

21 marketing tips for your business

Tips and advice from
marketing gurus

INTRODUCTION

The recent economic downturn threw many entrepreneurs' sales and marketing strategies into disarray. With customers more hesitant to buy, sales teams were (and some still are) struggling to get deals over the line. And just because the economy is in recovery mode doesn't mean that customers aren't cautious – smart companies need to keep refining their marketing strategies to keep their current clients and win more business.

Of course, getting to today's customer has never been tougher. They are better informed than ever before and are able to research and compare you with your competition at the click of a mouse. Entrepreneurs and marketing teams need to ensure their strategies are across all marketing mediums.

To ensure you're one step ahead of the competition, we've compiled 21 great tips from some of the industry's top experts. You'll learn about researching your customers, making the most of feedback (positive or negative) and hosting events, to keeping your database up-to-date, getting your product right for the marketplace and targeting your market niche. Who knows? A whole group of customers may only be a few pages away.

James Thomson
Editor, SmartCompany



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TIP 1:

COMMUNICATE PROFESSIONALLY

Clients today have access to more information than ever before. Clients can make product comparisons very easily. And most clients know what they are after even if they don't know how to articulate it. Clients don't expect to be coerced, bullied, tricked or intimidated into buying either. They don't expect to be treated like an 'idiot' or a 'sucker' by sales people who just talk at them and flash brochures or product sheets, looking for someone to boost their commissions. Nor, on the other hand, do they necessarily want to make 'friends' with sales people.

Clients expect to communicate and deal with a real professional who knows their own business and how they can best serve their clients' needs with creative solutions and fresh ideas.

- Sue Barrett, founder and managing director of sales consultancy firm Barrett

TIP 2:

PUT THE CUSTOMER FIRST - EVEN IF IT COSTS YOU

We're so driven to hitting our numbers that the person that gets overlooked all too often is the customer. And so a sales person's job is to do a lot less selling and a lot more helping people to buy.

And in fact, one of the things that we see from the very best sales people and the very best entrepreneurs is when they discover the needs of these customers; sometimes they're not the best resource or they're not the best answer for those needs.

Then the best sales people in that bunch of entrepreneurs will find the match, even if it isn't in their company, and send that referral over to someone and then when it's their time and those customers come back to you and they don't even shop, they don't even look at anyone else.

- Jack Daly, US sales guru

TIP 3:

NEVER BE FRIGHTENED OF FEEDBACK

Never be frightened of feedback, no matter how negative it might be. There will always be a grain of truth that merits attention. In the end, it is the customer who decides whether your product or service is any good and not the owner or manager of the business. It is always better to find out what the customer thinks rather than to pretend that you know what he or she thinks.

So, go for it; tell your customers that you can only fix the things you know about and get them to tell you about the things they want fixed.

- Lou Coutts, entrepreneur and litigation lawyer

TIP 4:

MEASURE, MEASURE, MEASURE

Researching your customers may seem boring, but it is the only way you'll start making progress in the downturn.

You've just run an ad and an additional 100 people have come through the door on day one of the ad. Your marketing has worked - irrespective as to whether or not they have bought your product/service. You could easily have 100 people through the door and sell to one of them.

You don't have a marketing problem, you have a selling problem. Before you run the ad again, you'd better get up to speed with sales techniques, otherwise you're going to get the same results again and again. The marketing worked, you and/or staff didn't.

The flip side of this is when you have 10 people come through the door and you sell to eight of them. There's nothing wrong with your sales and service skills - but the marketing wasn't the most successful. Measure, measure, measure - so you know where to put your future marketing spend.

- Debra Templar, director of Australian Retail Services

TIP 5:

COUNT YOUR CHICKENS

Make sure that you are looking after your existing customers better than usual (if that is possible) because there'll be plenty of hungry competitors out there to do anything to steal them from you.

If you step up first, and raise service levels when everyone is talking doom and gloom, you're going to be a beacon in the dark, and attract both old and new customers alike. You'll also raise the bar so high your competitors will waste a lot of valuable resources trying to jump over it.

- Robert Miller, Miller Heiman group founder and author of 'Strategic Selling'

TIP 6:

STEAL SOMEONE ELSE'S CHICKENS

With competitors cutting service levels you have the perfect opportunity to raise yours (having first done it for your own customers, you should be good at it!) and steal their chickens. If you've retained all of your sales force when the market is rife with lay-offs, you're in the perfect position to ask your entire sales and service teams to step up to a new mark and secure their company's future (they know they are thereby securing their jobs, so you don't need to raise this as a threat).

- Robert Miller, Miller Heiman group founder and author of 'Strategic Selling'

TIP 7:

THINK LIKE YOUR CLIENTS

Most businesses tend to view the world from their own perspective and not from their clients'. This means they often produce marketing and sales materials that talks about themselves and their products using company jargon rather than talking about their clients' priorities and problems in language the clients can understand.

