

# Marketing

# 101

BY JOY JORDAN

**It is a simple truth that potential customers cannot buy your company's products or services if they don't know who you are.**

**Obvious, yes, but often overlooked.**

**Therein lies the importance of marketing.**

To some, marketing is a dirty word. Many business owners and managers adhere to the belief that if they offer a good product or service, customers will find them. If only it were that simple. In today's fast-moving world, with an abundance of choices in every category, companies must find a way to stand out.

In an uncertain economy, however, many businesses are hesitant to spend

money on more esoteric needs like marketing. That can be a fatal mistake, say the experts.

"A business must always pay overhead first, but to completely stop marketing hurts the bottom line even more," says Lisa Conrad of Madison Avenue Cape Cod, a full-service marketing and advertising firm in Centerville. "If you have no presence, how does your target market know

you're there?"

'It takes money to make money' is an oft-repeated cliché, but that doesn't make it any less true. "The right marketing over time should yield a strong return on your investment – whether that's an enhanced Web presence, a magazine advertisement or a public relations campaign that increases your visibility and makes you a 'top-of-mind' choice," says Jim Farrell of Hanover's

PR First. "None of us can ever afford to take business for granted; being busy now is great, but it's not necessarily a guarantee of what's to come. Investing in marketing is an investment in your business's future."

"Being quiet in a quiet market is never a good choice," adds Michelle Fabiano of Chameleon eSolutions, a Woods Hole firm focusing on operations, business development and marketing. "Marketing needs to be as important a line item as rent or gas and electric. But ALL line items need to have the non-essentials removed in a lean economy or when businesses find themselves cash-strapped. Many businesses think that they can ignore the marketing line item or cut it first to save cash. Unfortunately, they are liter-

“If you are a fast-food restaurant owner, then perhaps the ‘buy one get one free’ coupon mailer is a home run for you. If you run a CPA firm, however, it’s probably more important to get that article, ‘Ten Tips To Save On Your Business Taxes,’ published in the local business journal.”

Jim Farrell, PR First

## Everything you need to know to promote your business

ally putting themselves out of business by doing so.”

In the end, marketing creates leads, and leads create business. “People have to know you exist in order to buy your product. Good marketing gets your name and customer benefit in front of the right target, which should result in a lead,” says Kim Borman, President of Kelliher Samets Volk, a marketing firm with locations in Boston, New York City and Burlington, Vermont.

### ➤➤ Determining the best mode for your business

Once you have made the commitment to include marketing in your business plan, the next step is determining the best modes for your business – and it all comes down to determining your target market.

“A business needs to determine who their target market is and what tactical method (broadcast, print, Web, mail, social network, etc) will reach the most people in that market for the least amount of money,” says Joe Giacobbe of Worcester’s Palley Advertising. “In simple terms ... fish where the fish are.”

It’s not just who your target is, it is where they are, notes Corissa St. Laurent, Constant Contact Regional Development Director for New England. “First and foremost, you need to know where your audience is going to best receive your communication and be able to easily act upon it. It is important that businesses create a

marketing mix that focuses on the channels of communication that will get them in front of their widest audience, allowing them to target their messages to specific audiences within the larger group, and that don’t break the bank. Effective marketing is only effective if it can be conducted regularly and constantly in order to create top-of-mind awareness for your brand.”

Farrell recommends working backward: Begin by asking your new clients and customers how they found you, and use that information as a starting

point for planning your marketing strategy.

“There isn’t one single best mode of marketing; successful campaigns include a combination of strategies,” Farrell adds. “One common denominator for all businesses is the importance of referrals and networking,

which should top every business owner’s list. From that point on, marketing should be a mix of advertising, public relations, social media, Internet, and direct marketing by mail or e-mail (or both).”

And while we all would like instant results, that’s not how it works. “Remember that patience is a virtue – especially with marketing,” says Farrell. “One of the mistakes that business owners often make is giving up on a particular marketing strategy too quickly. Give whatever marketing you decide to try a fair chance to succeed.

Once or twice is seldom enough to evaluate accurately.

### ➤➤ Integrating it all

With multiple tools being used, how do you ensure that your marketing is consistent across the board? It comes down to planning and integration, say

the experts.

“Integration means sticking to one message and using it throughout your marketing,” says Borman. “That way, every time your marketing message reaches your target, it is reinforcing the same benefit tied to your product.”

“The only way to effectively integrate the multitude of marketing tools that are available today is to have a clear concise plan of attack, including budgets and reporting on results,” adds Giacobbe. “The other important factor is to identify a person within the organ-

“Test, test, test and evaluate each test is the only real answer. Listen carefully to key prospects and they will tell you how they like to buy. You may not need to sell at all.”

STEVE DUBIN, PR WORKZONE

ization who is responsible for taking ownership of marketing.”

