



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION OF BARAGA COUNTY

Small Business Marketing Toolkit

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Introduction

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”

Simply put, it is the activity of selling or promoting your products or services. This can include the market research and advertising as well.

According to The Media Ant In 2026, marketing is more than just selling, it's about creating connections and establishing goodwill. In a world where we are overwhelmed with choices, how does your business stand out and build customer trust all while showcasing the unique value of your product or service?

Creating an effective marketing plan will help you get noticed by your ideal customers both online and offline; increased sales as “clicks” become customers and allow you to compete successfully in your market space.

So as a small business owner, how do you prioritize these activities with everything else you have to do on a day-to-day basis? And, when you find time to focus on your marketing strategy, where do you even begin to make an impact?

This toolkit, developed by the EDC of Baraga County, will take you through the process of developing a budget friendly strategy while sharing best practices that can easily be put into place and measured.

SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING IDEAS



Developing Your Marketing Strategy

Whether you choose to start with a simple one-page plan or create a more detailed plan, putting the work into this step will help set you up for success. Smartsheet.com has developed several templates for you to consider, several of which are shared in this section.

Let's start by laying out the four essentials of a successful marketing plan:

- 1. Know your audience:** Understand their preferences, habits, and needs. Do they match your service/product lines?
- 2. Set clear goals:** Are you looking to increase foot traffic, online sales, or brand awareness? More than one?
- 3. Keep it consistent:** As you work on your messaging and the various platforms, consistency will be key. With all the information people receive on a daily basis, hearing it repeatedly makes a difference.
- 4. Track and adapt:** Use tools like Google Analytics or Instagram Insights to see what's working—and what's not. It is important to be flexible and adjust your strategy when activities are not producing anticipated results.

Now are you ready to tackle a plan? Well maybe one more item. Let's do one more critical task before you put pen to paper. Take the time to evaluate your product/service, customer, competition and goals. This will allow you to focus your strategic planning efforts.

For small businesses or start-ups, a very basic marketing plan may be what makes your most comfortable. Here is a one page template that can be adjusted to fit your needs.



Common Marketing Mistakes to Avoid



1



Trying to reach everyone
Focus on the audience most likely to buy from you.

2



Posting inconsistently
Build trust by showing up regularly.

3

**Relying only on social media**
Use a mix of tools like email, events, PR, signage, and your website.

4

**Spending money without tracking results**
Measure what is working before investing more.

5

**Changing direction too quickly**
Give a tactic time to work before deciding it failed.



A simple, focused plan you actually use is more valuable than a detailed plan that sits on a shelf.



Next Step:
Use the marketing plan template on the next page.

ONE-PAGE MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATE

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
BUSINESS SUMMARY	
BUSINESS OBJECTIVES	
THE PROBLEM	
OUR SOLUTION	
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE	
TARGET MARKET	
MARKETING STRATEGY & OBJECTIVES	
FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS	

ACTION PLAN

CATEGORY	ACTION	OWNER	DATE	COST
PRODUCT				
PRICE				
PLACE				
PROMOTION				
MARKETING CHANNELS				
PERFORMANCE STANDARDS				
RESULTS MEASUREMENT METHODS				
OTHER				
OTHER				
OTHER				
REVIEW				

Need a more robust planning process? Smartsheet has shared a great expanded template that you may be interested in following, however, making it your own. Below is the full template and link. https://www.smartsheet.com/sites/default/files/2019-10/IC-Marketing-Plan-for-Startups-8609_PDF.pdf

MARKETING PLAN

BUSINESS NAME

Street Address
City, State and Zip

webaddress.com

VERSION 0.0.0

00/00/0000

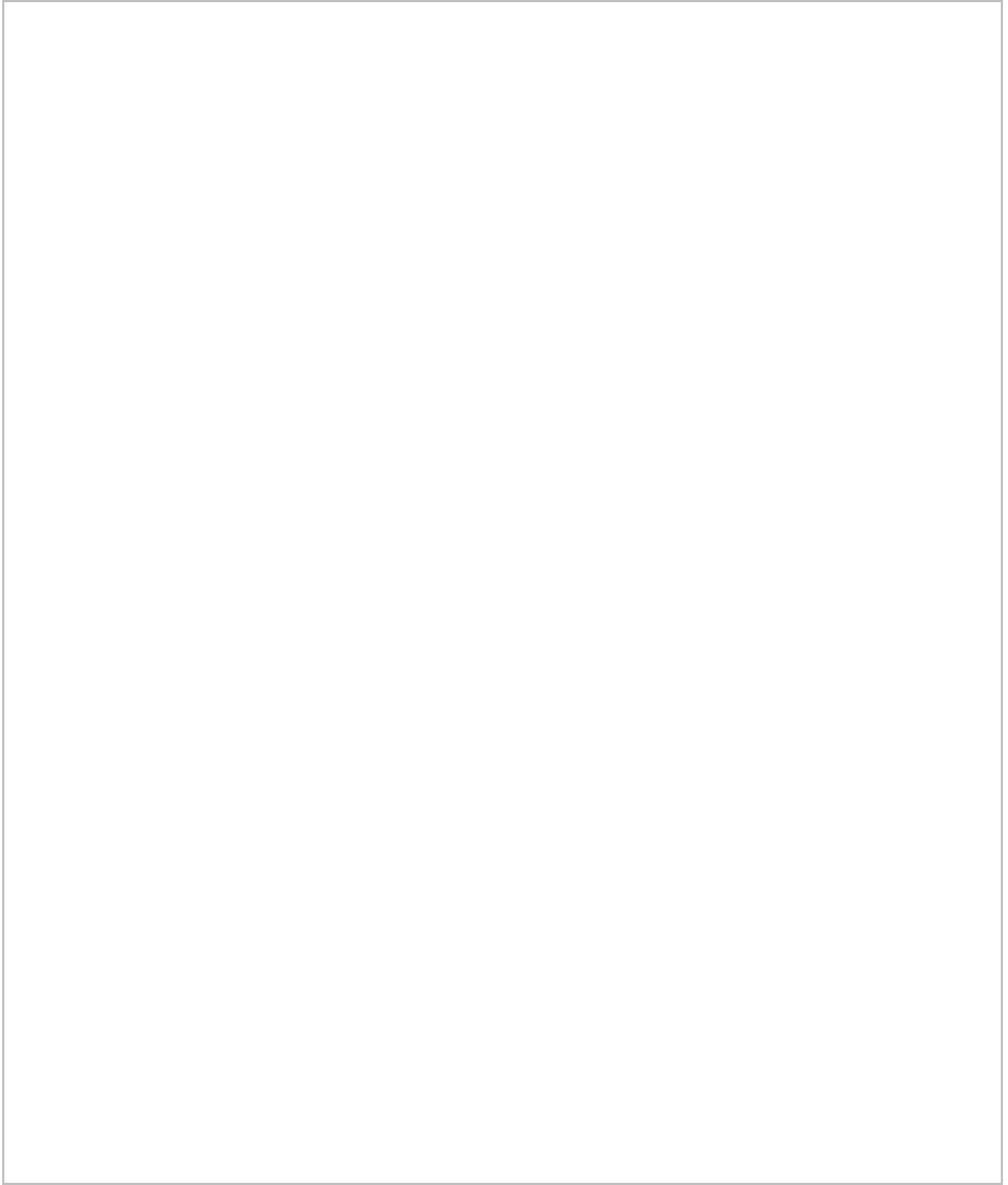
PREPARED BY	TITLE	DATE
EMAIL	PHONE	
APPROVED BY	TITLE	DATE

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



2. MISSION STATEMENT

3. VISION STATEMENT

4. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

4.1 5C ANALYSIS

4.1.1 COMPANY

4.1.2 COLLABORATORS

4.1.3 CUSTOMERS

4.1.4 COMPETITORS

4.1.5 CLIMATE

4.2 SWOT ANALYSIS

CONFIDENTIAL

INTERNAL FACTORS	
STRENGTHS (+)	WEAKNESSES (-)
EXTERNAL FACTORS	
OPPORTUNITIES (+)	THREATS (-)

