlight and be a benefit to both of you.

Business cards and stationary are a classic but solid method. These days printing costs are very low and this method is one of the easiest ways to gain exposure. Leave your card wherever is appropriate, asking friends, local business owners and colleagues to help you pass them on.

Your team members may well interact with your target market at times that you don't expect. For this reason it can be a very effective investment, and good for morale, to equip them with their own business cards as well.

Join local community groups and clubs. As well as making a contribution to your community you may well find opportunities that would not otherwise be available to you. The cost is negligible and the potential for exposure is at a constant high. Offer free consultations, trial periods or sample products or even consider putting on a contest that will get your service, product or name out there.

Asking for referrals should be a normal part of your business so make sure you involve friends, loyal customers and family. Not all marketing has to come at a hefty cost. Stay afloat and gain exposure in the tightest of times with some simple tactics that merely require your implementation in order to work.



The Cash Flow Tsunami — How to Recognize Early Warning Signs

A successful firm is one that is well managed. Being adaptable and flexible before major fluctuations occur can greatly assist you in hard times.

Recognizing problems before they arise can minimize the fall out and pave the way to a faster recovery. Learning to identify potential cash flow problems is critical to your success as a business as without adequate cash flow it may be on its way to becoming a statistic.

Early signs to watch for include slowing sales and reducing inventory turnover. Simply put, stagnant inventory is a cost to any firm whether it is raw materials or work in progress. So it doesn't really matter if the business is a retailer, manufacturer or service provider.

Watch for any economic signals and take heed when placing inventory orders. Be mindful of the industry that your clients operate in and satisfy yourself that they will be able to honor their obligation to pay you.

But a dwindling bank balance is not necessarily the result of market forces.

It can relate to poor decision-making when funding the purchase of a large asset and can even result from undercapitalization or poor working capital management. Better management can result in cash previously locked up inside the business being made available for investing in opportunities to grow the business.

“Watch your key performance indicators and take corrective action to leave your business in a better position.”

It is important to achieve the outstanding results while your competitors are struggling.

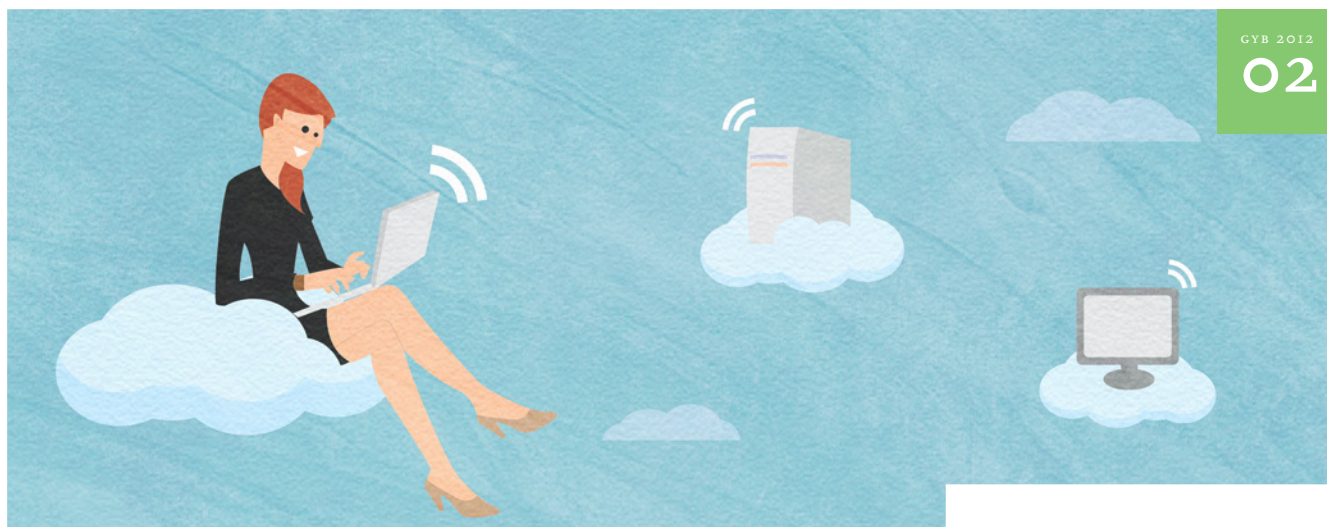
Your key performance indicators and your profitability, solvency and other important financial ratios can serve as useful financial barometers; much like weather forecasts can convey a general idea of what is to be expected.

