

I'm Open; Now What?

25 Strategies to Attract Your First Customers

A Small Business Marketing Report

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I'm Open; Now What?

Congratulations to you! You're either getting ready, or you've just launched a new business. You should be proud of your accomplishments; most people only dream about what you've achieved.

Now let's get you some customers!

Almost every week a small business owner emails me and asks, "Sharron, I just started my business; what should I do to start generating sales?" This repeated question has inspired me to write this report, a short, affordable, small business marketing action list for you to implement and begin generating interest in your business. If you need more details or are confused as to how to move forward on any activity I've described herein, I encourage you to email me, sharron@sharronsenter.com. I'd be happy to respond with more detail.

As you embark on your marketing campaign, I strongly encourage you to **pick 10 marketing activities and stick with them for no less than a year**. The biggest mistake I see entrepreneurs make is getting frustrated with the lack of their marketing results before they've allowed their efforts to take seed. I know you've heard this too, so don't let it happen to you. For example, if you've decided to actively network at chamber of commerce events, then do so for no less than a year. It will take you this long to start seeing results. You must do things repeatedly in order to have long-term success. And if you have small budgets, your success will take longer to come by. However, the good news is that most small businesses don't need big business traffic; you simply need small amounts of qualified traffic.

The following are low-cost marketing activities I recommend you implement as soon as possible in order to generate customer interest.

OFFLINE MARKETING ACTIVITES

- Brainstorm a personal mailing list that encompasses friends, family and associates. Mail a personal note that includes the following details.
 - Describe your new business, including your expertise and how you're different from your competition. [You should be able to voice the latter in no more than two sentences.]
 - Provide contact information including name, business name, postal address, store/business address, hours of operation, directions, Web site URL, business and fax numbers, email, etc.
 - Ask for referrals. Be forward. Describe the type of customer you're searching for. Ideally, describe your referral program, i.e., "For every paying customer you refer to my auto dealership, you'll receive a \$200 referral fee!"
 - Enclose several business cards so friends and associates can distribute them.
 - Include a P.S. on the bottom of your communication. Try, "P.S....I'd really appreciate your help. Please let me know if you're able to post my sales flyers and business cards at your work or place of business, or if you know of any

bulletin boards around your town that welcome flyer postings.”

- It's fine to use your new company letterhead and matching envelope; however, it would be smarter to use an invitation-looking envelope with a folded card inside. You can find invitation stock with matching envelopes at any major office supply store. Moreover, you can run them through your office printer.
 - Remember to dig through draws, old pocketbooks, phone books and day planners for contact information of individuals you've lost touch with. This is a great way to get reconnected.
 - Finally, ask those around you who are “connected” to send an email to their network on your behalf introducing your business. Don't be shy. Generally speaking, most people like to be helpful. It's also the perfect time to collect on outstanding favors.
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- Distribute a news brief to your local newspaper(s) announcing your grand opening. [NOTE: I offer a complimentary report explaining in detail how to do this exact thing. Email me, sharron@sharronsenter.com for you free copy.]
 - Define an aggressive grand opening special offer, which should last for approximately 30 to 45 days. The key is to create urgency. Grand opening promotions are one of the few promotions when it's okay to give something away [discount] and not get anything in return from your customer. Why? Because you need to generate

customers in order to get more customers. You're a new business. Anyone initially buying from you is giving you something -- they're taking a chance on your unproven service or product.

- Secure testimonials. How can you secure testimonials if you have no customers? Approach friends and associates and ask them for testimonials that describe your business ethics and expertise. You do not have to inform future customers that your friends and associates haven't necessarily bought from you. Nor am I suggesting you lie; rather, you need to start somewhere. That's all I'm saying. So work with what you have.
- Check out your local Business Network International (BNI) chapter, www.bni.com. Keep in mind that most organizations are only as good as the people in their local chapter. Essentially, BNI allows only one business from each industry/expertise to join, so there are no competing businesses. Each member's goal is to actively collect and pass leads to each other on a weekly basis. If you'd like more information, I know several associates active in BNI. I'm sure they'd be happy to discuss their successes and challenges with you.
- Generate a list of complementary businesses and approach them to cross-promote your business. For example, it makes sense for a personal chef to approach a personal shopping/errand service and visa-versa. The personal shopping business' customers are very busy and have already shown they're willing to pay for someone to help them save time. Thus, both businesses would

increase their sales if they cross-promoted each other's business with their respective customers. As you know, never give anyone your customer database. You must personally manage the distribution of messages to your customers. Your customer database is your bloodline. Never trust it to anyone!

