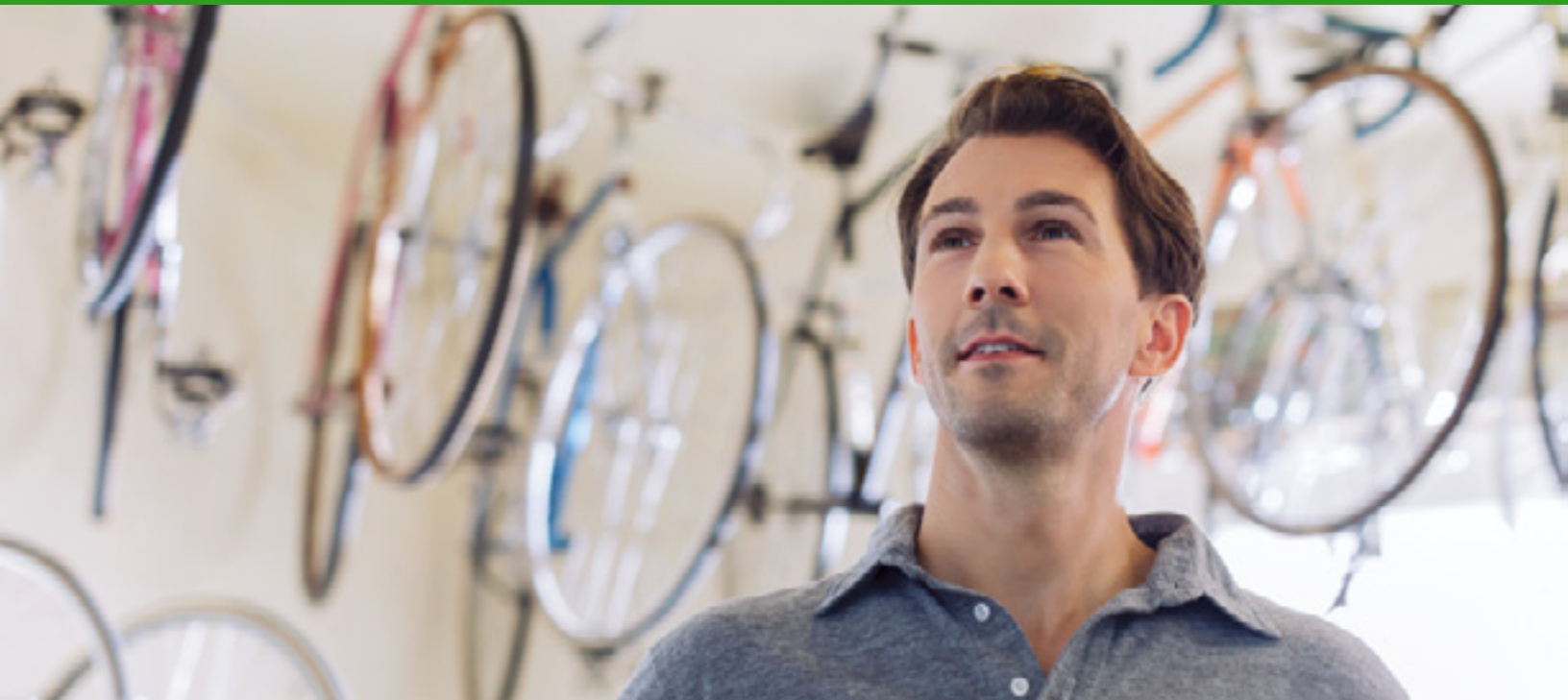


Building Buzz on a Budget

Market your business, build your
brand, and keep customers coming
back — without breaking the bank





Building Buzz on a Budget

CONTENTS

It's Not How Much You Spend, But What You Do With It	2
10 Ways to Market Your Business on a Budget	3
How to Turn Your Customers Into Marketers	5
How to Get More Customers From Your Blog	7
How to Make the Most of Email Marketing	9
How to Get People to Read Your Email Newsletter	11
Grab More Online Business With Landing Page Videos	13
What's the Best Content to Post on Social Media Sites?	15
How to Get Noticed on Facebook Without Paying for Sponsored Links	17
Inexpensive Ways to Leverage YouTube for Your Business	19
6 Tips for Handling Your Own PR	21
10 Rules for Crafting the Perfect Tweet	23
Marketing on a Budget? The Internet Is Your Best Ally	25



It's Not
How
Much You
Spend,
But What
You Do
With It

As an entrepreneur, you always dream big. How else could you have turned a kernel of an idea into an ongoing business that fills a particular customer need in a way no one else can?

But let's face it, competing with larger companies that have bigger budgets, more established brands, and deeper resources can be an ongoing challenge — especially when it comes to marketing. That's where your natural talent for doing more with less and focusing on what really counts to achieve your unique objectives give you an advantage (see "10 Ways to Market Your Business on a Budget," page 3). At the same time, the fact that you are small gives you a unique opportunity to build relationships with your customers and use their good will toward your company to strengthen your brand. (For more on this, see "How to Turn Your Customers Into Marketers," page 5.)