5. CORE CAPABILITIES

CAPABILITY ONE

CAPABILITY TWO

CAPABILITY THREE

6. GOALS

6.1 SHORT-TERM GOALS

6.1.1 FINANCIAL

6.1.2 PRODUCT

6.1.3 HUMAN RESOURCES

6.1.4 MARKETING

6.2 LONG-TERM GOALS

6.2.1 FINANCIAL

6.2.2 PRODUCT

6.2.3 HUMAN RESOURCES

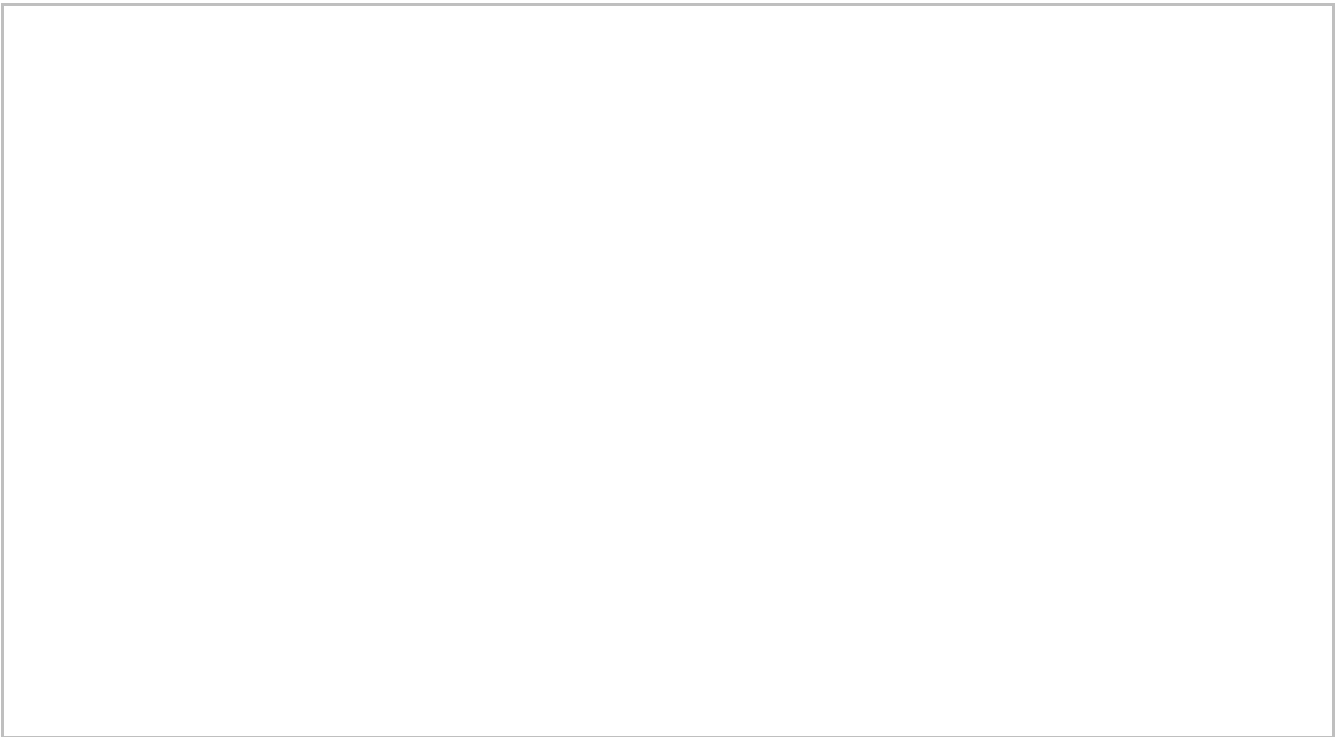
6.2.4 MARKETING

7. TARGET MARKET

7.1 INFORMATION COLLECTION

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7.2 PAIN POINTS

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7.3 SOLUTIONS

7.4 BUYER PERSONA

8. MARKETING STRATEGY

8.1 BUYER'S BUYING CYCLE

8.2 UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION (USP)

8.3 BRANDING

8.4 MARKETING MIX – 4Ps

8.4.1 PRODUCT

8.4.2 PRICE

8.4.3 PLACE

8.4.4 PROMOTION

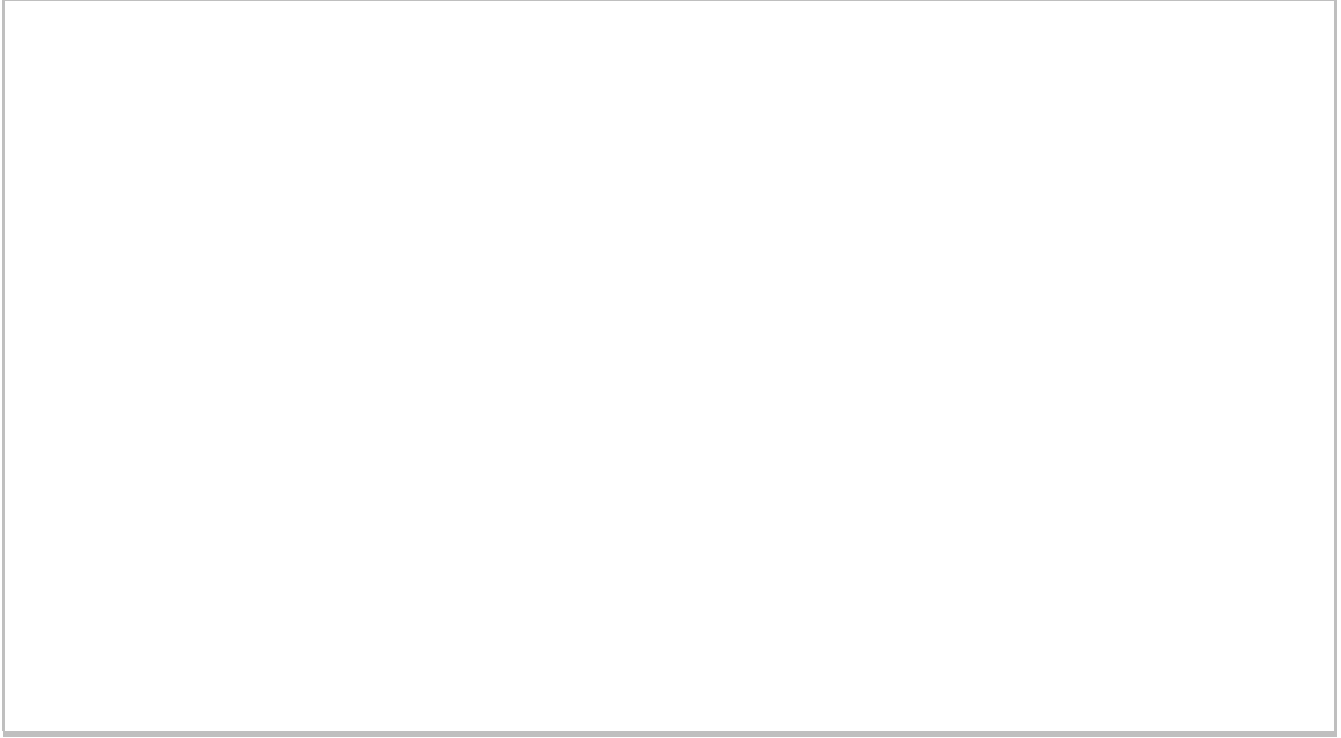
8.5 MARKETING CHANNELS

8.6 BUDGET

Category	Item	Quantity	Unit Price	Total Price
Personnel	Salaries			
	Benefits			
	Travel			
	Other			
Materials	Supplies			
	Equipment			
	Software			
	Other			
Facilities	Rent			
	Utilities			
	Insurance			
	Other			
Marketing	Advertising			
	Public Relations			
	Website Development			
	Other			
Miscellaneous	Travel			
	Meals			
	Entertainment			
	Other			

9. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS & MEASUREMENT METHODS

9.1 STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE



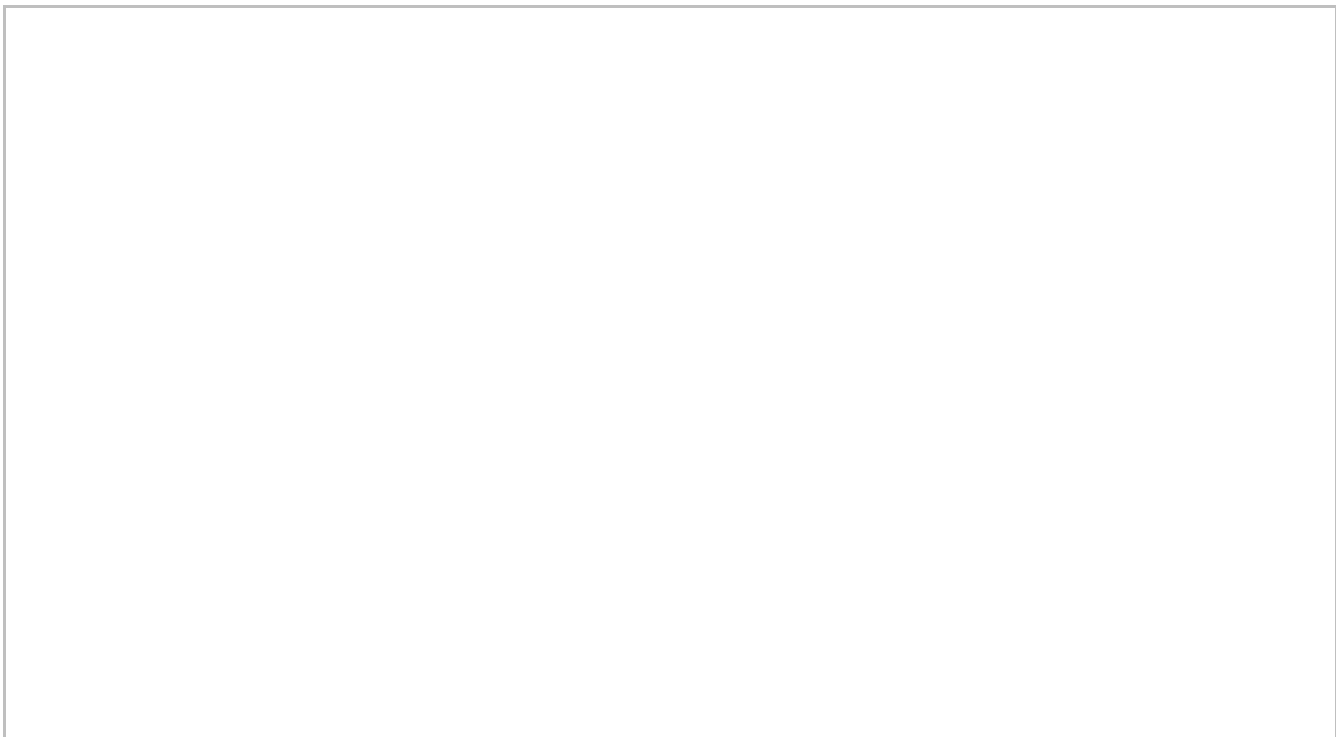
9.2 BENCHMARKS



9.3 MARKETING METRICS TO MEASURE SUCCESS



9.4 MEASUREMENT METHODS



10. FINANCIAL SUMMARY

10.1 FINANCIAL FORECASTS

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for the content of the Financial Forecasts section.

10.2 BREAKEVEN ANALYSIS

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin gray border, intended for the content of the Breakeven Analysis section.

10.3 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

10.3.1 INCOME STATEMENT

10.3.2 CASH FLOW PROJECTION

10.3.3 BALANCE SHEET

11. APPENDIX

11.1 RESEARCH RESULTS



11.2 PRODUCT SPECIFICATIONS AND IMAGES



MARKETING PLAN FOR STARTUPS

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Marketing Plan Template

**TO USE: Save a copy to your drive
or download to use with Microsoft Word**

Marketing Plan for: _____
(Your Business Name)

1. Define Your Audience

Service Area: The service area is the geographic region your small business serves. This could be a series of neighborhoods, a ZIP code, your county, or even an area code your business can reasonably serve with the time and resources you have available. If you're an online business, your service area may be much larger. But try to be as specific as possible. My local service area includes:

Market Demographics: Build a profile of the people living in your service area. Include information about average household income, family size, homeownership rates, median age, and employment statistics. You'll use this to determine whether your local service area is large enough to sustain your business, or whether you need to develop additional products or services to appeal to more of the population base. *If you serve multiple cities or regions, create a table for each one.*

Population	
Number of Households	
Median Age	
Median Household Size	
Median Income	
Employment Rate	
Average Annual Growth Rate	
Number of Businesses	

My Customer Persona/s & Target Audience: For your business to survive, the [customer personas](#) you create must be represented adequately within your selected service area and its demographics. It's likely that you'll end up with more than one ideal customer type, or customer persona. The aggregate of your personas can then be used to describe your target audience.

