

# Marketing strategies to fit any budget

## Effective marketing as a worthwhile investment

- Low-cost techniques that yield great results
- Today's tactics: from email to search engine optimization

The key for any new business today is finding the most effective way to attract and retain customers. Many start-up businesses however, see marketing as an expensive exercise that offers a low return on investment. As a result, marketing is often moved down the priority list or treated as an afterthought.

In reality, effective and efficient marketing can be one of the best investments you can make to grow your business. There are many low-cost and no-cost marketing techniques that can generate great results. The following are four tactics to help you start marketing your business cost-effectively:

### Word-of-mouth marketing

Word-of-mouth marketing is one of the most effective ways to market your business. The premise is simple: it relies on your current customers talking about your business to your potential customers. The key is creating a positive experience with your current customers so they will talk passionately and positively about what you offer.

According to [WOMMA](#) (Word of Mouth Marketing Association), there are many types of word-of-mouth marketing, many of which are inexpensive or free. These include: creating brand Web logs (frequently called "blogs"); generating "viral" messages that are entertaining enough for people to want to forward them by email; leveraging mobile technologies and business-to-business directories to increase awareness of your business; and developing referral systems that allow those happy customers to introduce their friends to your product or service.

### Marketing via email

Marketing via email can be an effective and low-cost way to get in front of potential customers and to keep in touch with your current customers. In fact, many time-challenged customers often prefer this type of contact. Bell can provide you with all the tools you need to launch your [business' Web site](#), including email.

A major benefit to email marketing is that it is easy to measure results. You can access data on who opened the email, who clicked where and how often. This allows you to change messaging and switch gears almost immediately to fine-tune your approach for your audience. Some start-up tips for email marketing include:

#### Use email to send customers to your Web site:

Web sites don't just make it easy for customers to find you. They also provide a destination for customers responding to emails or ads that feature new products, events or special offers.

**Get permission from users to send emails:** Allow recipients to opt in or out of receiving your emails - and honour your commitment. To ensure you are up to speed on spamming regulations visit [Industry Canada's](#) stop spam site.

**Use HTML instead of straight text:** Market research by eMarketer found that 60 per cent of online users prefer HTML email to text email.



**Find a reliable full-service email agency:** You may want a service that will work with you to develop your email, manage your lists and ensure your message is deployed without errors. To find a listing of email service providers visit the [Canadian Marketing Association Web site](#).

**Offer useful information when using email to promote a product or service:** If not done properly, emails can look too much like spam. Only provide information on products and services that is valuable to the customer. One way to accomplish this is to develop an online newsletter. However, do take the time to learn about some important dos and don'ts.

**Seek out e-marketing expertise:** Trend reports and research from email marketing experts such as [DoubleClick](#) or [Marketing Sherpa](#) can be useful resources. There are also e-newsletters such as [Email Sherpa](#).

### Search engine optimization

Web sites are not a "build it and they will come" proposition, especially if you're competing with companies with deeper pockets than yours. You need to ensure that when potential customers are looking for you (using Google, Yahoo! Search, or MSN's search function, etc.), they can find you.

Search engine optimization can help ensure that when a potential customer executes a search online for your business or for the kinds of products or services you offer, your Web site appears higher up on the list of search results than your competitors.

When looking into search engine optimization, it is best to talk to the experts. They can help you understand what is needed in such areas as planning out your keywords and integrating them into your Web site to increase your ranking. Also don't expect the same results from one search engine to another. For example, keywords that get Google to move your site up the list may not work with Yahoo.

Other ways to drive traffic to your site are:

**Provide value-added information:** Include tips and how-to guides that educate site visitors.

**Start alliances with other sites:** Put a link to their site on your Web page and have them do the same for you. However, make sure the links are relevant to your customers.

**Ask for advice from experts:** They can help you find the best way to maximum benefit from your site.

### Publicity marketing

Publicity happens when the media (newspapers, radio, television, online publications, magazines, etc.), talk about your business and what you have to offer. This differs from paid advertising because it is an unbiased source promoting your business for free. Think of it as a form of word-of-mouth marketing with a larger audience base. A Web site can play an invaluable role in supporting your publicity efforts.

Some tips to get started with low-cost publicity marketing include:

**Develop a press kit:** Having background materials in hand and on your site prepares you ahead of time to deal with public relations opportunities as they arise.

**Learn how to write an effective press release:** It must have a headline that makes people want to read it and should provide information or expertise the media will find worth sharing with their audience.

**Establish relationships with the media:** Position yourself as an expert on topics related to your product or service. Keep in touch with them so that you're always top of mind when they're looking for a quote.

**Find opportunities for speaking engagements:** Tailor your message to each group. Many event organizers heavily market to potential attendees so you may find your business getting a lot of free exposure.



**Find opportunities to write:** Get published. Send letters to the editor and write reports or articles. Community newspapers are always looking for new information of interest to their readers. You can also use the published article to pitch to a larger newspaper. Don't forget to post any press coverage on your Web site.

**Seek free expert advice:** There is lots of expert advice on the Web about how to manage publicity. Al Lautenslager, writes a regular column called Guerilla Marketing for [Entrepreneur Magazine](#) and offers insights into such things as how to write an effective press release, how to make use of online PR tools, and how to start generating publicity in seven days. You can also talk to professional Web services providers to find out how you can incorporate PR into your site.

In the end, if you have a solid business strategy, a great product or service, and consistently deliver on your customers' needs, you already have the right foundations to build a solid marketing strategy. By applying any or all of the low-cost marketing tactics listed above, you can grow your business and attract and retain more customers than you even thought possible - and keep your marketing costs in line.

The start-up experts at Bell will work with you to help build your business for success with the right technology mix. Get the [Bell Business Essentials Bundle](#), designed especially to get start-ups going.

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