Competing
with larger
companies can be
an ongoing
challenge.

As you no doubt know, the internet and social media offer a host of ways to connect with customers — and many of these channels and tools are free. The key is creating relevant, compelling content to share via social media (see "What's the Best Content to Post on Social Media Sites?" page 15), your company blog (see "How to Get More Customers From Your Blog," page 7), and email newsletter (see "How to Make the Most of Email Marketing," page 9, and "How to Get People to Read Your Email Newsletter," page 11). You can use all of these tactics to keep your name on the top of your loyal customers' minds and bring new ones into the fold.

We have compiled 25 pages of tips, tricks, and expert advice to help you do just that: market your business your way, strengthen your brand, and make customers for life — affordably. ■



10 Ways to Market Your Business on a Budget

So your marketing budget is a little tighter than you anticipated. Don't sweat it (too much). Instead, check out these ways to market your small business on the cheap.

1. Create a company page on Facebook

A Facebook page, which you can set up for free, allows you to reach and interact with customers and prospects. Update yours regularly with compelling content updates and exclusive offers. Facebook Insights gives you demographic data on who's visiting your page, allowing you to more effectively market to your customers. You can further increase your exposure by using [Facebook plug-ins on your website](#) that make it easier to ask fans to share your page with others.

2. Get active on Twitter

Twitter can be a tough platform to master, but the [rewards are high](#) when you do. The challenge lies in crafting thoughtful, compelling messages of 140 characters or fewer. Offer expert advice, answer questions, and tweet the occasional promotion or sales pitch. Include links to increase the traffic to your business's website or blog (see #4). For more Twitter tips, see "10 Rules for Crafting the Perfect Tweet," page 23.

3. Use YouTube

Many entrepreneurs use the site as a means to [reach new customers](#). You can, too, by creating engaging, appealing videos related to your business (see "Inexpensive Ways to Leverage YouTube for Your Business," page 19).



Quotes from the Pros

if you are not eating, sleeping, breathing your business, always looking for ways to improve and grow your business, you may want to rethink why you are in business.

— *Shaun Davis,*
Wise Guys Pizza Pies

4. Maintain a blog

Blogs allow you to communicate with clients, position yourself as a market leader, and rank higher in search engine results. You can set one up as a page on your existing company website for free. The more you update your blog, the more traffic your website will get.

5. Stay in touch with people

Keep a running list of customers who purchase goods or services from your company. [Follow up](#) with them periodically to check in and to find out if they are satisfied with your service.

6. Start an e-newsletter

Once you've created your list of clients, an effective (and often free) way to keep in touch with them is by sending out a monthly or quarterly email newsletter. (See "How to Get People to Read Your Email Newsletter," page 11.) In it, you can promote upcoming events, provide updates on your business, and invite customers to visit your website or store.

7. Hang promo posters

According to the [Web Executive](#), promotional posters still work. Make sure yours bear your business's logo

and clear details of whatever you aim to share with the public (such as news of an upcoming sale).

8. Make cold calls

This remains an effective, inexpensive marketing tool, particularly in B2B scenarios. Just do a bit of research first. Is your contact in need of your services? If so, you are much more likely to have a hot prospect at the end of the call.

9. Distribute sell sheets

Sell sheets highlight your products and prices; when sent to interested parties, they can result in sales. To avoid unnecessary printing and mailing costs, produce these informational flyers as PDFs and distribute them via email.

10. Hit the street

It sounds even more old-school than putting up posters (see #7), but going door-to-door in select areas of your city or surrounding areas can be an effective marketing strategy. Canvassing gives you a chance to talk directly with potential clients — whether they're consumers or other business owners — and make face-to-face connections. What starts with a firm handshake and a smile could lead to lucrative business relationship. ■

A photograph of two women sitting at a table. The woman on the left has short reddish hair and is wearing a green patterned top. The woman on the right has long brown hair and is wearing a green t-shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. In the foreground, there are several large, golden-brown bread rolls. A white paper bag is visible in the background.

How to Turn Your Customers Into Marketers

If you aren't asking your loyal customers to get the word out about your products or services, you're missing a free — and highly effective — marketing opportunity. With some gentle prodding, they could help you bring in more business by recommending you to their friends and colleagues.

Here's how to get your customers to pick up some of your [marketing load](#).

Raise the idea with your regulars

People who love your business presumably want it to thrive. Thus, they may be willing to write a [positive Yelp review](#), a testimonial for your website, or an email to their neighbors about your company. You just have to ask.

Build an online community

Encourage people to chat about your business on

social media by posting compelling information that they can't resist sharing. For example, if you're a personal trainer, ask your Facebook fans to fill in a blank, such as "You know you're a gym junkie when_____." If you run a pet-sitting service, post photos of animals and ask followers to write funny captions. The idea is to get people talking, to remind them that you exist, and, ideally, to let their followers learn about you.