Characteristic	Customer Persona Name
Age Range	
Gender/s	
Household Income	
Interests	
Education	
Employed?	
Professions / Job Titles	
Pain Points	
Goals When Purchasing a Solution	
Messaging / Value Proposition	

Description of Target Audience: _____

2. Set Goals

List specific, measurable goals you hope to achieve using local marketing in the coming year:

Goal 1: _____

Goal 2: _____

Goal 3: _____

Goal 4: _____

3. Differentiate Yourself from Your Competitors

Value Proposition: Write out your unique value proposition. Specifically, what makes your product or service different and better than the competition's?

Researching the Competition: Find out who your competition is and get to know them. Visit their websites and social media pages. Make notes about what their messages are, how they're connecting with customers, and where their efforts are lacking. Also check out local media and see where else they're advertising. By researching the competition, you can find market gaps that you'll fill with your own marketing efforts.

4. Choose the Types of Marketing You'll Do

Decide which marketing channels you will use to reach your target audience:

Online Marketing	
Offline Marketing	
Paid Advertising	
PR and Community Relations	

5. Craft a Marketing Budget and Create a Marketing Calendar

How much should you spend? A good rule of thumb is marketing should cost no less than 10% of gross revenues. Here is the basic formula for calculating your monthly marketing budget based on gross revenue:

Average Gross Revenue Per Month: _____ x 0.10 = _____

For example: if your gross annual revenue (the amount you take in before any expenses are deducted) is \$120,000, your budget will be \$12,000 a year.

Create a Marketing Calendar: You'll be surprised how far even a small marketing budget can stretch. Use the calendar template below to allocate your budget and plan your marketing activities over the next 12 months.

[Download the Calendar Template](#)

8. Track Progress & Make Adjustments as Needed

Remember the goals you set in step two? Make a checklist of those goals. Include any key performance indicators (KPIs), such as revenue targets, new customer acquisitions, and website traffic. As you reach your goals, check them off the list.

Be sure to track which ads are producing the best results, and make adjustments to optimize your campaign. If one ad is performing well, perhaps you should increase spending on that ad. If one is underperforming, maybe it needs improvement—or perhaps canceling altogether.

Let's Create a Marketing Checklist!

Checklists are a great way for your business to stay on task and be consistent in your approach to marketing. A marketing checklist will help you to ensure that all the important steps are covered.

As shared by SAMANTHA Digital these 15 tasks are must haves on your marketing checklist that helps you develop a successful marketing strategy that fits within your budget and resources.

#1: Define Your Target Audience

Defining your target audience involves identifying the specific group of people who are most likely to be interested in your products or services. To define your target audience, research your market and analyze your competitors.

Look for trends and patterns in customer demographics, behavior, and needs. Consider age, gender, location, income level, interests, pain points, etc.

Once you have a general idea of your target audience, create a buyer persona that outlines the key characteristics of your ideal customer. A buyer persona is a detailed profile of a typical customer, including their name, age, job title, hobbies, goals, challenges, and preferred communication channels. Use this buyer persona as a reference point when developing your marketing strategy.

Your messaging, branding, and marketing tactics should all be tailored to resonate with your target audience and address their specific needs and pain points.

It is also essential to regularly revisit and update your buyer persona as your business evolves and your target audience changes. Conduct customer surveys, analyze website data, and stay up-to-date with industry trends to ensure you effectively reach your target audience.

#2: Set Marketing Goals

Setting clear marketing goals is essential for small business success. Whether you aim to attract new customers, boost sales, enhance customer satisfaction, build credibility, or foster customer loyalty, having specific, measurable digital marketing goals enables you to direct your resources toward the most impactful strategies.

Here are some tips to set effective marketing goals:

- Align your marketing goals with your business objectives: Your marketing goals should support your overall business objectives. For example, if your business goal is to increase revenue by 20%, your marketing goal could be to generate 50 new leads per month.
- Use SMART criteria: Your marketing goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. For instance, your goal to generate 50 new leads per month is specific, measurable, and time-bound. To make it achievable and relevant, you may need to break it down into smaller sub-goals, such as increasing website traffic or improving conversion rates.
- Prioritize your goals: Identify the most critical marketing goals that will have the most significant impact on your business and focus on them first. Once you achieve these goals, you can move on to the next set of objectives.
- Track your progress: Regularly monitor your marketing performance and track your progress toward your goals. This will help you identify what's working and what's not and adjust as needed.

#3: Create a Marketing Budget

Creating a marketing budget is essential for small businesses to allocate their resources effectively and get the most out of their marketing efforts.

Here are some steps to create a marketing budget:

- Define your overall budget: Determine how much you can spend on marketing based on your business's financial situation and goals.
- Identify your marketing channels: Determine which are most effective for your business, such as social media, email marketing, or pay-per-click advertising.

- **Allocate your budget:** Allocate your budget across your marketing channels based on your goals and performance data. For example, if your goal is to increase website traffic, you may allocate more of your budget to search engine optimization (SEO) and pay-per-click advertising.
- **Monitor your spending:** Keep track of your marketing expenses and regularly review your budget to ensure you're staying on track.
- **Be flexible:** Be prepared to adjust your budget as needed based on changes in your business objectives, marketing performance, and market conditions.

We will dive further into budgeting and marketing channels in a later chapters.

#4: Develop a Brand Strategy

Developing a brand strategy is essential for small businesses to establish a strong and recognizable brand identity that resonates with their target audience.

What is a brand strategy? A brand strategy defines your brand's personality, messaging, and visual identity and ensures consistency across all marketing channels.

Here are some tips to develop a brand strategy:

- **Define your brand personality:** Your brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with your brand, such as friendliness, reliability, or innovation. Identify the traits that align with your target audience and business objectives and incorporate them into your brand messaging.
- **Craft your brand messaging:** Your brand messaging is the language and tone you use to communicate with your target audience. Develop a clear and concise brand message highlighting your unique value proposition and resonating with your audience's pain points and aspirations.
- **Create a visual identity:** Your visual identity is the visual elements that represent your brand, such as your logo, color scheme, and typography. Design a visually appealing and memorable brand identity that reflects your brand's personality and values and appeals to your target audience. All branded materials should be consistent.
- **Ensure consistency:** Consistency is key to building a strong and recognizable brand. Ensure that your brand messaging and visual identity are consistent across all marketing channels, including your website, social media, advertising, and other collateral.

By developing a brand strategy, small businesses can establish a strong and recognizable brand identity that sets them apart from competitors and resonates with their target audience.

#5: Build a Website

A website is essential for small businesses to establish an online presence, showcase their products or services, and engage with their target audience.

A website is the hub for all your online marketing activities and can significantly impact your business's success.

Here are some tips to build a website:

- **Define your website goals:** Determine the primary purpose of your website, such as generating leads, promoting your products, or providing customer support. Your website's design, content, and functionality should align with your goals.
- **Choose a platform:** Select a website builder platform that meets your business needs and budget. Platforms like WordPress, Wix, and Squarespace offer easy-to-use templates and drag-and-drop interfaces that allow you to build a professional-looking website quickly.
- **Design your website:** Develop a visually appealing and user-friendly website that reflects your brand identity and engages your target audience. Ensure your website is mobile-responsive and optimized for search engines to maximize its visibility and reach.

- **Create relevant content:** Develop high-quality, relevant, and helpful content that educates, informs, and engages your target audience. Incorporate keywords and phrases that align with your search engine optimization strategy and encourage visitors to take action.
- **Add functionality:** Incorporate functionality that enhances your website's user experience and encourages conversions, such as lead capture forms, chatbots, and customer reviews. And remember to be sure that your website looks great and performs well on mobile devices of all sizes.

By building a website, small businesses can establish an online presence, reach a broader audience, and increase their credibility and authority in their industry.

#6: Optimize for Search Engines

Search engine optimization (SEO) is a crucial marketing tactic for small businesses to improve their website's visibility and rank higher in search engine results pages (SERPs).

Here are some tips to optimize your website for search engine traffic:

- **Conduct keyword research:** Identify relevant and high-traffic keywords and phrases that your target audience uses to search for products or services like yours. Use these keywords throughout your website's content, metadata, and URLs.
- **Optimize your website structure:** Ensure your website's structure is user-friendly and easy to navigate. Use descriptive and concise URLs, include internal linking, and create a sitemap to help search engines crawl and index your website.
- **Develop high-quality content:** Create content that is informative, relevant, and valuable to your target audience. Use keywords strategically and incorporate multimedia, such as images and videos, to make your content engaging and shareable.
- **Earn backlinks:** Backlinks are links from other websites that point to your website. They signal to search engines that your content is valuable and authoritative. Earn backlinks by creating high-quality content that other websites want to link to, guest blogging, or reaching out to influencers in your industry.

An effective SEO strategy can greatly increase visibility with a small business's target market, attract new customers, and drive sales. By optimizing your website for search engines, small businesses can increase their website traffic, generate leads, and improve their online visibility.

Your website and SEO are activities where you may consider hiring a third party to develop.

#7: Leverage Social Media

Social media is a powerful marketing tool for small businesses to reach their target audience and engage with them on a more personal level.

Here are some tips to leverage social media effectively:

- **Choose the right platforms:** Select a social media platform (or platforms) that align with your target audience and business objectives. For example, if you're targeting younger audiences, platforms like TikTok and Instagram may be more effective than LinkedIn.
- **Develop a content strategy:** Develop a content strategy that aligns with your brand messaging and resonates with your target audience. Create a mix of educational, entertaining, and promotional content that encourages engagement and social sharing.
- **Engage with your audience:** Respond to comments and messages promptly, and engage with your audience by asking questions, running polls, and hosting live events.
- **Analyze your results:** Use social media analytics tools to track your performance, measure engagement, and adjust your strategy accordingly.

