

Business Promotion Basics

Promoting your business is something that no entrepreneur can ignore. In this article, Antonia Chitty of ACPR shares some simple tips from her book, *A Guide to Promoting Your Business*, which will help every business owner who needs to promote their products or services.

Making a plan

Planning how you will promote your business is an essential part of a healthy enterprise. Try to work out a plan for the year ahead. This will help you continue with promotional activities at both busy and quiet times, vital if you want to keep up your business profile.

Start by writing down all the different promotional activities you can think of. Include ideas that have worked well in the past, and things you see working for competitors. Look on small business sites on the internet for more inspiration. Talk to people at networking groups, face to face or online, and ask what works for them.

Then, using a spreadsheet or year planner, note down which activities you will do when. Make sure you have a spread of activities throughout the year. Look at where you have gaps and see if you can come up with an event or have a special offer so that you have things to promote all year round. Try to make one phone call or send a few emails every day. Continuous effort is far more effective than big bursts of promotion without any follow up.

PR essentials

As part of your plan have a regular programme of press releases. It may take several releases before you catch a journalist's eye, or you may strike it lucky and send in just the right sort of story first time. If you are unsure what makes a good press release, read the sort of publication you'd like to feature in, and see what stories they cover.

How often you send out press releases should be based on how often you have genuine news. If you bring out a new range each season, it is simple to plan in a press release each quarter, plus a further release each time you have a sale.

Note down which sectors of the media will be interested in your news, and don't forget to include different angles for trade and consumer press. You may be able to devise different press releases on the same subject for different audiences. If, for example, you had a new range of boots, there would be potential for a press release about the styles available in children's sizes to parenting media, and a different release for outdoors pursuits magazines. A third release could emphasise the fashion angle for women's magazines.

Something that wouldn't interest the national media may interest your local paper. Develop a relationship with the reporter who covers your local area, and keep them informed about the latest developments at your business. Stories about new staff, increased employment opportunities, or when employees gain qualifications may make the business pages.

Advertising

Include advertising in your promotional activities. Think about how much money you have to spend on advertising throughout the year. Many small business owners invest all they have in one or two adverts, and get little response. Potential customers may need to see your business offering up to seven times before they are moved to make a purchase. Advertising will usually contribute to raising your company profile in the long term, but may not always show an immediate rise in sales.

To make advertising work for you, plan it carefully. Cost up the price of a series of adverts or adverts in a range of complementary publications. Find out about series discounts, and also consider waiting until the last minute for discounted rates. Most importantly, remember advertising alone may not be enough. Look at how you can back up your adverts with PR, editorial coverage, competitions or offers targeting the same audience.

Online promotion

There are lots more ways to make use of the internet. Have you got a website? A simple site with details of what you offer and how to get in touch works as an advertisement for your business 24-7. And if you are prepared to invest your time or some money in an online shopping cart you can offer your products to a far wider audience.

Think beyond print advertising too. Have you looked at pay per click adverts on the internet? You can limit your budget to a small amount each day and just pay when people click on your advert and visit your website.

Swap links with complementary sites to increase the number of people who find your site. And consider writing articles or offering top tips in your area if expertise for other websites too. Becoming an expert in a certain area that ties in with your business gives people confidence to buy. Join relevant forums too, but remember to read their rules about promoting your business. You may be able to mention it if it is relevant to a question asked by another member, or you may need to pay a small amount for an advert on the site.

Need more ideas?

If you need more help making your plan, there's a promotion plan template at www.prbasics.co.uk as well as a template for writing your own press releases, lots more free resources, and essential links. Remember to spend a few minutes promoting your business every day, and add new ideas to your plan as you have them. You will soon see the difference this makes to your business.

*Antonia Chitty runs www.acpr.co.uk, helping business owners do their own promotion. Her latest publication, **A Guide to Promoting Your Business** (£15), is packed with affordable techniques for getting your business noticed. The book is written with busy business owners in mind, and can be worked through in short sections when you have a few minutes. Clear explanations, examples and exercises make it easy to pick up the essentials skills to boost your business, and you put your new skills into practice as you work thorough the book. **A guide to Promoting Your Business** is £15 from www.prbasics.co.uk , www.acpr.co.uk , www.amazon.co.uk and can be ordered from any bookshop if you quote ISBN 978-0955534508*