Call out for support

If customers feel invested in your business doing well, they will have a reason to talk about it. The owners of [Hobson's Homemade](#), a Massachusetts bakery, used Kickstarter to get their hands on much-needed commercial equipment before they expanded. The bakers not only surpassed their \$15,000 goal, but also created a community of eager customers


(grassroots marketers!) who want to see that their money is being put to good use.

Give customers reasons to talk about you

Ask your customers to repost your latest news (such as a grand-opening announcement) to their social media accounts in return for a discount or a first-in-line spot at a sale. Consider doing the same for users of [mobile apps](#) that reward customers for “checking in” at certain stores, such as [Shopkick](#) or [Kapture](#).

Frequently flaunt what you do

Are you a wedding photographer or an independent hair stylist? With your clients’ permission, post a few shots online and ask them to share the images with their networks. Or run a photo contest: Ask your customers to take a silly snapshot of themselves in front of your store, share a historic picture of your town’s Main Street, or upload an image of themselves using your product. Post the results on [Pinterest](#) and on your [blog](#), and they will likely return the favor. ■



If customers feel invested in your business doing well, they will have a reason to talk about it.

4 Tools to Track Your Brand’s Online Presence

As your business gains popularity, people are likely to start talking about it online more frequently — via blogs, consumer-review sites, and social media networks. But is everything they’re saying positive, or even accurate?

Use these tools you can use to monitor what’s being said about your company affordably:

SocialMention

This free tool can help you monitor brand and keyword mentions in public social media updates, blogs, images, videos, and elsewhere. [SocialMention](#) analyzes its context to determine whether references to your brand are positive, neutral, or negative. It also lists the Twitter users who discuss the brand most frequently. You can sign up for email alerts or an RSS feed to track your brand’s activity or just check the website daily for updates.

Trackur

This [cloud-based service](#) provides additional data sources, a more visual interface, and the ability to store and share keyword searches and to set up multiple profiles on a single account. Users get a free 30-day trial; plans start at \$27 a month thereafter.

Mention

This [app](#) comes in desktop, mobile, and a Chrome web versions, and allows you to easily track mentions of your brand and other pre-set keywords or phrases across the web, social media platforms, and online forums, identifying the “tone” of each mention. The free basic version provides up to 250 “mentions” per month with daily web alerts and real-time social alerts.

Wildfire by Google

This [free tool](#) can help you measure which brands are gaining fans the fastest on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ so you can keep tabs on competitors and your industry.

How to Get More Customers From Your Blog



Blogging is a cheap, easy way to get — and keep — your brand name in front of prospects and customers. When done well, a [company blog](#) helps build credibility, elicit helpful feedback, and generate sales leads.

Here are some tips for using your blog to boost your visibility and bring in new business.

Post new content frequently

Once you start blogging, it's important to maintain a steady pace of [posting](#) new information. Most experts recommend offering something new at least once, if not two or three times, per week. The goal is to give people a reason to keep coming back to your blog

and/or to add your content to their RSS or email feeds. Frequent updates will also help your company rank higher in search engine results.

Blog at your domain name

Use your company's URL in your blog's address, such as "www.companydomainname.com/blog" or "blog.companydomainname.com." This guarantees that internet search engines will index your blog content as part of your website instead of as a separate entity, resulting in a higher overall ranking and greater visibility.

Let your personality shine through

Consciously develop a "voice" for your blog that



Consciously develop a “voice” for your blog that reflects your personality, your values, and your approach to doing business.

reflects your [personality](#), your values, and your approach to doing business. If you need guidance or inspiration, browse the web for other blogs in your niche. Consider what you like and don’t like about each one, then try to emulate your favorite elements as you write your own posts. You could also hire a professional writer to help you generate ideas and either create original posts or hone your drafts.

Include links in each post

Leverage the power of the internet by [adding relevant links](#) to every blog post. Link to pages within your own website, as well as to interesting and useful external resources that your customers may appreciate, such as informative magazine articles. Links help increase your audience’s size and loyalty — and can

also boost your search engine rankings.

Promote your blog widely

Make your blog more visible to prospects and customers by putting a [link](#) to it in every email you send. Tout your blog on your company’s website and in all of your social media profiles. When you comment on other people’s content, provide a link to your blog. List your blog with directories like [BlogCatalog](#) and [Technorati](#), too.

Repurpose your content

Once you’ve written something for your blog, don’t let it molder. If you post frequently, you’ll build up a large amount of content fairly quickly. [Repurpose this material](#) as articles on your website, as [guest posts](#), as one or more e-books, or as a series of [free reports or white papers](#). ■



How to Make the Most of Email Marketing

With so many small businesses interacting directly with customers on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, email can seem outdated as a marketing tool.