By leveraging social media, small businesses can increase their brand awareness, reach a broader audience, and build meaningful relationships with their customers.

#8: Start a Blog

Blogging is an effective content marketing strategy for small businesses to establish themselves as thought leaders in their industry, educate their target audience, and drive traffic to their website.

Here are some tips to start a blog:

- **Develop a content strategy:** Develop a content calendar and a content strategy that addresses your target audience's pain points, interests, and questions. Create a mix of informational, educational, and promotional content that aligns with your brand messaging and resonates with your audience.
- **Optimize your content:** Use keywords strategically throughout your blog post, optimize your headlines and meta descriptions, and use multimedia, such as images and videos, to make your content more engaging.
- **Promote your blog:** Promote your blog to your social media followers, via email marketing, and guest blogging. Encourage social sharing and engagement by including social sharing buttons and asking for feedback and comments.
- **Analyze your results:** Use analytics tools to track your blog's performance, measure engagement, and adjust your strategy accordingly.

By starting a blog, small businesses can establish themselves as thought leaders, drive traffic to their website, and generate leads and sales.

#9: Invest in Paid Advertising

In addition to organic search and social media efforts, small businesses can also invest in paid advertising to reach their target audience and drive traffic, leads, and sales.

One popular form of paid advertising is pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, which allows businesses to display ads on search engine results pages (SERPs) and other websites, and only pay when a user clicks on the ad.

To get started with PPC advertising, small businesses should first determine their advertising budget and choose the right keywords and targeting options to ensure their ads are shown to the right audience.

It's also important to create compelling ad copy and landing pages that encourage users to take action, such as making a purchase or filling out a form.

In addition to PPC advertising, small businesses can also consider other forms of paid advertising, such as sponsored content or display advertising on social media platforms.

By investing in paid advertising, small businesses can expand their reach and generate new leads and customers.

#10: Implement Email Marketing

Email marketing is a cost-effective and highly targeted way for small businesses to reach and engage their audience. With email marketing, businesses can send personalized messages to subscribers based on their interests, behavior, and stage in the customer journey.

To get started with an email marketing strategy, small businesses should first build their email list by offering a lead magnet or incentive in exchange for users' contact information.

Once the list is built, businesses can create a content strategy that includes a mix of promotional and educational content, such as product updates, industry news, and how-to guides.

It's also important to segment the email list and personalize the messages based on subscribers' interests and behavior. This can help increase engagement and conversions, as users are more likely to respond to messages that are relevant to their needs.

Finally, small businesses should use analytics tools to track the performance of their email campaigns and optimize their strategy over time.

By monitoring open rates, click-through rates, and other key metrics, businesses can identify what works and what doesn't, and adjust their email marketing approach accordingly.

#11: Nurture Leads

Once a small business has captured a lead through their website or other marketing channels, it's important to nurture that lead through the sales funnel and convert them into a customer. Marketing automation tools can help automate this process by sending personalized messages and content to leads at key points in the customer journey.

To nurture leads effectively, small businesses should first define their buyer personas and create a content strategy that addresses their pain points and interests.

This may include blog posts, case studies, videos, or other types of content that educate and inform leads.

Next, businesses should use marketing automation tools to send targeted messages to leads based on their behavior and stage in the customer journey.

For example, businesses may send a welcome email to new subscribers, a promotional offer to leads who have shown interest in a particular product, or a follow-up email to leads who have abandoned their shopping cart.

It's also important to personalize the messages and content based on the lead's interests and behavior, as this can help increase engagement and conversions.

Finally, businesses should use analytics tools to track the performance of their lead nurturing efforts and adjust their strategy as needed.

By nurturing leads effectively, small businesses can increase their chances of converting them into customers and driving revenue growth.

#12: Claim Your Online Listings

Claiming your online business listing slash listings is a critical step in establishing a strong online presence for your business.

Online listings refer to any directory or platform that displays your business's information, such as your name, address, phone number, and website URL.

Examples of online listings include Google My Business, Yelp, Bing Places, and Facebook.

Claiming your online listings involves verifying that you are the owner or representative of your business, and ensuring that all the information displayed on these platforms is accurate and up-to-date.

This can help potential customers find your business more easily, and can also improve your search engine rankings and online reputation.

Here are some tips for claiming your online listings:

1. Start with the most popular platforms: Begin by claiming your business listings on the most popular directories, such as Google My Business, Yelp, and Facebook. These platforms receive high levels of traffic and can have a significant impact on your online visibility.
2. Verify your information: Make sure that all the information listed on these platforms is accurate and up-to-date. This includes your business name, business hours, company's mission, address, phone number, website URL, and hours of operation.
3. Optimize your listing: Take advantage of all the features offered by these platforms to optimize your listing. This can include adding photos, responding to reviews, and promoting special offers or events.
4. Monitor your listings: Regularly monitor your online listings to ensure that all the information is accurate and up-to-date. This can help you identify and address any errors or inconsistencies that may arise.
5. Be consistent: Ensure that your business information is consistent across all the platforms where it is listed. This can help improve your search engine ranking and online reputation.

By claiming your online listings, you can establish a strong online presence for your business and improve your visibility among potential customers. It is a simple yet effective step that can have a significant impact on your overall marketing strategy.

#13: Monitor and Analyze Performance

Once you have implemented your marketing plan, it is important to monitor and analyze its performance to ensure that you are achieving your goals and making the most of your marketing budget.

There are several key metrics that you should track, including website traffic, conversion rates, social media engagement,

and email open rates.

Luckily, there are many free digital technologies to monitor website performance.

To monitor your performance effectively, use analytics tools such as Google Analytics or Hootsuite Insights to track your metrics over time and identify trends and patterns.

Set up custom reports and dashboards to make it easy to track your progress toward your goals.

In addition to tracking your metrics, it is important to analyze your data and use it to inform your marketing strategy. Identify which channels and tactics are driving the most traffic and conversions, and adjust your marketing plan accordingly. A/B testing and experimenting with different marketing approaches can also help you identify what works best for your business.

Here are some resources that may be helpful:

1. How To Verify Your Domain In Google Search Console
2. How to Connect Google Analytics in WordPress
3. How To Set up Google Analytics 4 for Showit (in 2 minutes)

#14: Stay Up-To-Date

The marketing landscape is constantly evolving, and it's important to stay up-to-date on the latest trends, technologies, and best practices.

By staying informed, you can ensure that your marketing efforts remain relevant and effective.

There are a number of ways to stay up-to-date on the latest marketing trends.

You can subscribe to industry publications, attend conferences and events, join online communities and forums, or follow thought leaders on social media.

Another important way to stay up-to-date is to continually experiment and try new things.

Marketing is all about testing and learning, so don't be afraid to try out new channels, tactics, or messaging to see what works best for your business.

#15: Build a Community

Building a community is a powerful way to connect with your audience and foster brand loyalty.

A community is a group of people who share a common interest or goal, and building a community around your business can help you establish a meaningful relationship with your customers.

One effective way to build a community is by creating a social media group or forum where customers can connect with each other and discuss topics related to your industry or products.

You can also organize events, webinars, or meetups where customers can network and share their experiences.

Another key aspect of building a community is to actively engage with your followers on social media and other channels. Respond to comments and messages promptly, share user-generated content, and create content that encourages discussion and interaction. By building a community, you can create a network of loyal customers who will promote your business and help it grow.

As you know, marketing is an ongoing and fluid process, and your strategy will evolve over time. Remember to regularly revisit and refine your strategy as your business and audience evolves.

Now that we have laid out a plan to follow, let's explore marketing strategies in more detail. All of this planning will help your business drive growth and success while keeping your entire team engaged and informed.

SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING CHECKLIST

Use this form to build, review and strengthen your marketing strategy.

Business: _____

Date: _____

Completed by: _____

Review date: _____

☐

1. Define Your Target Audience

- Identify the customers most likely to need or value your products or services.
- Research customer demographics, behaviors, interests, needs and pain points.
- Review your competitors and look for market trends or gaps.
- Create or update a buyer persona for your ideal customer.

☐

2. Set Marketing Goals

- Align marketing goals with your overall business objectives.
- Create goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).
- Prioritize the goals that will have the greatest impact.
- Choose how and when progress will be measured.

☐

3. Create a Marketing Budget

- Determine how much your business can realistically spend on marketing.
- Identify the marketing channels that best support your goals.
- Allocate funds across your selected channels.
- Track spending and adjust the budget as needed.

☐

4. Develop a Brand Strategy

- Define your brand personality and the traits you want customers to associate with your business.
- Create a clear, concise brand message and value proposition.
- Establish a consistent visual identity, including logo, colors and typography.
- Use consistent messaging and visuals across all marketing channels.

☐

5. Build or Review Your Website

- Define the primary goal of your website.
- Choose a platform that fits your needs, skills and budget.
- Make sure the site is visually appealing, easy to navigate and mobile-friendly.
- Create useful content that reflects your brand and encourages visitors to take action.
- Add helpful features such as contact forms, reviews, online booking or lead capture.

☐

6. Optimize for Search Engines

- Research the words and phrases customers use to find businesses like yours.
- Use relevant keywords in website copy, page titles, descriptions and URLs.
- Make sure your website structure is easy for visitors and search engines to navigate.
- Create high-quality content and look for opportunities to earn backlinks.

☐

7. Leverage Social Media

- Choose the platforms most relevant to your target audience.
- Develop a realistic content strategy and posting schedule.
- Share a mix of educational, entertaining and promotional content.
- Respond to comments and messages promptly.
- Review analytics and adjust your approach.

☐

8. Start or Maintain a Blog

- Create a content calendar based on customer questions, interests and needs.
- Use clear headlines, keywords, images and helpful information.
- Promote blog posts through social media and email.
- Track traffic and engagement to learn which topics perform best.

☐

9. Invest in Paid Advertising

- Set an advertising budget and campaign goal.
- Choose the right platform, keywords and audience targeting.
- Create clear ad copy and a strong call to action.
- Send users to a relevant, easy-to-use landing page.
- Measure results before increasing your investment.