We have some very useful tools available with which to conduct a quick business

health check over your business which will give you either a sense of comfort or the specific areas that you should focus on to improve your business results.

USING CLIENT COMPLAINTS TO YOUR BEST ADVANTAGE

Client complaints are a fact of business. A client who takes the time to complain rather than to take their business elsewhere may well be speaking on behalf of the silent majority. If the complaint warrants a systemic change or if you have taken action as a result of the complaint thank the client for bringing the matter to your attention and advise them on the corrective steps that you have taken.



Getting Your Head into the Clouds

It can be a Catch-22 on whether economic, technological and management trends are good for small business or not. They certainly require an investment in time and money to keep abreast of the never-ending developments. However, to ignore them is to provide your competitors with the opportunity to grow their businesses at your expense.

If there is one technological trend that should command your attention for its ability to help you to respond to your business environment it is cloud computing.

Cloud computing refers to services and applications that are web-based, hosted and accessed through the Internet or the “cloud”.

There are typically three parts to the cloud:

1. Infrastructure - housing printers, hard drives, etc.
2. Platform - housing shared documents, client files, etc.
3. Software - applications and programs accessed remotely

The most significant benefit of utilizing cloud computing is that small business owners can remotely manage information and access services and programs from anywhere with an Internet connection. Imagine being able to effectively manage customer relationships, human resources and financial programs no matter where you happen to be.

“You can reallocate your IT budget into profit development activities.”

It also means that you can save on hardware and software expenses and maintenance costs as all information is held on a remote server. Another benefit is that you always have access to the latest version with the best tools and resources technology has to offer.

Flexibility and remote access create a more manageable and versatile work environment, relieving staff of the ‘chained to the desk’ work mentality meaning both you and your team have access to the information they need in order to help your business realize its vision.

Disaster recovery and backup capabilities are seamlessly built into the cloud, protecting your data from being lost permanently by having it automatically and regularly backed up and stored at secure premises elsewhere in the world.

The cloud can facilitate collaboration and minimize the margin for error as people are no longer relying on the staple ‘cut and paste’ method of moving data between spreadsheets. Instead review and revise spreadsheets, documents, presentations, in fact just about any type of file from anywhere in the world leaving a clear audit trail for others to know what has been changed and why.

Analysts say that cloud computing has already made its way into many businesses in one-way or another. The best method is a slow and calculated approach, with safety and security as your number one consideration. Don’t wait for your competitors to leap ahead.



An Entrepreneur's Reading List – Book Suggestions to Help You Get to the Top

In a fast changing and challenging business world never underestimate the value of a continuing education. Often our success is based on setting goals, implementing the necessary strategies, achieving those goals and then setting some more.

It may seem like the hamster wheel analogy but there are easier and more exciting ways of achieving your goals.

“It is vital to invest in time to expand your knowledge to outperform the competition.”

Whether it is touching up on your management skills, honing in on sales strategies, marketing or communication or keeping up with current trends in technology and finance, good reading material can go a long way.

Participating in seminars and webinars (educational lessons taught over the Internet allowing you to participate from your home, office, car or anywhere

that you can access the Internet) are active ways to increase your field of knowledge. Reading the most current or recommended books in your field is also a key way to stay up-to-date.

You might want to start with a basic book geared towards revisiting the importance of organization in the life of a small business entrepreneur. Getting Organized, written by Stephanie Winston details timesaving strategies and organization tips that will help clear your mind and your desk.

For the few of you who are yet to read it, The E-Myth Revisited, written by Michael E. Gerber develops an in-depth analysis of the most common mistakes that cause small businesses to fail. Learn how to avoid making these errors and give your small business a higher chance of success.

Learn about the successes of the greats, and follow in the footsteps of some of the century's most successful SME's. Founders at Work; Stories of Startups' Early Days written by Jessica Livingston contains interviews with industry moguls like the founders of Hotmail, TiVo, Firefox and PayPal, to name a few.

How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie can help develop your management skills- Carnegie professes that 85% of success is due to leadership abilities. These tips and strategies can help enthuse your team and create a more high-energy work environment.

In The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, author Stephen R. Covey presents a holistic, integrated, principle-centered approach for solving personal and professional problems. He reveals principles that give us the security to adapt to change and the wisdom and power to take advantage of the opportunities that create changes.



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