But don't write it off just yet. Email is still very relevant to business marketing. In fact, email marketing and social networking should go hand in hand in your efforts to build relationships with clients, boost your search-engine rankings, and grow your brand online.

Although U.S. internet users spend 27 percent of online time on social networking, Experian Marketing Services reports that email ranks as the [top category](#) for the amount of time users spend on mobile devices.

Email marketing is also a significantly [better investment](#) than social media marketing. In 2011, the "Power

of Direct" from the Direct Marketing Association reported social media marketing has a return on investment of \$12.71 in earnings for each ad dollar a business spends, but email marketing has a staggering 4,000 percent return on investment, earning almost \$41 in profits for each \$1 outlay.

Marketing professionals know this, and in 2013, 64 percent of businesses responding to an [iContact survey](#) reported that they were integrating their email marketing with their social media campaigns.

How to use email with social media

To join the ranks of expert email marketers in the social media age, try these strategies:

Combine email with social networking as part of

a comprehensive marketing plan. Include social media buttons and links in email correspondence to connect readers to your social media profiles and to allow blog posts to be shared. Companies like [MailChimp](#) also allow you to incorporate “like” buttons into email newsletters, so if a reader likes what he reads in the email, he can post an update to his Facebook page with either a custom message about your email campaign or a stock message with the subject of the email.

Run contests and sweepstakes or offer giveaways via social media and your website.

Ask users who enter or to provide their email addresses to build your email list.

Make your [email newsletters](#) mobile-friendly. Email is routinely accessed on smartphones and thus should be easy to read and share with friends on mobile platforms.

Post copies of your email newsletters on your social media accounts and in newsletter directories. So your content can be discovered by and shared with more users. ■

Post copies
of your newsletters
on your social
media accounts
and in newsletter
directories.



4 Email Marketing Mistakes to Avoid

1. Failing to include an opt-in form on your website

The ability to reach a precise, targeted audience is a key benefit of email marketing — yet many businesses may neglect to collect contact information from visitors who don’t buy. Allow any site visitor to sign up to receive email from you, Nurture the customer relationship with relevant content, and when prospects are ready to purchase, you’ll be at top of mind.

2. Sending “overly professional” newsletters

Rigid, newsletter-style emails have become extinct in the terms of effective online marketing strategies. Eugene Farber, founder of [Content Strategy Hub](#), says today’s most impactful messages come in a snappy, direct, easy-to-digest format written in a conversational tone.

3. Using an unreadable format

A large portion of emails — 43 percent— is now read on a [mobile device](#). Email templates should be adapted to accommodate mobile devices, including vertical formats, brief copy, more legible fonts, prominent call to action, and hotlinks that are easy to tap or swipe.

4. Being inconsistent

Conflicting theories about how often you should send email marketing messages abound. To find what’s right for you and your customers, “test and learn” over time, by analyzing website data like click-through rates and your own return on investment.



How to Get People to Read Your Email Newsletter

Is an email newsletter part of your small-business marketing arsenal?

If not, Monika Jansen of [Groupon Merchant Blog](#) offers several compelling reasons to reconsider:

- Newsletters arrive in your customers' email inboxes, where they at least have to look at the sender and subject line before reading the email or hitting Delete.
- If you include graphics and short headlines, newsletters are easy to skim quickly.
- As long as you send them regularly, newsletters will keep your business at the top of your customers' minds. When the time comes for them to make a purchase, they'll think of you first.

At its most effective, the newsletter offers a blend of content, from how-to articles and product announcements to surveys, promotions, and general company information. For all that a newsletter can offer, however, the biggest challenge is getting recipients to actually open and read your message.

Here are seven tips for creating an email newsletter that prospective customers will feel compelled to look at.

1. Put your creative energy into the subject line

The 30 to 35 characters that recipients see in an email subject line will likely determine whether or not they continue reading. Never go the understated route



Quotes from the Pros

Entrepreneurship

is about accomplishing more with less, innovating status quo business practices. This is what separates the companies of tomorrow from the companies of today.

— Ruben Canada,
Canada Enterprises

(“Here’s Our January Newsletter”). Be more **enticing** by using words such as tips or steps (“4 Tips for Saving Time When Filing Your Taxes”). Avoid any tactics that may cause the recipient or their email filters to think your message is spam. Refrain from using ALL CAPS and exclamation points!!

2. Short is sweet

Any message that seems uninteresting or too long to scan will be immediately consigned to the trash bin. Get to the point quickly. Your goal is to deliver as much value as possible in short summaries (one to two paragraphs, tops). If what you want to say can’t be squeezed into this format, write a brief description of the content and link to an article or blog post on your business website.

3. Offer value

Your job, in the small space allotted, is to provide useful information and not blatantly self-promoting fluff. As you write, ask yourself why should a reader **care** about this particular item? Will it make a difference in their lives or enable them to perform better in the workplace? Readers need to understand what’s in it for them before they read further or click on any links.