☐

10. Implement Email Marketing

- Build your email list using permission-based sign-ups.
- Plan a mix of promotional and educational content.
- Segment your list and personalize messages when possible.
- Track open rates, click-through rates and conversions.
- Use the results to improve future campaigns.

☐

11. Nurture Leads

- Define the steps a potential customer takes before making a purchase.
- Create useful content for different stages of the customer journey.
- Send timely welcome, follow-up or promotional messages.
- Personalize communications based on customer interests and behavior.
- Track results and refine your follow-up process.

☐

12. Claim and Maintain Online Listings

- Claim your business profiles on major directories and platforms.
- Verify your business name, address, phone number, website and hours.
- Add photos, services, products and other useful information.
- Respond to reviews and keep all listings accurate and consistent.

☐

13. Monitor and Analyze Performance

- Track website traffic, conversions, social media engagement and email performance.
- Create a simple dashboard or recurring report.
- Identify which channels and tactics are generating the best results.
- Test new approaches and adjust your plan based on the data.

☐

14. Stay Up-to-Date

- Follow trusted industry publications, organizations or thought leaders.
- Attend relevant workshops, webinars, conferences or networking events.
- Regularly test new tools, channels and messaging.
- Review your strategy as customer behavior and technology change.

☐

15. Build a Community

- Create opportunities for customers to connect with your business and one another.
- Engage with followers and respond to questions or comments.
- Share customer stories and user-generated content.
- Consider events, webinars, groups or meetups.
- Encourage loyal customers to refer and advocate for your business.

Planning Your Marketing Budget

Why do you need a marketing budget? A marketing budget does three important things:

1) It forces strategic thinking. When money is limited, you have to choose. That constraint makes you prioritize the activities most likely to drive results. Unlimited budgets lead to scattered efforts.

2) It enables measurement. If you don't know what you spent, you can't calculate return on investment. A budget creates accountability and lets you learn what's working.

3) It protects your business. Without a budget, marketing spend tends to creep up during good times and disappear during tough times. Neither extreme serves you well. A budget brings discipline. (AdWave 2026)

So if you're going to jump into a marketing strategy, make sure you set your boundaries. Realistic boundaries.

Now, let's develop a budget for your marketing strategy. Here are some guidelines for your consideration. The most common budget total is a percentage of revenue. Industry research suggests:

Established businesses (maintaining market share): 5-10% of gross revenue

Growth-focused businesses: 10-20% of gross revenue

Startups building awareness: 15-25% of projected revenue

These ranges come from surveys by the U.S. Small Business Administration and various industry groups. They are great starting ranges for your planning purposes.

While it is typical to use a percentage of revenue as a guideline for your budget, you will also want to take into account your marketing goals, amount of competition and stage of business.

Succeeding Small lays out six things for you to consider:



While we spoke about revenue guidelines above, here is some data on how various industries typically spend.

- **Professional services firms spend 6-10% of revenue**
- **Retail businesses spend 10-15% of revenue**
- **Restaurants typically spend 3-6% but heavier on location and signage.**

Your competitive landscape matters too. If competitors are spending aggressively on advertising, you may need to match their investment to stay visible.

They also lay out a great checklist of items that you may want to include in your budget.

Think of your marketing investments falling into two categories: upfront and ongoing. (Remember your logo, branding, and website need to be in place before you can market on an ongoing basis.) Other upfront expenses may include:

- Domain name
- Website hosting
- Business cards
- Print marketing material (flyers, brochures, door hangers)
- Digital graphic design materials (social media post graphics, website graphics, etc.)
- Marketing tools (if you are designing your marketing in-house)
- Promotional merchandise

Examples of ongoing marketing expenses help you take your strategy to the next level by promoting your business and increasing sales.

These ongoing investments may include the following:

- SEO (search engine optimization)
- Social media marketing
- Paid advertising
- Ad spend (the money spent on paid advertising like Google Ads, campaigns, or social media ads)
- Traditional marketing (TV, radio advertising, etc.)
- Direct mail
- Email marketing
- Content marketing
- Influencer marketing

You do not need to invest in ALL things marketing! The strategy you design will dictate where you're investing your marketing dollars.

Here is a template that can keep your budgeting process on track:

Marketing Budget Guide & Template

Use the guide questions on the first two pages to help you identify your marketing budget. Then, use the templates on the following pages to set, allocate, and track your budget.

What are your main marketing objectives? (growing brand awareness, increasing sales, etc.)	
What are the key performance indicators (KPIs) for your objectives? (gaining 1,000 leads, new social media followers, etc.)	
What marketing strategies will you use to reach your objectives? (growing local SEO, joining local events, etc.)	
How long will your marketing budget run? (One quarter, six months, one year, etc.)	

What are your previous marketing campaign metrics? (your previous average CPC, conversion rates, etc.)	
What are your new target metrics?	
What is your total business revenue (or total starting capital)?	
What percentage of your revenue/capital will you allocate to your marketing budget?	
Set your total marketing budget:	

Marketing Objectives	Marketing Strategies	Budget Allocation (Total: \$_____)	Actual Spend
Objective 1:			
Objective 2:			
Objective 3:			
Objective 4:			

Marketing Objectives	Marketing Strategies	Budget Allocation (Total: \$_____)	Actual Spend
Objective 5:			

Marketing Metrics (CPL, CPC, conversion rates, etc.)	Target	Actual

MARKETING IDEAS FOR SMALL BUSINESS

The Media Ant shared a great article titled *“Best Small Business Marketing Ideas for 2026 Success”* which can help you think through what is trending in small business marketing today. These activities range from no cost/low cost to a heftier price tag.

A. Digital Marketing Ideas

- **LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA ADS**

Social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube let you target specific audiences with precision. For example, a local fitness studio in Bengaluru can run Instagram ads targeting young adults interested in fitness within a 10-kilometer radius.

- **CREATE ENGAGING REELS AND SHORT VIDEOS.**

Short-form videos are taking over! Create fun, educational, or behind-the-scenes reels to connect with your audience. A fitness studio can post quick workout tips to attract fitness enthusiasts- it's fun, shareable and builds trust.

- **INVEST IN LOCAL SEO* AND GOOGLE MY BUSINESS.**

If your business serves a local audience, optimize your Google My Business profile. Update your contact details, post photos, and encourage happy customers to leave reviews. For example, a beauty salon can boost foot traffic by appearing in “salons near me” searches.

*Search engine optimization (SEO) is the practice of getting targeted traffic to a website from a search engine's organic (unpaid) rankings. The goal of SEO is to rank your website higher in search results for queries—known as keywords—related to your business.)

- **USE EMAIL MARKETING WITH PERSONALIZATION.**

Email isn't dead—it's just smarter now. Send personalized emails with offers based on past purchases or preferences.

- **PARTNER WITH INFLUENCERS (MICRO-INFLUENCERS AND NICHE INFLUENCERS).**

You don't need a celebrity influencer. You can collaborate with influencers in your niche who can speak directly to your product/service. A local clothing brand could team up with a fashion blogger to reach a broader audience. This can help your business reach the desired target audience of your brand and will last.

- **OPTIMIZE FOR VOICE SEARCH.**

With voice assistants like Alexa, Siri, and Ok Google becoming household staples, tailor your SEO for voice queries like “best vegan restaurants near me.”

- **CREATE EVERGREEN BLOG CONTENT AND GUIDES.**

Write helpful content like “How to ... (your product/service here)” that remains relevant year-round, drawing organic traffic. Create a guide for beginners who want to know the nitty-gritty of your business that might not be available easily over the internet.

B. Offline Marketing Ideas

- **HOST LOCAL EVENTS OR WORKSHOPS.**

Bring your community together with workshops or open house events. Example: A photography studio could teach a basic editing class, which doubles as a way to showcase their skills.

- **USE FLYERS, POSTERS, AND BROCHURES.**

These might sound old-school, but they work wonders for local outreach. Distribute them at community centers, chambers of commerce, cafes, or schools.

- **COLLABORATE WITH OTHER LOCAL BUSINESSES.**

Team up with complementary businesses. Example: a yoga studio and a health food café could cross-promote each other's services.

- **SPONSOR COMMUNITY EVENTS OR CHARITIES.**

Aligning your brand with a good cause not only helps the community but also helps to boost your reputation in a positive fashion.

C. Cost-Effective Marketing Ideas

- **USE REFERRAL PROGRAMS TO ATTRACT MORE CUSTOMERS.**

Word-of-mouth is powerful. Offer discounts or freebies to customers who refer their friends.

- **CREATE A LOYALTY PROGRAM FOR REPEAT CUSTOMERS.**

Reward loyal customers with points they can redeem for discounts. Example: A local café can offer a free coffee after 10 purchases.

- **RUN CONTESTS AND GIVEAWAYS.**

Host social media contests to boost engagement. Example: a clothing brand could ask followers to share their best styling tips and offer a free outfit as the prize.

D. Technology-Driven Marketing Ideas

- **USE CHATBOTS FOR CUSTOMER SUPPORT.**

Chatbots provide instant responses to customer queries, even at odd hours. They're affordable and improve customer satisfaction.

- **LEVERAGE AI TOOLS FOR CONTENT AND CAMPAIGN AUTOMATION.**

AI tools can help you schedule social media posts, write blog content, or analyze customer data—all while saving time.

- **BUILD A MOBILE APP FOR DIRECT ENGAGEMENT.**

If your business has a loyal customer base, an app can provide personalized offers and easy access to your services.

E. Creative and Unique Marketing Ideas

- **USE USER-GENERATED CONTENT (CUSTOMER STORIES, TESTIMONIALS).**

Share real customer stories on your social media or website. It's authentic, relatable, and builds trust.

- **CREATE VIRAL CHALLENGES ON SOCIAL MEDIA.**

Start a fun challenge to engage your audience. Think along the lines of creative photo poses or quirky product uses.

- **START A PODCAST TO SHARE EXPERTISE.**

Podcasts are a fantastic way to connect with your audience on a deeper level. Example: a marketing agency could launch a podcast on "Small Business Growth Hacks."