Their sales people tend to still drift toward product discussions, not solution discussions.

And when a sales person is put on the spot to validate their credentials with a new prospect they usually get lost in a sea of product information and company spin, not client centric information and clear value propositions.

- Sue Barrett, founder and managing director of sales consultancy firm Barrett

TIP 8:

LEVERAGE YOUR CUSTOMER DATABASE

Every small to medium enterprise knows the value of a customer database as a sales and marketing tool. Used properly, the customer database is one of the most potentially effective devices to reinforce customer loyalty and boost sales.

Every SME also knows how challenging it can be to devote the necessary time to ensure the customer database keeps growing, is accurate and up-to-date, and is put to best marketing use.

And of course there is the time-consuming task of choosing which software to use in the first place. Any SME wanting to make better use of a customer database can access dozens of online resources that are readily available, and database management solutions can be custom-built or bought off the shelf.

A lot of SMEs aren't using their customer databases properly. They don't communicate with customers through the database enough, but of course it usually comes down to a lack of resources, especially time. Using a database effectively often means a lot of changes to the way an SME does things, but we all know that so many SME owners have enough to do just running the business and maintaining cashflows.

- Mackey Kandarajah, co-founder of database marketing company Pakka

TIP 9:

LISTEN ACTIVELY

Skillful thought and action are among some of the most critical skills in selling; diagnosing and solving problems, opportunity questioning, active listening, paraphrasing and verifying; advising clients on the best use of a product or a solution in relation to their priorities; linking the 'big picture' to details and strategy; thinking about possibilities; effective alignment of client and company objectives; listening closely to the needs of clients and being able to feed them back to marketing and technical people for product improvement and market relevance; and understanding the financial importance of client retention.

The stereotype of the 'smooth talking' sales person whose job is to convince and persuade people to buy a product is outdated and, most of all, ineffective.

- Sue Barrett, founder and managing director of sales consultancy firm Barrett

TIP 10:

THE POWER OF PERCEIVED VALUE

In order to compete in today's marketplace there is a minimum price of admission: we have to have a product or a service that generates genuine real value. The very first time that a customer elects to buy from a sales person's entrepreneur company they don't buy real value; they buy perceived value because the only time that you can buy real value is on the second and subsequent purchases.

A great exercise for an entrepreneur owner and sales person is not only to create a product or service with real value, but they should push their organisations in themselves to figure out how they're going to sell perceived value because the perceived value is going to be the first point of vulnerability at winning over new customers.

- Jack Daly, US sales guru

TIP 11:

THE ART OF NETWORKING AT FUNCTIONS

When expanding my network, there are a number of things I like to do. I tend to think they are obvious, but I have been assured that they are not, as people do get stuck in ruts. Stuff that I like includes going to functions in my industry where I can gain knowledge (networking only is soulless). I note that if this is your thing, then get yourself on the committee running the show as you are guaranteed to meet more people, interesting people and it's a great credibility thing to do. Just remember though you are more likely to network with the same competitors, over and over again.

Go to functions where potential clients will go. I vastly prefer to do this than hang out with competitors.

Get involved in volunteer work. You'd be surprised who you run into. For me, I do a lot of work volunteering at my children's school and have been surprised by the number of truly interesting people I have met, digging muck out of drains.

- [Brendan Lewis, serial technology entrepreneur](#)

TIP 12:

BALANCE CONTACTS AND CONNECTIONS

Having a combination of contacts and connections is important in networking. The key is understanding which contacts you will turn into connections and apply the farming approach with a view to yielding powerful results over a longer period of time.

Contacts: By definition a contact is like having lots of little plants that don't have deep roots. If you put pressure on the plant when it doesn't have deep roots, it will topple over or pull away from the soil and die.

Connections: Having a connection is like having a large tree with a deep root system. When you put pressure on the big tree or lean on it, its root system is strong enough to support this process.

- [Sue Barrett, founder and managing director of sales consultancy firm Barrett](#)



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TIP 13:

USE ONLINE NETWORKS CAREFULLY

With the advent of Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn and the like, the online networking opportunities abound. However there is inherent danger in falling into the trap of just collecting names for the sake of wanting to “appear” to have a large network.

Ask yourself the following questions: How long since you actually spoke to any of those people on your online network? Are some people on your connection list people you have never spoken with? Have you understood why they want to be connected to you? Do you know why you want to be connected with them? If you don't know why, then you may want to think about why their name is on your list in the first place.