4. Include a compelling call to action

It’s one thing to get people to read your newsletter. What do you want them to do next? Offer a clear **call to action** to guide everyone toward the next step (such as “Act Now” or “Click Here to Learn More”).

5. Use images to catch the reader’s eye

An email filled with text alone is rarely appealing. Readers are drawn to images, particularly of people.

6. Know when to send the newsletter

When recipients get your newsletter has a lot to do with their decision to read it or not. According to the email delivery service **Constant Contact**, Monday is the best-performing day of the week. Your email newsletter also has a better chance of being seen between the hours of 8 and 10 a.m. or 4 and 6 p.m. (vs. other times of the day).

7. Make your email smartphone-friendly

Increasingly, prospective customers are viewing email messages on their smartphones. Be sure to **optimize your newsletter for use on mobile devices**. Anything that slows down your reader may lead to a loss of interest from your **target audience**. ■



Grab More Online Business With Landing Page Videos

When done right, [videos](#) are an attractive, effective online marketing tool. But do you know how to use them to attract more customers?

Experience shows that adding one or more videos to your landing page can [increase conversion](#) by 80 percent [PDF].

“Videos allow a deeper look into your organization,” explains Carrie Kerpen, CEO of [Likeable.com](#), an award-winning social media and word-of-mouth marketing agency.

Here are some tips for making video an integral part of your small business’s website:

Develop different types of videos

Analyze the demographics of your website’s visitors, and which inbound links bring the most traffic to your

site. For each broad category of visitor, develop a video that’s likely to resonate with them.

Although you may be able to use some of the same images and verbiage in various videos, try to produce as many different clips as there are categories of visitors. Put each video on its own landing page. This way, the first impression you give every visitor to your website generally caters to his or her needs and interests.

Keep your videos under 30 seconds

Few new visitors to your website will want to watch a lengthy presentation. You need to draw them in and capture their interest first. So, make those [first-impression videos](#) no more than 30 seconds long.

Trying to convey too much information, or asking too much from your visitors, will drive prospects away

rather than encourage them to click through your site. Be precise in your messaging and offer useful content.

Design the landing page to highlight the video

Keep the visual elements simple. You want visitors to zero in on the video immediately. Use an interesting thumbnail image as the hotlink to the video, and steer clear of auto-play videos, which tend to drive people away from your page.

Add just enough text and graphics to each landing page to prompt visitors to watch the video. A thought-provoking headline (such as “Are you spending more and getting less? Find out here!”) can prompt visitors to linger long enough to watch your video all the way through.

Speak the prospect’s language

[Craft your videos](#) so that they provide information for visitors who may know nothing beyond the obvious about your product or service. Fill each video with images and language they’re likely to appreciate, and give viewers credit for above-average brain power. Videos that talk down to viewers do more to offend than to attract.

Keep the video quality as high as you can

Work hard to avoid fuzzy images, shaky camera work, muffled sound, and cave-like lighting. Substandard “production values” will prompt your visitors to find something else to watch before they ever receive your message. It doesn’t cost much extra — if anything at all — to shoot videos in high definition and capture quality audio.

Low-cost and free software such as [Jing](#), [Windows](#)



Avoid fuzzy images, shaky camera work, muffled sound, and cave-like lighting.

[Movie Maker](#), [VirtualDub](#), [Wax](#), [Animoto](#), or [AVIedit](#) allow you to incorporate sophisticated graphics, too.

Include a value proposition and a call to action

Subtlety is important, but find a way to include your business’s unique value proposition and a [call to action](#). Assuming your video grabs and holds people’s interest, they need to know what comes next:

- Should they call, text, or email you?
- Do they choose among several product/service options?
- Can they click on a link to look deeper into your offerings?

Videos not only tend to increase how long people stay on your site, they pump up the trust level, too. By driving home your small business’s value proposition and wrapping it all up with a call to action, you greatly increase the chances that a visitor will become a customer.

Remember: Videos can and probably should be an [integral part](#) of your online marketing strategy, one that brings people to your site and makes them buy. ■



What's the Best Content to Post on Social Media Sites?

“The single most important factor for making social media campaigns successful is **content**,” says Santanu Bhattacharya, CEO and founder of **Salorix**, a provider of online data and advice for effectively using it in marketing decisions.

Bhattacharya isn't alone in his opinion. Experts agree that certain types of content are **better** than others, because they are far more likely to attract and hold the interest of customers and prospects.

Here are some suggestions for specific categories of social media content you can share, which habitually do best at attracting attention and generating responses from prospects and customers:

Pictures, videos, and graphics

In the sea of text that floods most online media,

arresting images stand out like lush tropical islands. Posting visual material — even if it doesn't always relate directly to your company's unique selling proposition — can grab people's attention and keep them coming back for more. Even better, a well-planned **infographic** can convey a lot more information in an instant than a voluminous amount of text can convey in an hour.