- **LEVERAGE ECO-FRIENDLY AND SUSTAINABLE MARKETING INITIATIVES.**

Consumers love businesses that care about the environment. Use eco-friendly packaging or run a "plant a tree with every purchase" campaign.

F. Seasonal Marketing Ideas

- **PLAN CAMPAIGNS AROUND HOLIDAYS (CHRISTMAS, INDEPENDENCE DAY).**

Create special offers or festive-themed campaigns during holidays to attract seasonal shoppers. This is a great time to collaborate with other businesses or participate in Chamber of Commerce activities designed to market their members.

- **USE DATA TO TARGET SEASONAL TRENDS.**

Analyze past sales data to identify trends and plan your campaigns accordingly.

- **CREATE LIMITED-TIME OFFERS AND FLASH SALES.**

Scarcity drives urgency! Limited-time deals can encourage quick action.

Remember, consistency, creativity, and knowing your audience will guide you to the correct strategies. Make sure to measure each activity so that you can make any necessary changes to be successful.

MARKETING HOW TO'S

Now that you have created a budget, developed a strategy and have a checklist in hand, it is time to get more into the marketing weeds. This section will detail “how to” and best practices for some of the most popular marketing activities.

YOUR WEBSITE

One of the core marketing tools is a website. It is a great way to provide your customers and potential customers information about your business. Did you know that 80% of US consumers search online for local businesses on a weekly basis and 32% search for them daily (SOCi Consumer Behavior Index 2024)?

Here are 5 reasons why a website should be a cornerstone of your marketing efforts:

- Find customers
- Build credibility
- Better serve your existing customers
- Expand your market
- Stay competitive

Your website is the “digital front door” to your business and you want to provide essential information that encourages potential customers to “step inside”. Here are the key components you should include:

- A clear explanation of what you do and who you do it for.
- A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section that handles common objections.
- A pricing or “How It Works” page.
- An “About Us” section that states why you started the business or what makes you different from your competition.
- Contact information.

Don't overthink your initial site or wait until everything is “perfect” to launch it. A website is fluid and will change and grow as your business does. For example, you may add additional items like a blog, customer testimonials, photos of your staff, etc.

Do, however, make sure that the information on your site is correct and kept up-to-date. Proofread everything before you make the site live! Your website is a reflection of your business and this is your chance to build trust and credibility. Don't have the in-house capabilities to develop your website? No problem. There are plenty of options for you to get the job done.

Why Hire a Professional for Web Design and Development?

Lightburn.co does a good job of providing the ins and outs of hiring a professional web design company. It isn't just about making your site look good – it's about creating a seamless user experience that drives results. A well-designed website reflects your brand, builds trust, and can even boost your SEO rankings.

Here's why working with a professional agency can give you the competitive edge:

- **Expertise and Experience:** Agencies bring a team of specialists. For a website project, those agencies will have specialists in design, development, and digital marketing. This trio ensures your site functions seamlessly and aligns with your business goals.
- **Time and Cost Efficiency:** While using internal resources to do it yourself might seem more budget-friendly, a professional approach saves you time and future expenses related to troubleshooting, redesigns, and other limitations. It also keeps your staff focused on their day-to-day responsibilities.
- **Integrated Solutions:** By combining web design and development with marketing strategies, agencies ensure your website isn't just visually appealing but also optimized for search engines and conversion focused.
Let's talk about the red flags you should look for:
Before committing to a web design company, be aware of common pitfalls that could lead to wasted time and money:
- **Vague Proposals and Hidden Costs:** Always ask for detailed quotes and be wary of vague language that could signal hidden charges.
- **Limited Portfolio or References:** If a designer or agency has little to show in terms of past work or client feedback, proceed with caution.
- **Poor Communication:** Responsive, transparent communication is key. If you're struggling to get clear answers early on,

consider it a red flag.

Navigating the hiring process can be straightforward if you follow these steps:

- 1. Define Your Needs:** Be specific about the type of site you need, the functionality you're looking for, and your budget. This clarity will guide you in finding the right fit.
- 2. Research and Shortlist:** Look for agencies or designers with experience in your industry and check their reviews, portfolios, and case studies.
- 3. Conduct Interviews:** Whether in-person or over audio/video calls, discussing your vision helps assess whether the team's style and approach match your needs.
- 4. Request Proposals:** A professional agency will provide a proposal that outlines timelines, deliverables, and pricing.

While there's nothing wrong with finding a web design and development partner that is geographically distant from you. There are also benefits to looking local. Local agencies and designers offer benefits that go beyond what remote companies or freelancers can provide:

- **Community Insight:** Local agencies understand the local market, allowing them to create more targeted designs and strategies.
- **In-Person Collaboration:** The opportunity to meet face-to-face fosters better collaboration and trust.
- **Proven Track Record:** Local agencies are invested in their community, often showcasing work that has made a real impact for neighboring businesses.

Choosing an agency that offers web design and marketing as part of their services ensures your website doesn't just look good but performs exceptionally. Make sure you do your homework and choose wisely.



SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Now that you have your website up and running, you may consider expanding your marketing efforts to other social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc. Your messages can be consistent across the platforms saving you time but expanding your reach.

HubSpot reminds us that “posting regularly builds visibility — but what really earns trust is how you show up when people reach out. Social media isn’t just a content channel; it’s a two-way street”.

By understanding that your social media activities are meant to serve as way to communicate with customers/potential customers, you will need to train yourself and your staff to be vigilant. For example, put a simple rule in place: respond to every comment, mention, and direct message within 24 hours. While it takes time to do so, your efforts will pay off. Customers and prospects will feel seen and heard.

Before you know it, this will become second nature. Here are a few simple habits that HubSpot suggests:

- Like or reply to every customer comment or shout-out.
- Answer questions publicly when possible (others are watching, too).
- Use replies as a source of content inspiration — your audience is telling you what they care about.

There are many types of social media to evaluate for your marketing strategy, but this graphic highlights some things to consider when choosing a platform.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING PLATFORMS			
	PEOPLE	CONTENT	STRATEGIES
	• 25-34 • Boomers	• Photos & links • Information • Live video	• Local mkting • Advertising • Relationships
	• 18-25 • 26-35	• How-tos • Webinars • Explainers	• Organic • SEO • Advertising
	• 18-24, 25-34 • Millennials	• Inspiration & adventure • Questions/polls	• Ecommerce • Organic • Influencer
	• 25-34, 35-49 • Educated/ wealthy	• News • Discussion • Humor	• Customer service • Ads for males
	• 46-55 • Professionals	• Long-form content • Core values	• B2B • Organic • International
	• 10-19 • Female (60%)	• Entertainment • Humor • Challenges	• Influencer marketing • Series content
	• 13-17, 25-34 • Teens	• Silly • Feel-good • Trends	• Video ads • Location-based mkting • App mkting
			

When you start, choose 1-3 platforms where your potential customers would most likely be. Commit to a posting schedule that you can maintain and remember the key is QUALITY not QUANTITY in your messages. But don't overthink your post either. A quick post, photo, testimonial or meme can catch the attention of your intended audience.

BLOG

One of the best definitions of a “blog” that I have found is “it’s the sharing of insight and information on a consistent basis through your own designated online portal”. It is also a way that your business can share your expertise and products/services in a more conversational way while being an inexpensive option for marketing. Approximately 60% of small businesses currently are blogging!

Business.com outlines **six** key benefits of adding a blog to your marketing strategy.

HIGHER SEO RANKINGS

Search engine optimization (SEO) is the method often used to get your company’s website to rank well in search results when potential customers search for the product or service you offer. To rank highly, your site needs recent, relevant blog posts featuring popular keywords and search terms.

Traffic to your blog — and other pages on your website — is indexed by search engines. Search engines favor websites that regularly publish fresh, relevant content. Each blog post creates a new indexed page on your website, giving search engines more opportunities to display your content in search results. With AI-powered search features increasingly pulling from authoritative sources to generate responses, having comprehensive, well-structured blog content positions your business as a trusted resource that these systems can reference.

This increased traffic isn’t just about quantity — it’s about attracting the right visitors who are actively searching for solutions your business provides. Additionally, the more often others share your content and link back to your blog, the more chances there are for your site to rank for keyword searches your ideal customers conduct. In other words, blogging has a chain reaction that ultimately leads to higher SEO rankings that, in turn, can improve your revenue by bringing more people to your business.

HUMANIZING YOUR COMPANY

A huge part of business success depends on growing customer relationships. People want to know who you are, how you operate your business, what your values are and what your business adds to the industry.

It’s difficult to explain all of that on a website landing page, but a blog allows you the space and provides an opportunity to develop a personality for your brand to help, entertain and inspire others and to put relationships before sales. A blog familiarizes people with your business and humanizes your organization and people trust companies they get to know well. Additionally, a blog can shine a spotlight on your customers.

EASIER CROSS PROMOTION

When you have a blog with great content, you can promote it all over social media with compelling and intriguing teasers, images and catchy headlines. Think of your blog as the hub and your social media channels as the outposts. Find out where your target audience hangs out online and use those platforms to build followings and relationships. Post intriguing snippets with links back to specific blog posts.

Every click on your blog is important for improving SEO and building brand awareness. When you add share buttons to blog posts and those buttons are placed correctly, you increase the opportunity for readers to share your posts with their communities, thus creating more brand promotion and opportunities for SEO indexing. That’s why it’s important to use your social media accounts every day to share the content on your blog — it’s an easy way to advertise your business and gain social currency.

BUILT-IN NEWSLETTER CONTENT

If you’re not working on building your email list, you should be. A blog post is a perfect place to ask for that conversion. At the bottom of each post, urge readers to subscribe to your email list and have all of your posts delivered to them automatically. If you’ve written a popular post, you may also want to send it out to your email list as part of your company’s email newsletter. In such a newsletter, it’s important to give just enough information to keep readers engaged but not so much that they have no reason to visit your blog to read more. The idea of a newsletter is to engage the reader and encourage them to click through links in the email content to take them to your blog. We will talk more about e-mail options in the next section.

BETTER CONVERSION RATES

You want visitors to your blog to do several things: sign up for your newsletter, share what you've written, like you enough to link to other pages on your site and, most crucially, make a purchase. The more you blog, the more chances you have for conversion.