- Sue Barrett, founder and managing director of sales consultancy firm Barrett

TIP 14:

BUY SOME WORD-OF-MOUTH

Get people talking about your business by hiring a ‘word-of-mouth’ expert to start a conversation on your behalf.

The Word of Mouth Company operates across the eastern seaboard and starts 500 conversations a day. Its team of 50 conversation starters are invited to speak at established community groups like mother's groups about up to seven brands an hour. It costs from \$1.30 per person and all feedback is tracked online.

- Jo Schultz, The Word of Mouth Company

TIP 15:

THE POWER OF CRM

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems have long been the preserve of larger companies, but they are great tool for smaller businesses too. The systems capture customer information and can be used to create targeted marketing campaigns. For example, if you decide to send an offer to lapsed customers, a CRM allows you do this quickly and effectively.

An off-the-shelf CRM system can cost as little as \$600, plus around \$4,000 for a consultant to customise the system. However, billing systems like MYOB can often do the basics.

CRM is vastly under-utilised by Australian businesses. Lots of companies seem to think CRM is the same thing as direct marketing, but it most certainly is not.

Most businesses can have an immense amount of dormant information on their computer systems that can be used to create more effective marketing campaigns.

- Paul Bennett, CEO of advertising agency Euro RSCG

TIP 16:

EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

Whether its bubble wrapping lampposts, creating pavement art or paying actors to argue in cinemas, experiential marketing (also known as ambient marketing) is on the increase as companies try to reach time-poor consumers.

If it's a unique idea developed from a genuine insight that's well executed, it will achieve cost-effective results.

A great example of an Ignition experiential marketing campaign involved a campaign for the promotion of a new Ikea store. One night, Melbourne experiential agency Ignition put 50,000 Ikea swing tags on public furniture, and also drove around old Volvos loaded with Ikea furniture.

These engaging brand experience moments will capture the attention, hearts and minds of consumers and present a clear call to action. If experiential is used as part of an overall campaign, then it works brilliantly.

- Nina Hendy, marketing expert

TIP 17: PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Product placement is about dressing branded product as part of a set or photo shoot, or having it integrated into a script. But television networks and magazines are swamped with approaches, so consider hiring a PR firm to do the legwork.

Sydney's Believe Advertising specialises in product placement. Director Adrian Falk has had clothing, bags and FMCG brands feature in television shows, blockbuster movies, magazines and advertising shoots. It will set you back the cost of your product, plus his fee.

Fees vary depending on the longevity of the campaign and the objectives, but Falk is willing to work within a client's budget.

It works perfectly for people who don't have the budget to advertise on TV and product placement is more believable than traditional advertising.

- Adrian Falk, Director of Sydney's Believe Advertising

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TIP 18:

DIRECT MARKETING

Direct marketing includes brochures and offers sent in the mail, email and SMS communication, which can be very effective and relatively inexpensive.

The Australian Direct Marketing Association says costs vary depending on communication method and type of design and production used.

Direct marketing allows you to measure return on investment very effectively because you know who you sent the offer to and can track whether they come back and take up the offer.

- [Melina Rohan Corporate and Regulatory Affairs Director, Australian Direct Marketing Association](#)

TIP 19:

HOST AN EVENT

Organising a corporate event doesn't have to cost the earth. Friday night drinks and canapés at your office is a good start, although hosting an event in a stylish restaurant or art gallery can be a cost-effective marketing option.

An event will give you valuable face time with your customers, but make sure you ask them to bring a friend so they can introduce a potential new customer to your business.

Getting to know your core customer base is paramount. Remember, it's five times more expensive to attract a new customer to your business than it is to keep a current one happy.

- [Justin Hind, chief operating officer of Downstream Marketing](#)

TIP 20:

HAVE A TARGETTED CAMPAIGN

The days of the mass marketing campaign is fast diminishing. For example, sending a catalogue or flyer to every home in your area just won't work - instead, you need to target your marketing to the people who you know are actually interested in your product.

Any such campaign will need to be multi-disciplined; online, direct email marketing, and advertisements in appropriate media. A campaign based around a loyalty or rewards type program can be particularly effective, as you can be certain you are targeting those customers who want your goods.

It's about protecting the margin as best you can. Think of ways of giving them a reason to come to you.

- [Brian Walker, principal and founder of retail consultancy The Retail Doctor](#)

TIP 21:

CALL YOUR CUSTOMERS TO ACTION

Companies need to focus on marketing that will deliver them a solid return on investment.

We're focused on return-on-investment type marketing, call-to-action type marketing messages that drive the revenue of the business.

Call-to-action is something that gives consumers a specific reason to buy. Not necessarily a discount, but points of differentiation like a special flavour for the month, or a new product. Simply from a marketing perspective, it's just about being pro-active and getting out there.

- [Luke Bayliss from Sumo Salad](#)