Useful, relevant information

There's so much to know and so much pressure to know it that people crave helpful **information**. (They don't want to be scammed, spammed, or punk'd.) Keep your updates **conversational** in tone and easy to understand. Strong, clear statements work best. Companies that earn a reputation for providing accurate,



Quotes from the Pros

Small businesses are the fabric of our communities and knowing that our contribution is part of something bigger than ourselves is humbling and also drives our purpose.

— Max Faingezicht,
ThriveHive

Don't ever stop trying to improve. Life changes constantly, and we as business owners have to change and grow along with it.

— Amie Mount,
Wishing Wells Reflections

relevant information are likely to develop a large and loyal social media following.

Jokes and cartoons

Everyone enjoys a good laugh, often even in “serious” contexts, such as business blogs, company newsletters, and professional discussions. A judiciously selected joke or cartoon — found elsewhere and bent to your purposes — can demonstrate [your personality](#) and help to establish a bond with your followers. Remember to keep everything in good taste (think G-rated and nondiscriminatory).

Contests and promotions

Offer people a chance to get [something for nothing](#)

In the sea of text that floods most online media, arresting images stand out like lush tropical islands.

and they will likely respond with time, attention, and contact information. Use contests and promotions to attract new prospects, elicit responses to a survey, solicit information about people's interests and needs, and so forth.

Personal comments

Success with social media is all about connecting with people. So, although you can and should tout your products and services, prospects and customers are often most interested in you and your [personality](#). People want to feel like they are interacting with the [real you](#). Respond to questions and comments, thank fans for sharing your content, and share relevant content from others with your followers. ■

How to Get Noticed on Facebook Without Paying for Sponsored Links

Did anybody think social media companies would make their user base available free of charge forever? Facebook now has more than 1 billion monthly users, some 618 million [daily users](#), and 680 million mobile users. Although the company was once widely criticized for failing to monetize its [user base](#), its practices have started to change.

Facebook is learning to generate revenue from user base, which is bad news for the small businesses that crafted a marketing strategy around the popular platform.

New York Times columnist [Nick Bilton](#) describes how he had a Facebook subscriber list of 25,000 and would receive 535 “likes” after posting a link to one of his columns. His subscriber list has since grown to 400,000, but he now averages only 30 “likes” per post.

He did an experiment and found that when he paid \$7 to promote a post on Facebook, he had a 1,000 percent increase in interaction.

Although Facebook denies that it has [tweaked its algorithm](#) to force people into paying for more exposure, [independent studies](#) appear to indicate that recent changes have had an impact on overall reach.

If you don’t want to pay for [sponsored content](#), how can you increase the chances that your posts will still gain exposure? Here are four tips.

1. Turn on “get notifications”

[EdgeRank](#) is Facebook’s algorithm that decides which posts will be in front of the eyes of your fans and which won’t. Remember the days when the little red number at the top of your page would alert you to a



new posting on pages you liked? That's now turned off by default when a person likes your page. Have your fans turn it on by going to your business's page, hovering over the Liked box, and clicking "get notifications." Then, pin the post to the top of your page, so it stays within view of your new fans.

2. Use images

You've probably noticed that since Facebook changed its news feed to make images more prominent, their use has taken off. A [HubSpot](#) study found that when photos are posted on pages they receive 53 percent more "likes" than the average post.

A HubSpot study found that when photos are posted on pages they receive 53 percent more "likes" than the average post.

3. Don't abandon text

Brandon Duncombe, social media manager at [Bargaineering.com](#) says, "Regardless of the medium, you'll still need to have text in your posts that draws users in. Asking open-ended questions and encouraging debate grabs eyeballs. But always make it relevant to what you want the user to ultimately do (click on an image, watch a video, click on a link, etc.)."

4. "Like" other pages

View other business and nonprofit pages while using Facebook as your business instead of as an individual. Share their interesting posts or announcements on your page. This may prompt others to share your content, which means fans of other pages will see your name. It also puts fresh content on your page effortlessly. ■



Inexpensive Ways to Leverage YouTube for Your Business

Have you been neglecting [YouTube](#) as a marketing vehicle? You shouldn't.

Here's why: The [second most searched site on the internet](#) (behind parent company Google) gets more than 1 billion unique monthly visitors and reaches more adults ages 18 to 34 than any cable network. Users watch more than 6 billion hours of video each month, it's localized in 56 countries and 61 languages, and 700 [YouTube videos](#) are shared on Twitter every minute.

With that kind of potential, ignoring YouTube as part of your marketing strategy is a mistake. Here are some expert tips for using YouTube to gain exposure without spending like a major media company.

1. Keep your budget low

According to Dane Atkinson, CEO of [SumAll](#), "The average ROI of a self-created video is near \$300, so don't

spend a fortune making your content." Atkinson said that this figure is based on an internal SumAll study involving more than 50,000 of its member-businesses which shows that spending a lot doesn't always produce better results.