Be sure to include a "call to action" at the end of your blog as suggested above. Perhaps you may choose to add a coupon, chance to win a prize or a digital download about your product/service.

By requesting visitors to sign up, you can then add these prospects to your customer database and market directly to them via email and across social channels.

IMPROVED AUTHORITY

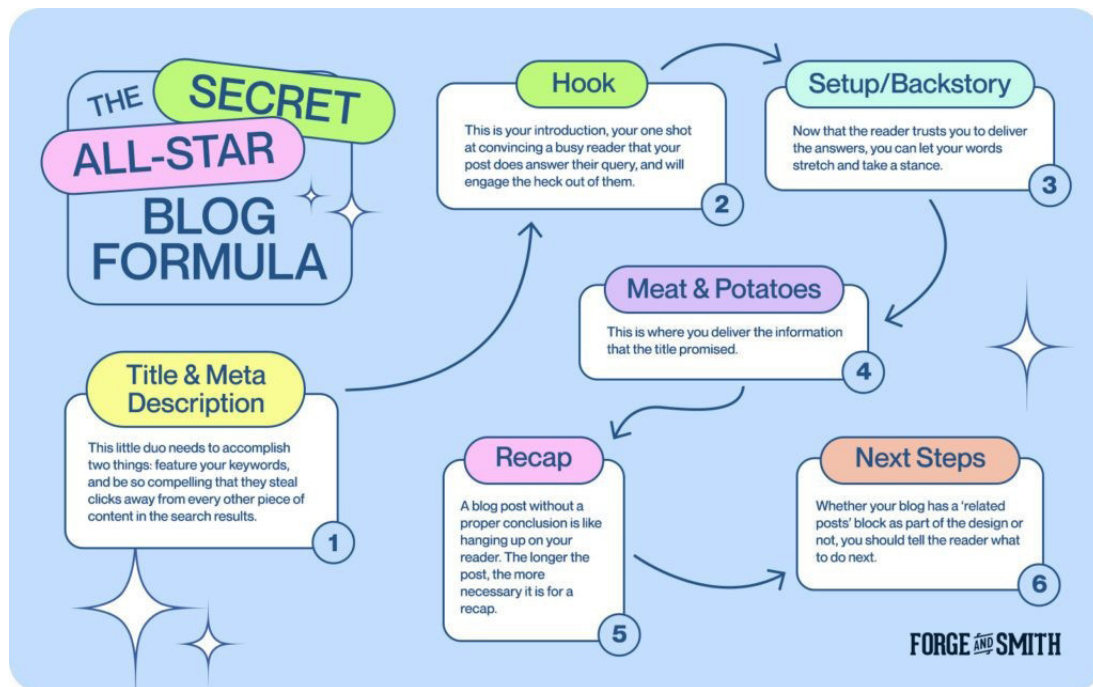
Blogging can help establish your expertise in your field. Posting valuable content consistently helps people identify your business as a useful resource, resulting in repeat viewership. This can send signals to search engines like Google that your site is a quality source. This is particularly beneficial for small businesses. Establishing yourself as a market authority can place you higher than competitors in search engine results, leading even more potential customers to your site.

Publishing insights about industry trends, sharing lessons learned from client projects and offering expert commentary on developments in your field all contribute to building authority. This expertise becomes particularly valuable when potential customers research solutions and compare providers.

Blogging is a cost-effective traffic driver. By producing valuable content that remains relevant, you'll convert more customers and generate higher revenue. Plus, repeated demonstration of your expertise and authority will fuel customer trust, making them more likely to make a purchase.

Next, let's look at how to create a successful blog protocol that will keep your message consistent, clear and relevant.





Forge and Smith have developed an “All-Star Secret Blog Formula” (above) to help small businesses navigate the blogging world. Let’s break it down step by step.

Step 1: Title & Meta Description

This little duo needs to accomplish two things: feature your keywords, and be so compelling that they steal clicks away from every other piece of content in the search results or social feed. That’s a lot of pressure!

You want to make your content sound like it’s everything a potential customer wants and needs in that moment – without lying, of course. If your content doesn’t live up to the title, your blog post will have a high bounce rate and do nothing for your SEO or conversions.

You can find lots of tips from industry pros on how to write unique and irresistible titles, like this one from Copyblogger and this one from Wordstream.

Keep in mind that Google truncates titles, especially on mobile devices, so make sure that the first few words contain the goods.

Step 2: Hook

This is your introduction, your one shot at convincing a busy reader that your post does answer their query, and will engage them. You have to hook ‘em fast, because there are literally thousands of other search results waiting for them to bounce back!

Get right to the point. Reiterate their problem, and explain how you’re going to solve it through this blog post. It’s a vote of confidence if the keywords they searched appear somewhere in those first paragraphs – which should be short. Being concise does not mean boring! **Your hook is also where you set the tone.**

- The best blog posts feel like a conversation with someone on your team
- Don’t fret about rigidly correct grammar (unless that’s your audience’s preference); use the same language you’d use with customers on the phone or in person
- Make sure that your tone is appropriate for the mood of someone reading the topic – are they anxious? Angry? Excited? Desperate?

Bolster your hook with supporting content like strong visuals and, if it’s a meaty topic, a table of contents. Throw some stats into the hook or at the top of the following section, because numbers validate your point of view.

Step 3: Setup or Backstory

Now that the reader trusts you to deliver the answers, you can let your words stretch and take a stance. This is the place to get more colorful or personal (if that’s the tone), and to provide any needed backstory to support the post.

It could be the reason you wrote the post, how you gained the insights, or explanations of the main topic to make sure everybody is on the same page. Your reader might have a totally different idea of the meaning, or a bias that you're about to challenge!

Consider an optimized heading or two, paragraphs that clearly state the perspective on, or definition of, the topic, and answer supporting questions. You don't want readers to have to go back to Google to clarify anything.

Step 4: Meat & Potatoes

This is where you deliver the information that the title promised. The topic should dictate the length. There isn't a magic word count that will make Google love you. If it's easy to answer, don't drag it out just to hit a word goal. And if it's complex, don't leave stones unturned just to save space.

Make sure to format your content for easy reading. Break up copy by using optimized headings (which are vital for SEO), short paragraphs of two to three sentences, bullet lists, and enticing visual content. Remember people are inundated with information on a daily basis and tend to scan items for what might catch their eye or answer their questions.

Step 5: Recap

A blog post without a proper conclusion is like hanging up on your reader. The longer the post, the more necessary it is for a recap. It ties everything together by restating the main topic and what was learned, which proves that this post was indeed everything the reader needed.

Next Steps

Whether your blog has a 'related posts' block as part of the design or not, you should tell the reader what to do next.

You could leave it up to them, and 99.9% of the time they will exit your website. But a key aspect of improving both user engagement signals and conversion optimization is handing the reader an enticing next step – further down the funnel:

- Read a related blog post
- Point them toward more information/testimonials on your website
- View a product mentioned in the post
- Elaborate on this topic with your company/the writer via social media
- Encourage them to sign up for your newsletter

It's not suggested to ask for a contact conversion or sale right from a blog post. Instead, offer a natural-feeling lateral move like the ones above.

EMAIL MARKETING

When done right, email marketing returns more per dollar than any other channel used by small businesses. According to AWeber's research, 79% of small businesses say email marketing is important to their strategy. Yet only 60% say their strategy is effective. In this section we will cover why email marketing makes sense and how to capitalize on its potential. Let's take a look at the history of email ROI:

There are three core steps of email marketing:

- identifying your campaign objectives,
- defining and building your target audience, and
- planning and creating your email content.

In step two, where you are building your audience, is where email marketing and social media cross paths. By using your social media, you can encourage visitors to subscribe to your emails which will allow you to develop a targeted list to communicate with.

To get you started Fit Small Business outlines 18 different types of email campaigns including examples <https://fitsmall-business.com/types-of-emails-for-marketing/>. This should get your creative thoughts flowing on how best to tackle email marketing for your business. Don't forget that a balance of "copy and images" is as important as having a clear, concise message.

There are several bulk email service providers that you can choose from to facilitate your new email marketing campaigns. This table highlights companies considered the best by marketers.

BEST BULK EMAIL SERVICES

Tool	Key Features	Pricing	Best For
HubSpot	Drag-and-drop editor, segmentation, A/B testing, integration with HubSpot CRM	Free	Businesses using HubSpot CRM
Constant Contact	High deliverability, automation paths, A/B testing, security features	Starts at \$12/month	Advanced bulk email automation
Brevo (Sendinblue)	Affordable, SMS marketing, customizable templates, easy-to-use email builder	Free for 300 emails/day	Small businesses and startups
GetResponse	Autoresponder workflows, segmentation, AI-powered insights, SMS marketing	Starts at \$15.58/month	Small to medium-sized businesses
ConvertKit	Extensive tagging, visual automation builders, easy-to-use for creators	Free, paid plans \$9/mo	Creators, authors, podcasters
Drip	Automated drip campaigns, dynamic content, data-driven reports, integrations with eCommerce platforms	Starts at \$39/month	Small eCommerce businesses
Campaign Monitor	Advanced automation, drag-and-drop editor, time-zone-based email sending, A/B testing	Starts at \$11/month	Medium to large businesses
MailerLite	Drag-and-drop editor, HTML editor, automations, integrates with eCommerce platforms	Free, paid plans \$9/mo	Small businesses and budget-conscious marketers

This table highlights the key features, pricing, and who each tool is best suited for.

If it is right for your business, you may want to consider an e-newsletter to keep your customers wanting more! This is a great way to share updates on products/services, staff, sales, industry news, etc. You can even add coupons into the mix. Sound like a lot to create? Don't worry there are unlimited templates on the internet for your consideration.

COOPERATIVE MARKETING

To enhance visibility and sales through cooperative efforts, consider these small business cooperative marketing strategies:

- partner with local businesses for joint promotions or events
- share advertising costs for local print or online media
- create a co-branded loyalty program to encourage cross promotion
- utilize social media to promote each other's products or services
- organize community events to attract a larger audience together
- develop bundled offers that combine products from multiple businesses

For example, if you provide hair and nail services, partner with a massage therapist and create several self-care packages for Mother's Day or Teacher Appreciation Week! Get new customers in both your doors while providing an incentive to the customer to commit.