- Create a customer referral program immediately. If a customer buys from you, tell them what they'll receive when they refer you a paying customer. Don't be stingy. In my book, 10% is stingy!
- Put a sign or bumper sticker on your vehicle with your URL on it. If you don't have a Web site just yet, then create a slogan that describes what you do with your phone number. Approach friends, family and associates and ask them to put your bumper sticker on their cars. For example, "I cut hair. Call Karen 000-000-0000." Or, "I organize people. Call Sue 000-000-0000." Finally, "I cook at your home, www.yourpersonalchef.com." I suggest including a slogan rather than your business name, because quite often a business name isn't enough to describe what you do. Check out www.makestickers.com. I haven't used this company, but you can order as little as one sticker at a time for only \$4.95. It's very rare to be able to purchase such small quantities. Or do a Google.com search for, "affordable bumper stickers."
- Meet with your local Welcome Wagon representative. In many towns there is a person who visits new homeowners and for a nominal fee will introduce your business to new homeowners.

Nine times out of 10 this person is also a member of the local chamber, a good place to begin tracking this contact down.

- Align your business with a reputable organization. It could be an industry-specific organization, a local chamber of commerce or the Better Business Bureau. [See appendix A for details on how to select a professional membership.] Aligning with a reputable organization will bring your new business instant credibility. Moreover, it'll send the message you're serious about business, and it will help your business appear long-standing.
- Offer a no-questions-asked, 30-day, money-back guarantee. Your goal is to remove the sales objection, "What if I don't like it?" NOTE: Some states have laws regarding mandatory purchase refunds. Visit your local attorney general's office for more information. Check it out, because if it's 45 days, then you may as well say, "45-day guarantee," and look the better for it.
- Create an easy-to-read sales flyer and post it at various locations in and around your town, including community centers, Post Offices, town halls, libraries, coffee shops, etc. Make sure you include your grand opening special offer with an expiration date. At the bottom of your flyers include a row of tear-offs [tags with perforated lines.] On each tear-off include your name, business name, phone number, email address and Web site URL. If you have a budget, it would be worth it to have a professional design your flyer. If you need help, I can refer you to an affordable graphic designer or two.

- Make available several forms of payment options including cash, check and credit card, both online and off. If you have no idea where to start, go to www.paypal.com. You can be setup with a merchant account allowing you to accept credit cards in just a few minutes. In the same vein, if you sell products that require financing, make sure you have this available. A good place to find financing is at the bank where you already conduct your business and personal banking. It works to your advantage to be a known-entity.
- Provide a price range. Try to sell something for as little as \$20. This will promote impulse-buying by your prospects. I realize your services may start at \$75 an hour and higher. No matter, try to create something that costs around \$20, so your prospect can sample your abilities. What's more, this price looks great in a window and on flyers.
- Take advantage of free publicity. Distribute a free press release at www.prweb.com, or pay \$10 for an upgrade and receive guaranteed exposure. I use this service on a monthly basis. It's great. It's the coolest thing when someone 2000 miles away reads about me in a newspaper I've never heard of.
- Commit to a quarterly customer communication. It could be a one-sided, 8.5X11 postal newsletter, an email, a phone call, but it must be something!

- Display road signs. At minimum, put a realtor-like sign in front of your house with your business slogan and phone number and/or Web site URL. The goal is to get the phone to ring! In the same vein, if you see a visible retail business underutilizing their professional road sign, ask if you can borrow their sign, or pay a very small fee to advertise your business on it. Tell them you're launching your business and could really use the exposure. Or, again, ask if you could at least put your realtor-like sign on their front lawn. Check out www.asavealotsign.com. I have not used this company; however, their prices appear to be incredibly affordable.