2. Make your videos educational

Use your YouTube channel to provide value: Offer educational videos instead of advertisements. That's how investment business Born to Sell grew its YouTube presence into a revenue driver. Along with videos that teach customers how to use his company's site, [Born to Sell](#) provides "tutorials that aren't about us but which show people that we know our space," says CEO Mike Scanlin.

3. Make an explainer video

An [explainer video](#) is a fun and engaging way to tell your customers about your company in less than three

minutes. You can make one yourself or hire somebody to do it for you. It doesn't have to be expensive. Bill Elward, CMO of [Castle Ink](#), says: "If you're looking for a cheap and easy way to build up the videos within your channel, consider [Fiverr.com](#). For just five dollars, there are people out there that will create 30 to 60 second videos that follow your script. We've leveraged it on our channel and had great success."

4. Answer customers' questions

Adam Dukes, creative director at [Social Sinergy](#), says he advises business owners to "write down all the questions they've been asked over the years about their product or service. Answer each question on video and share them on the social channels."

5. Don't aim to "go viral"

You can spend hours (or days) reading articles about how to make a video that goes viral, but the odds of it happening are [exceedingly low](#). Even if a video does go viral, it's unlikely to translate into sales. Companies with deep marketing pockets spend a lot of money in the hopes of creating a viral video. Your dollars are better spent producing content that viewers find helpful (see #2).

6. Promote your video on other sites

Your video may reside on YouTube, but if you aren't promoting it on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels, you're missing out on traffic. You don't need to hire a PR expert, either. Simply promote your videos by using industry-specific hashtags and compelling descriptions in your tweets and status updates. The more exposure your video gains, the better return you'll receive on your investment.



Even if a video does go viral, it's unlikely to translate into sales.

7. Use Animoto

According to Brooke Franks, content manager for [ProSites](#), "Animoto allows you to add your own images and choose background music from a free library to create promotional videos. This is especially cool for business owners who don't have time to re-

cord video footage, as you can use images you've compiled to make your video. [Animoto](#) also allows you to instantly share your video on YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, and Twitter."

8. Focus on the first 10 seconds

Your video has only about 10 seconds to engage its viewer. Begin with something that's eye- and ear-catching, just like a story headline in a newspaper or on a website.

9. Think about quality

You don't need expensive camera equipment or a production studio. On YouTube, [the quality of the content](#) is more important than the quality of the picture. After that, keep your video fast-paced and short (no longer than five minutes). Although quality that's fit for a network TV show isn't required, make sure the subject is well lit and keep your camera steady. ■

6 Tips for Handling Your Own PR



All of those stories you read online or see on TV — the ones quoting or interviewing small-business owners like you — don't happen by accident. Someone at those companies did something to [catch the media's eye](#).

You could hire a public relations firm to raise your profile, but it'll cost you. Or you can handle your own PR as part of your overall marketing plan (See “10 Ways to Market Your business on a Budget,” page 3). If you choose to go the latter route, here are six tips for getting noticed by the press.

1. Have a clear goal

Knowing what kind of publicity you seek will help you define your PR strategy. Some examples: If you simply want to sell more products or services, you'll want to reach consumers through local or regional media. If your goal is to attract investors, your efforts should

target the financial press. To establish yourself as a thought leader in your industry, your strategy should focus on getting known by [bloggers](#) and reporters who cover your niche.

2. Make PR a priority

Of course you have a million other things to do, but publicity builds brand awareness, which typically leads to more customers. Try to devote 30 minutes a day to engaging in [PR activities](#). After a few days, you'll likely find yourself looking at your business through different eyes — as someone identifying ideal opportunities for media exposure.

3. Build a strong network

Look closely at the bylines on articles, blogs, and other news sources. Compile a list of people you'd like to [get to know](#). Some may be big-name journalists, while



Quotes from the Pros

Everyone has 24 hours, but some get more out of that time than others. Maximizing time is not about being busy; it is about spending time productively in ways that generate more revenue.

— Nicole Mason,
Peak Efficiency Professionals

others may be known only within a specialized area. Learn what kinds of stories appeal to each one (see #4). Seek out up-and-coming writers who cover topics related to your business; they're often the most approachable.

The window of opportunity for news hooks is short, but the right angle can prove irresistible.

4. Focus on content of value

Although the media constantly craves new ideas and information, reporters and bloggers won't write about just anything. They're wary of blatantly self-promotional "news." Consider how what you sell or do [ties into current events](#). For instance, let's say you offer travel services to frequent flyers. A good story pitch amid the NSA/Edward Snowden news might be something like, "10 Ways to Be Productive When Stranded in Moscow," writes Geoffrey James for *Inc.* The window of opportunity for news hooks is short, but the right angle can prove irresistible.

5. Craft an appealing press release

Once you've decided on a compelling topic, put together a [press release](#) designed to resonate with the

media. A properly structured press release clearly states "who, what, where, when, why, and how," but there's more. Include the hook in your headline and in the first paragraph. Keep your sentences short. Offer only the business-related information that pertains to the topic of the press release. Stick to the facts. Hyperbole like "greatest" and "highest customer ratings" (particularly without any supporting data) will kill a writer's interest.