It also can be helpful to look for opportunities that offer multiple options. “Thankfully, many media companies have diversified their business with multiple streams of income and have found multiple vehicles to sell under one roof,” notes Fabiano. “For example when you buy a print ad in a publication of your choice, you may be able to reach an online audience as well, giving you more comprehensive media buy.”

Consistency is key, of course. “What your Web site says about you should be the same message that your public relations campaign says, and your e-mail advertising,” adds Farrell. “PR pieces can and should be posted on your Web site. Your message can also be carried forward to other marketing strategies such as a blog, an e-newsletter and even your Twitter account.”

Efficient organization is just as necessary for your marketing programs as for other business operations. “The challenge is to choose the highest pri-

ority programs first and have a point person push things out of the pipeline,” says Steve Dubin of PR Workzone. “Each tool should reinforce the other. A familiar look and verbiage should set the tone. Set up a simple spreadsheet of projects, expected timelines, assigned staff and weekly updates.”

### Creating an integrated marketing plan is vital to bringing multiple tools together and is not difficult to achieve.

- First, start by writing a series of objectives and point all marketing efforts toward achieving those objectives. Each of your marketing efforts should reach back to one or more of your objectives and if they don't, you should consider dropping the activity.
- Are you building brand awareness? Are you selling more? Are you driving greater attendance to your events? Are you increasing your cash flow?
- Take time to analyze whether or not a marketing activity or tool is working for you by measuring the success based on your overall objectives. A worthwhile marketing tool will allow you to measure the success of your activity after you launch it.
- Create a schedule of activity incorporating your various marketing tools and integrate your activities when possible. For example, you can create an expert opinion article for your blog that you can also use in your e-newsletter.”

Corissa St. Laurent, Constant Contact

### >> New and innovative methods

The buzz is all about the Web and social media these days – but is it right for your business? Using these new tools can open new paths, but if your target audience is not also participating, it can be a waste of your time and money.

“Digital is being used a lot more these days because of its ability to target niche groups,” notes Borman. “Community efforts, though, like sponsorships of certain organizations in town or referral programs are a good way to spread the word with less money.”

The instant nature of social media can be a boon – if used properly. “The social Web sites give us the opportunity to spread our message at a moment's notice,” says Fabiano. “If you decide to have a last-minute fire sale, you can throw up your message in less than a minute! No art departments, no sales reps – just an offer and a message. With that said, if you don't have a zillion friends who are buying your product, you need to align with the media companies that have a like-minded audience.”

Specifically, LinkedIn is a great networking tool for businesses, notes Farrell. “There are groups within LinkedIn that have ongoing discussions and a chance for a business owner to showcase expertise to a ready-made audience. Plaxo is another such tool; and some businesses are also using Facebook and Twitter.

“And while this next suggestion may not be the latest innovation,” he adds, “it is nonetheless important: Use your expertise and marketing strategy to educate a potential client. People buy products and services from people they trust, and if you can become a trusted advisor it may well lead either to direct business or a referral.”

### >> Cost-effective tools

How can you get the best bang for your buck? The Web offers many low- or no-cost options, including social media, e-mail newsletters and directory listings.

“Online listings are everywhere and can help reach your message and brand,” says Fabiano. “It is free to post a thought or announcement on Facebook and other social media. Incorporating a public relations campaign is virtually free. It just takes a little time, smart brainstorming and the willingness to look at their business in a new light.

In terms of money well spent, look to something you use every day and in numerous ways: your logo. “A solid, consistent logo is No. 1,” notes Conrad. “Too many companies allow each different media to make a new version of their logo. Have a logo created that you own outright and then use it.”

In addition, while not free, hosting or sponsoring events can offer an excellent return on your investment. “Promotional events are an excellent way to build interest, excitement and attention for your business and they do not need to break the bank,” says St. Laurent. “Events can be educational, fun or both, and provide a live forum to promote your products, services and build relationships through face-to-face experiences. If you plan to do promotional events, be sure to follow-up and stay in touch with attendees through social media and e-mail marketing. This will ensure that you are building and deepening the relationships you start.”

Of course, doing most of the work yourself, particularly in the form of guerrilla marketing, can save money as well, notes Dubin. “From arranging co-promotions with other like-minded businesses, to becoming very proactive with social media to creating events that capture the imagination of the press and your best prospects – a consistent message on a consistent basis can yield new business on a consistent basis.”

### >> Reaching a niche

How can businesses reach specific niche groups, such as women, second-home owners, or other businesses?

Research is critical – some of which you can do on your own, some of which is best handled by an agency.

Many niche groups have associations or organizations that you can identify through conducting a simple online search, says St. Laurent. “Once you’ve located a group you’d like to market to, see if you can provide free support or assistance to them. You can also join social networks for different niche groups, but be careful about joining a network just to promote. Taking time to build real relationships with your niche interest groups by providing valuable information and support is a great way to build your reputation and brand awareness among them.”