Another great opportunity for small business marketing is working with your local Chamber of Commerce. Did you know that 63% of consumers have a more favorable opinion of businesses that belong to a chamber of commerce? Or that customers are 49% more likely to purchase from a chamber member? Your membership in the Chamber typically provides you with several

ways to get your name out in the community.

- Online and printed Chamber Directory listing
- Eligible to participate in business networking events
- Host a networking event to showcase your business
- Advertising and sponsorship opportunities
- Business-to-business events
- Gift card programs
- Referrals
- Marketing resources
- Educational workshops and training

Engaging in Chamber activities, committees or leadership allow you to build relationships with other business owners. These relationships can lead to working cooperatively on promotions and gaining customers.

Event CHECKLIST

Name: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Planning phase

Task	Owner	Start date	Deadline	Priority	Status
Set goals	Jane S.	12/01/23	01/21/24	Medium	Open
Develop sponsorships	John D.	12/15/23	02/10/24	High	Open
Guest list					
Book site					
Contact suppliers					
Select menu					
Approve budget					
Plan itinerary					

Promotion phase

Task	Owner	Start date	Deadline	Priority	Status
Design and mail invites					
Marketing and PR					
Create program					

COUPONS/INCENTIVES/LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Start with a simple reward system (digital or physical) that feels fun and easy to use. Think stamps, punch cards, or online progress trackers. Bonus points if you personalize it with their name, preferences, or purchase history.

After five or 10 purchases, offer a reward that feels like a win: a free drink, a low-cost product (under \$5), a bonus add-on, or early access to something new.

The key? Make it feel personal and let customers see how close they are to earning their reward.

A FEW LAST IDEAS TO CONSIDER

Google - For your business, optimizing your Google Business Profile (GBP) is one of the easiest (and most important) ways to help customers find you. This can result in a boost to your visibility in Google Maps and local search results.

Texts - With open rates as high as 98%, text is one of the most effective and low cost ways to promote offers or send reminders. It works especially well for service-based businesses such as salons, restaurants, clinics, fitness studios, and local shops. Mobile phone numbers can be collected via your newsletter requests, prize drawing slips, your point of sale, etc.

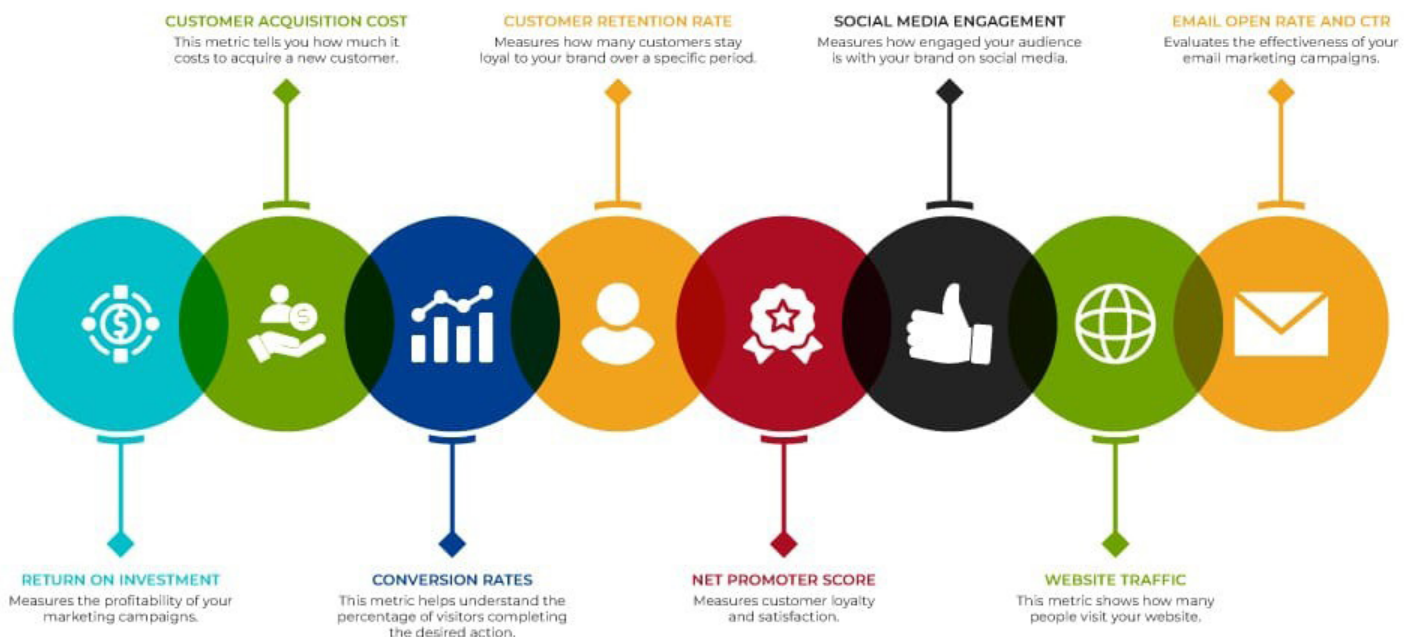
Consider short and to the point texts for these options:

- Flash sales or last-minute discounts
- Appointment reminders or confirmations
- Shipping updates or order status
- VIP-only offers or restock alerts
- Event reminders or changes in store hours

Make sure to use your text campaigns wisely. You do not want to inundate your customers with texts. Build in an easy way for them to opt-out so as not to get frustrated with your messaging.

Local Media – Do your local radio stations, television stations, newspapers or Chambers of Commerce provide opportunity for businesses to be highlighted?

BREAKDOWN OF KEY MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS METRICS



EVALUATING YOUR STRATEGIES

Once you have put your new marketing strategies in place, it will be important to evaluate them in order to make the adjustments necessary for continued and growing success.

Let's look at some key metrics that can help you develop a model for tracking your strategy outcomes.

CUSTOMER ACQUISITION COST (CAC)

Calculating your customer acquisition cost (CAC) tells you exactly how much you spend on marketing and advertising to attract a new client. CAC is an essential metric to evaluate the health and efficiency of your customer acquisition strategies. Maintaining a CAC in line with your budget sustains business profitability.

- **Website Traffic and Conversion Rates** - Utilize tools like Google Analytics to monitor visitor behavior and traffic sources. For instance, a spike in traffic following a targeted email campaign indicates a successful call-to-action.
- **Email Campaign Performance** - First, you can review delivery, open, and click-through rates. High delivery rates means your emails are reaching inboxes, but don't depend solely on this metric. Open rates are important, as a low open rate can reveal that you need to focus on writing shorter, more intriguing subject lines. Of these stats, the click-through rates are the most important.
- **Social Media Engagement** - Analyze likes, shares, and comments to measure engagement. A campaign that generates a high level of interaction suggests strong audience interest and potential for expanded interest.
- **Search Engine Rankings** - Use tools like Google Analytics and SEMrush to track your rankings.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Another way to evaluate the effectiveness of your strategy is by measuring consumer satisfaction from the first interaction to after they have begun utilizing your organization for services.

Listening to what your customers say can provide feedback on how your marketing plan aligns with your organization's communication and marketing strategies. Here are some ways to do that:

- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Online reviews
- Social listening

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

WEBSITE ANALYTICS AND SETUP

How to Verify Your Domain in Google Search Console

<https://samanthadigital.com/training/how-to-verify-your-domain-in-google-search-console/>

How to Connect Google Analytics to WordPress

<https://samanthadigital.com/training/how-to-connect-google-analytics-in-wordpress/>

How to Set Up Google Analytics 4 for Showit in Two Minutes

<https://samanthadigital.com/training/how-to-set-up-google-analytics-4-for-showit/>

SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING

Event Ideas for Small Businesses

Small Business Choice

<https://www.smallbusinesschoice.com/blog/event-ideas-small-business>

Marketing Ideas for Small Businesses

Backlinko

<https://backlinko.com/marketing-ideas-for-small-business>

How to Calculate Customer Acquisition Cost

Constant Contact

<https://www.constantcontact.com/blog/how-to-calculate-customer-acquisition-cost/>

How to Promote Your Business

Shopify

<https://www.shopify.com/blog/how-to-promote-your-business>

How to Create a Small Business Marketing Strategy

Small Business Trends

<https://smallbiztrends.com/marketing-strategy-for-small-business/>

Small Business Marketing Guide

Forbes Advisor

<https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/small-business-marketing/>

The Ultimate Guide to Small Business Marketing

HubSpot

<https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/small-business-marketing-guide>

Small Business Marketing Strategies

Linda Handley

<https://www.lindahandley.com/blog/small-business-marketing-strategies>

25 Best Small Business Marketing Ideas

The Media Ant

<https://www.themediaant.com/blog/25-best-small-business-marketing-ideas-2025/>

Small Business Marketing Checklist

Samantha Digital

<https://samanthadigital.com/marketing-checklist-for-small-business/>

The Ultimate Guide to Small Business Marketing

VistaPrint

<https://www.vistaprint.com/hub/ultimate-guide-small-business-marketing>

EMAIL MARKETING RESOURCES

Best Bulk Email Services

OptinMonster

<https://optinmonster.com/best-bulk-email-services/>

Types of Emails for Marketing

Fit Small Business

<https://fitsmallbusiness.com/types-of-emails-for-marketing/>

MARKETING BUDGETING

Marketing Budget Guide

Fit Small Business

https://fitsmallbusiness.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/FSB_MarketingBudgetGuide_24_KD_rnd1.pdf

MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATES

Marketing Plan for Startups

Smartsheet

https://www.smartsheet.com/sites/default/files/2019-10/IC-Marketing-Plan-for-Startups-8609_PDF.pdf

Free Marketing Plan Templates

Smartsheet

<https://www.smartsheet.com/free-marketing-plan-templates-excel>

Marketing Plan Template

Fit Small Business

<https://fitsmallbusiness.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Marketing-Plan-Template-1-29-2024.docx>

Please note: These resources are provided for informational purposes. Content, pricing, recommendations and website availability may change over time. Inclusion in this toolkit does not constitute an endorsement of any specific company, product or service.