6. Send a customized pitch

When your press release is ready, it's time to [pitch](#) the people on your media contact list. Send an email — with a brief but compelling subject line — that describes in one or two sentences why your news is of interest to the reporter's or blogger's audience. Make yourself available for an interview at the other person's convenience, not yours. Be prepared for rejection or to be simply ignored.

Journalists constantly receive pitches and press releases. The ideas that eventually get through come from small-business owners and others who are persistent and offer something of value. ■

10 Rules for Crafting the Perfect Tweet



Social media experts say small businesses should have a presence on [Twitter](#). But in order to reap the benefits of tweeting, you have to make your mis-sives stand out.

Here are 10 ways to get your tweets noticed:

1. Piggyback on other events

Are you attending an industry conference? Is there a highly publicized event that relates to your business? Set up a #hashtag (or contribute to the event's hashtag) and tweet about what's happening in real time. You could provide a lot of value to your customers, especially during events that aren't open to the public.

2. Tweet with images

Words are important (see #10), but a tweet that links to a photo or a video will generally have an engagement rate [two times higher](#) than one that doesn't.

3. Start with the right followers

There are 20 million [fake Twitter accounts](#) out there, and a lot of other people will follow you only in the hopes you will follow them back. Both are useless to your brand and you should disregard them. Instead, search hashtags that are in your industry and follow those people.

Allow your customers to follow you by [including links](#) on your website and look at [wefollow.com](#), a website that categorizes more than 1.5 million people by interest. If you're in the tech industry, you might follow and make contact with some of the more than 31,000 people in that category and try to get some of them to follow you back.

4. Include short videos

Use the [Vine](#) app to record six-second videos that loop until the viewer stops them. NBC's [Al Roker](#) uses Vine for a behind-the-scenes view of his show's production.



5. Ask for retweets

When you do this — sparingly — your retweet rate will be **12 times higher** than when you don't. When should you ask? When you're sure that what you're promoting holds exceptional value for your customers.

6. Follow basic rules of grammar

Tweeting, by its nature, is somewhat informal, but unless your brand specifically caters to teens, avoid sounding like one. You probably won't be labeled "unprofessional" if you avoid semicolons, but periods, commas, and correct spelling are essential.

7. Spell out your words

Typing "AFAIK" instead of "as far as I know" may save space, but your message will be lost on any followers who don't know that it stands for. It only takes a few more characters to write "I think" instead.

8. Go easy on the hashtags

According to an infographic from [Neomobile](#), any more than two hashtags is considered spam. Stick with highly targeted hashtags. For example, if you tweet about an upcoming sale in Seattle, #sale isn't

Unless
your brand
caters to teens,
avoid sounding
like one.

going to stand out. #SeattleSale is more targeted, but even better, use hashtags that are specific to your industry. If your customer base includes other small businesses, hashtags like #smallbusiness and #startup are popular but focused enough to attract relevant readers to your tweets.

9. Use a standard format

Marketing expert [Allister Frost](#) recommends writing your tweets based on this formula: call to action (20 characters), link (20 characters), and message (80 characters). Leave the last 20 characters blank. For example, "Learn how to write the perfect tweet! [link] Follow these 10 tips and watch your conversion rate soar." (The link will automatically shorten when you hit the "tweet" button.)

10. Think like a journalist

Journalists know that the headline is the most important element of any story: It needs to make a huge impact in a few words. Your tweets are competing for your followers' attention, so make every word count. ■



Marketing on a Budget? The Internet Is Your Best Ally

Successfully marketing your business doesn't have to cost a fortune, but it is something that requires daily diligence.

Throughout this e-book, we have shared expert tips, tricks, and tactics for effectively marketing your business without breaking the bank. You've heard from fellow small business owners and marketing experts who have "been there, done that" successfully, paving the way for you to apply similar strategies in your company.

The key takeaway? The internet is your friend — a massively accessible, affordable means to reach current and prospective customers, whether it's through social media, your website and blog, and/or a periodic email newsletter. Sounds easy enough, but be sure to take to heart some of our experts' best advice:

- Eugene Farber, founder of Content Strategy Hub, says today's most impactful email messages come in

a snappy, direct, easy-to-digest format written in a conversational tone.

- "Videos allow a deeper look into your organization," explains Carrie Kerpen, CEO of Likeable.com.

- Marketing expert Allister Frost recommends writing your tweets based on this formula: call to action (20 characters), link (20 characters), and message (80 characters). Leave the last 20 characters blank.

- A HubSpot study found that when photos are posted on Facebook pages they receive 53 percent more "likes" than the average post.

As you've seen, successfully marketing your business doesn't have to cost a fortune, but it is something that requires daily diligence. Now get out there and start having a real conversation with your customers. ■