Media groups within agencies use proprietary research to figure out the best vehicles to buy to reach these groups, notes Borman, so sometimes it pays to call in the professionals.

“I go after the psychology of the buy,” says Fabiano. “Second-home owners may be reading the local publications when they are in town, listening to the local NPR or music stations. If they have a management company, that company may produce a monthly newsletter where they can place their message. It is intuitive and it has to have multiple approaches in the 21st century. It is both mass marketing and grassroots.”

In the end, creating a plan for marketing your business is not that different from creating a business plan – it requires forethought, consistency and organization.

“The best advice for recharging or starting a marketing plan to is to take the first step,” says St. Laurent. “There are a lot of excuses that can arise when it comes to marketing and many businesses put it off as an afterthought or only instigate it when they are desperate. A better approach is to proactively and consistently market your business using an ongoing, integrated approach. Monitor your marketing efforts over time and see what’s working for you and what’s not. Build and nurture relationships with your customers and other influencers by staying in touch with them, listening to and reacting to their needs and desires, and most importantly, by providing an overall excellent customer experience.” ■

**SHEPLEY**

# MAKING PUBLIC RELATIONS WORK FOR YOU

Tips from Jim Farrell,  
president of PR First,  
a public relations/marketing  
company based in Hanover

A PR campaign, properly implemented, will let thousands of readers, many of whom may never have heard of you, know who you are, what you do and why they should utilize your services.

Some people refer to PR as “free advertising.” A more accurate description is “information deemed newsworthy by editors.”

Most editors and publishers (and especially their advertising staff!) cringe at the notion that PR is “free” advertising. Newspapers and magazines don’t give away their space easily. The same is true for the gatekeepers of the Internet and the many online Web sites and blogs.

What the editorial gatekeepers will do, however, is print or post news releases, features or information presented in a straightforward, factual manner. What it really comes down to is this: Will this information benefit the readers of the publication or viewers of this program/website? If the answer is “yes,” there’s a good chance your material will be included, which is good for you and your business.

Your legitimate news can further your marketing goals by bringing you increased visibility and credibility. If a media outlet discusses or mentions you or your company, product or service - or quotes you as an authority in your field of business, that can be very impressive.

Many businesses fail to take advantage of the opportunity to promote themselves through a public relations campaign. Here are a few legitimate examples of **self-promotion**:

- 1 You open a new business; or, your current business opens a new location.
- 2 You add staff members, or promote existing ones.
- 3 You develop a new product line.
- 4 Your company wins an award – anything from a Chamber of Commerce “Company of the Year” to “Bay State Corporate Citizen.”
- 5 You are involved in a charitable cause.

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If you choose to try your own hand at self-promotion (more on this later!), remember a few key points:

- 1 Keep it newsworthy.
- 2 Keep it simple and straightforward.
- 3 Keep it brief.

Simple announcements are good springboards for publicity, and companies that are PR-savvy try to get these seen on an on-going basis, usually several times a month.

The real value of PR comes, though, when it is taken to a higher level – where a company showcases its expertise through feature articles or case studies.

For example, you are the president of a company that sells office products – everything from multi-function printers to copiers. You write a thoughtful, objective article on the effect e-mail is having on the sales of fax machines.

The article appears in your local business publication. Suddenly, you're not just "that guy who sells printers." You're someone who is providing education and valuable information to consumers.

Companies that use public relations successfully often become points of reference for feature writers and editors seeking a local expert opinion. If one of these deadline-driven folks calls you, return the call promptly.

Getting editors and reporters to know of your existence is accomplished in part through newsworthy articles, and the ability to provide a credible, informed viewpoint. It doesn't hurt for media personnel to have a copy of your business card on file. It's a relationship that is usually developed over time – and part of that is knowing how and well to make yourself know to these gatekeepers. A well-written e-mail that inquires about being used as a source is a great investment of time if

it lands you on the business pages of your favorite trade publication.

If you are a competent writer, enjoy it and have the time to devote to it, you can probably realize a level of success by conducting your own public relations campaign. Identifying the newsworthy opportunities is only a part of the challenge, though. Equally important is identifying the publications for which your information is suited.

If writing isn't your strength, or you just don't have the time to plan, coordinate and execute all the elements of a PR campaign, consider using an outside firm for your company's publicity. If you choose this option, here are a few general guidelines:

- 1 Seek a firm with industry-specific experience.
- 2 Seek a firm with a proven track record. Ask for samples of previously placed publicity.

- 3 Seek a firm that understands the medium you are trying to reach.
- 4 Ask for references from the firm you select – and check them!
- 5 Beware of long-term commitments until you are comfortable with the arrangement.
- 6 Yes, it's important to ask pricing – but price shouldn't be the sole determining factor.

Your PR firm should function as your marketing partner – able to identify and take advantage of opportunities for publicity. Done properly, PR will increase your visibility and enhance your image – and it should bring you more business. ■

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