

FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST

The word 'marketing' conjures up images of promotion – advertising, brochures, websites and even business cards. This is only a small part of marketing and it is important to develop your strategy first, so that you have a clear idea of what you are trying to achieve.

Define your brand

The first step is to decide the personality of your business. It may sound strange but this is important. Think about some famous brands you use on a regular basis, and then think about what they stand for. If you are a small company much of this 'brand' will come from your own personality.

Things to consider are:

- The values your company stands for such as quality, customer service and technical or specialist expertise. Mention these in all communications.
- The look at all of your communications. Everything should use the same colours, look, even the font.

Online marketing

The internet both complicates communication and also makes it easier. It can be seen as a great leveller as, if handled correctly, a small business can have a higher profile than a large business with big budgets. But navigating the choices on offer is a minefield – you will have been called or emailed by 'experts' offering guaranteed benefits – take these with a pinch of salt and if in doubt, call TAS for free and impartial advice.

Having a website is a must for every business. This online brochure tells people primarily about your business and how to contact you. The look and content of your website will often decide whether or not you get business, and a professional look can often help you charge more for your services. Other sources will then feed business to your website. These can be used to present your expertise and encourage enquiries. It may be as simple as answering a question on an online forum or a



TAS Marketing Officer Laurence Barnard talks about promoting your business and standing out from the crowd.

pay-per-click service like Google Ads, both of which allow people enquiring about your services to link through to your website. At a higher level are blogs where you can post articles which demonstrate technical expertise or details of successfully completed projects – these can drive lots of people to your site, and are definitely worth considering if you have a good message and are willing to update the blog every week or two.

“Companies with a smart appearance and strong brand can charge more for the same service.”

Up another level again are social networks, and each delivers something slightly different. The key is that they all provide a form of referral. People have always selected services based on referral, but today the process of referral extends beyond work colleagues, friends and neighbours to what are often very large networks of online contacts.

One of the features of the internet is to link all of this together. An item on LinkedIn or Twitter might refer to a blog article which in turn links to your website. These methods are used both in domestic and business environments – after all, you don't stop using Google when you get to work, do you?

Traditional marketing

Despite the growth of online marketing there is still a role for traditional communications channels – PR articles and paid-for advertising in hardcopy magazines, newspaper and directories.

Direct mail

Direct mail might be a letter or email, and the success rate is never high – it's very much a 'shotgun' approach to marketing. Costs are low, but as you will know yourself, junk mail and 'spam' can actually put you off using a business, so think carefully before choosing this method.

What to say

People do not want to be sold to, so your messages need to focus on helping and informing them. This might take the form of specialist advice, explaining the impact of legislation on their business, or suggesting the best way of solving a problem, perhaps drawing on some of the work done by TAS. Case studies are another popular feature, showing people what can be done and giving ideas. These can include testimonials from satisfied customers.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Before you start to build your brand, understand what your customers, potential customers and suppliers think of your company – even a ring-round or quick survey can help. You might find some factors that you did not realise or took for granted. Also be prepared for some shocks and act to put anything right which people criticise.

Website

- A must have. Build-it-yourself websites are available from many sources and can cost very little to operate. However they "add-ons" can build up and end up costing you a fortune. TAS can build all customers their own optimised website with no hidden costs for a minimal fee.
- Use your website to explain your services, also include examples of successful projects with customer quotes. People want to know your capabilities, and why you and not your competitor.
- Ensure you include contact details on every page.
- Consider using something like Google Ads to direct enquiries to your website, these can be tuned to your local area.
- See our previous article on the TAS website about making your website more visible on search engines, and the pitfalls that can trap the unwary.
- To ensure a professional look to the website you can employ a designer, but select a company which has produced websites you like (including those of your competitors!) You want to employ someone creative, not a techie. Try to ensure your website has a content management system which allows staff change text themselves, keeping costs down.

Blogs

A useful method of demonstrating your technical expertise. Consider writing articles about how you solved customer problems, or specific pest problems and how they are addressed. Project stories are a 'must' – publish stories about successful jobs with third party quotes from customers. These can be used on the blog, website, in press releases,

KEY MARKETING INITIATIVES

newsletters, even proposals. Often people will request anonymity, but this is not a deal-breaker, and these are worth their weight in gold.

"... make sure everyone in your business knows what is expected of them in terms of appearance, behaviour etc."

YouTube / Flickr

Another opportunity to provide testimonials. Perhaps a video or pictures of your work – can be kept private if you wish.

Facebook

This can be used to inform people in your area about your services and link to blogs, YouTube or your website.

Letterbox drops

A means of creating awareness if you need to build your business, although people get fed up with getting junk mail so don't expect much response. A postcard or fridge magnet is easy to keep, with your contact details and details of your services.

Appearance

A smart appearance always impresses, so have a uniform e.g. a polo shirt in your corporate colour with your company name embroidered on it. Easy to get and relatively low cost thanks to the internet. You may be surprised that studies show companies with a smart appearance and strong brand can charge more for the same service.

Local networking

Look at local business networks you can join or other voluntary organisations for a subject you are interested in. But don't approach these with the aim to get business, no one wants to be pestered. Approach it with the attitude 'how can I help you' and business will come your way.

Business cards

Always have business cards in case people are interested in your service. As well as your contact details make it clear what service you offer, with a list of your principal services on the back. Try to leave a few cards with anyone you do work for in case they want to pass on your details. Try to set up agreements with other local businesses to swap cards and make sure you recommend each other – this is great marketing, often at the price of a pint!

Brand

Finally, make sure everyone in your business knows what is expected of them in terms of appearance, behaviour etc. One bad experience for a customer can have huge negative perception on your whole business, especially if they then turn to Twitter or Facebook to complain.

SUMMARY

There is probably more you can do to improve your standing in the minds of your customers and potential customers. Think about your business needs, and how the way you market yourself can change customer perception and deliver more business and more profits.