ONLINE MARKETING ACTIVITIES

- Get a Web site. Yes, you do need one. Today's Web sites are yesterday's business cards. Either look credible or don't, you choose. If you need a recommendation for a very affordable Webmaster, I know someone.
- Try to avoid using free email addresses for your business, such as Yahoo and Hotmail. Instead, pay a small fee to secure your own email address, i.e., yourname@yourbusinessname.com. Having your own domain name and email sends the message, "I'm in business for the long-haul."
- Watch out for hosting companies that charge very small monthly fees, or anything else on the web that is free or has ridiculously low prices. Typically, in exchange for these low prices, they get to place ads in

your email body and at the top of your Web site – not very professional looking.

- Once your Web site is up and running, list your business in free online directories. To find these directories do a search on Google.com. Type in the words, [free business directories]. Superpages.com gives up to five free listings.
- List your business with as many search engines as possible. The most important element of search engine success is ensuring you've created effective title pages and meta tags. Essentially this is the code behind every web page that you can't see. At the top, there are "key words" you input that describe what you're selling. The second most important element of search engine success is to be linked to other popular sites. Many search engines, such as Google, rate your Web site based on its popularity, i.e., how many other Web sites link to you.
- Write expert articles and post them to free Web sites looking for articles about your expertise. See, www.ideamarketers.com or www.authorconnection.com as an example. To find more Web sites that welcome article submissions, go to www.google.com and type in ["your expertise" submit article.] For example, "Personal Fitness Submit Article."
- Offer a free emailed monthly tip about your expertise to all visitors. Provide a brief sign-up form on all your web pages. Make sure you tell visitors you will not sell or distribute their email or other personal

information. In the same vein, make sure you post a privacy statement that details what you do and don't do with your customer's information. Never add anyone to your email distribution list without asking permission first.

Businesses with Storefronts

- Display as many balloons as possible in and just outside your store.
- Display grand opening banners and grand opening promotional messages.
- Display a banner with your Web site URL.
- Display take-one flyers and business cards on check-out counters and on top of miscellaneous product displays.

Businesses in Malls

- Meet with the mall marketing manager immediately and find out what mall-sponsored advertising vehicles are available for your business, i.e., Can you display weekly promotional flyers around the mall or at the mall information booth? Can you rent low-cost poster frames that are displayed throughout the mall? Can you hand out flyers at mall entrances? Is there a monthly mall-sponsored newsletter that goes out to mall employees where you can include a special offer?
- If the mall will allow, display two poster-size signs at your store's entrance promoting your grand opening.

What, you have some money to spend? Lucky you!

If budgets allow, I recommend the following.....

- Place a small ad in your local newspaper. Remember, frequency is much more important than the size of your ad. I strongly recommend you advertise for no less than three months in any given publication - six months if it's a monthly publication.
- Buy a mailing list that encompasses three to five surrounding towns near your business and mail a sales letter or postcard. Depending on your business type your specifications will vary. For example, if you're selling high-end used cars than your specifications may look like -- married, with children, homeowner, two cars, \$125,000+ combined income. There are two keys to successful direct mail marketing. One, you want a very targeted list. Two, your reader must identify with your message and special offer. Remember to include a promotional code to track your piece. And also remember to include a promotional end date to increase reader urgency.

Summary

Not every strategy is applicable for all businesses. For example, if your business is online-intensive, than it may not make sense for you to advertise in your local newspaper. Rather, it would make sense for you to advertise within a targeted electronic newsletter [ezine] where your target audience is spending time. To find a targeted ezine do a Google.com search. For example, try “[Your Target Audience] ezine,” such as “Car Lovers Ezine.”

From my personal experience with helping clients grow their businesses, as well as growing my own small business for the last three years, implementing the enclosed strategies work. I receive new business leads generally at least every other week, sometimes more, sometimes less. However, it takes time to get to this point. Again, I can't stress this enough; pick 10 marketing activities and repeat them for at least a year.

On a more personal note, I want to share with you something that I've personally experienced and know of many other small business owners who have too. Starting a business can be at times absolutely thrilling and then all of a sudden very lonely. At first, it's exhilarating - you're motivated to succeed; everything is new and fresh. You've finally decided to go out on your own. However, sometimes after being in business for only a few months you may experience an emotional let down. Becoming an entrepreneur is almost anti-climatic because you've worked so hard to launch your business. In fact, you may have waited years to do so and now just finally pulled the trigger, which compounds the sensation. Although it doesn't happen to everyone, know that you may experience a personal let down several weeks into your launch. It's very natural and you will get ahead of it. Let's face it, you can only remain so high for so long until you have to come down a little. The law of gravity applies to us too, small business entrepreneurs. The key is to know about this possibility and to align yourself with other small business owners who have been successfully living an entrepreneurial life for some time. You'll learn that these are the same people who will be able to identify with you and understand your daily struggles and successes as an entrepreneur. It's an awesome life being an entrepreneur; everyday is like learning to ride a bike

for the first time. You'll get some bruises, but then you'll also clear some high jumps!

If there's anything else I can help you with please let me know. I can be reached at sharron@sharronsenter.com or (978) 346-4086.

Thank you for your business!

Appendix A

Are you receiving a return on investment from your professional memberships?

Before you join a professional organization, make sure you're getting at least some of the following benefits.

- The organization actively markets itself and its members. Tip -- Next time you're considering joining an organization, ask to see the marketing plan. You'll learn tons about the organization based on what happens next.....:-)
- The organization has a professional Web site that provides members a free listing and link back to their own site. Even better, the organization allows members a free Web site hosted under the organization's domain name. Although I recommend hosting your own site, if it's cost-prohibitive, this is a great alternative.
- The organization provides an easy-to-use search engine so Web site visitors can find the business they're looking for. For example, check out the United States Personal Chef Association's site at, <http://www.uspca.com>. One of the key benefits the association offers its members is an easy-to-use search engine whereby visitors can find a personal chef within 10 miles of their home town, <http://www.hireachef.com>. FYI -- I came across this organization after seeing a business card size ad in my local newspaper. Part of the advertiser's call-to-action included a Web site address that leads directly to her hire a chef web page, for example, [www.hireachef.com/\[your name here\]](http://www.hireachef.com/[your name here]). As long as this organization is

actively driving qualified traffic to its Web site, this is an incredible benefit for a \$299 annual membership fee, never mind the other benefits included in this fee.

- You can sample the organization's events before joining.
- The organization's goals and mission match yours.
- The organization offers an opportunity for you to spotlight your business to other members.
- The organization distributes a monthly membership newsletter [postal or electronic] and invites members to submit expert articles at no charge.
- For a small fee you can include a flyer inside the postal newsletter or a four-line ad in the organization's electronic newsletter with a link to your Web site; saving you hundreds in postage had you managed your own direct mail campaign.
- For a small fee you can purchase the organization's membership postal database and/or email list.
- You can freely use the organization's logo in your marketing materials, Web site, etc. Why would you want to? The theory is that the organization's logo brings your business credibility. The indirect message you're sending a prospect is, "If she's willing to spend money on a professional membership then she must be serious about her business."
- There are recurring activities hosted by the organization that enable you to network and facilitate business.
- Finally, keep in mind that inside most professional organizations there are all types of experts -- financial, marketing, technology, health, etc. Before you spend money on a consultant outside your chosen

organization be sure to ask if there's someone within the organization who can help you pro bono.

About The Author



Sharron Senter is a New-England based marketing consultant, speaker, writer and founder of Senter & Associates, a marketing communications firm that helps small business entrepreneurs deploy low-cost marketing tactics. She has been helping businesses deploy low-cost marketing strategies since 1990. Sharron is best known for

her free weekly emailed marketing tips. Contact Sharron at sharron@sharronsenter.com or sign up for her free marketing tips at <http://www.sharronsenter.com>.

Report Guarantee: If you're unsatisfied with my report, I truly would like to know. It's important to me that you learn a minimum of 8 to 10 truly fresh ideas to help you generate revenue for your business. If you do not find the new ideas you're looking for, email me at sharron@sharronsenter.com. I will counsel you for an hour on the phone to generate other low-cost marketing ideas to help you grow your business. Or, you can simply return my report for your money back.

Feedback: I welcome any feedback you have about my report. I'm always trying to improve my reports and to reaffirm what lessons I've learned. I'd especially love to hear about successes you've had after implementing strategies outlined in my report. Email me anytime at sharron@sharronsenter.com.