Marketing is critical to the success of any small business. In some instances, effective marketing is vital to the survival of a small business. In all instances, good marketing is essential for any small business to achieve its full potential. It is easy to think of marketing as merely placing ads. However, marketing is broader than just advertising. Marketing involves all of the ways in which you communicate with customers. Essentially, marketing is presenting a message to customers and influencing customer perceptions. In fact, you are marketing whether you realize it or not. The question is: Are you communicating the right message?

Small businesses must take a more creative and coordinated approach to marketing since limited budgets do not permit spending large amounts of money on national TV commercials, aggressive ad campaigns, etc. In addition, most small business owners must work to understand their customers, their business, and its strengths in order to craft an effective marketing strategy.

Why is marketing important?

All businesses need customers, and marketing involves communicating with customers. It is the process by which a business attracts customers and generates sales. Marketing involves many aspects of your business and is fundamental to retaining current customers and gaining exposure to new ones. It is important to understand that everything you do in your business relates to marketing.

How do you market your small business to the “right” customer?

Knowing the customer is the foundation to all successful marketing efforts. Consider the customers you are trying to reach. You should be able to describe your “typical” target customer in terms of demographics (age, gender, income, location, etc.). In addition, it is important to understand what motivates them. Consider the following questions: Why would they need or desire your product or service? How do they make purchasing decisions (price, quality, service, convenience, etc.)? What are their other options for meeting that need? Keep in mind that it is possible that your business may have more than one target customer group (or segment). If this is the case, it is important to develop a description of each segment since the needs and motivations of each group may vary.

Some information about your customer group(s) can be obtained by conducting market research. Market research is intended to help you find your customers, identify what products and/or services they need, and determine the best ways to sell them your product or service. The process of conducting market research means collecting information about potential customers, industry trends and competitors. Market research can be time-intensive, but is a critical aspect to your business and/or marketing plan. The Kennesaw SBDC can assist you with marketing research and guidance. Contact our office for more information.

Is it necessary to create a marketing plan?

Effective marketing doesn’t happen by accident. Developing a coordinated, targeting and systematic approach to marketing requires planning. A market plan should include a written timeline identifying planned marketing activities. It should also go hand in hand with your business objectives and financial resources. It is recommended that you create a marketing plan specifically tailored to your customers, business objectives, and financial resources.

A marketing plan is important because the marketing process is ongoing. You cannot expect to market your business one time and achieve superior results. Additionally, you might not see immediate results from your marketing activities. When marketing activities are coordinated, your marketing can have more impact on your targeted groups and the budget can be used more efficiently.
MARKETING for SMALL BUSINESSES

Are you avoiding the common marketing mistakes?

**Haphazard Marketing (Hit or Miss):** Marketing on a sporadic basis does not produce favorable results. For marketing to be effective, it must be a continual and coordinated process. While marketing efforts may increase during times of the year due to the seasonality of a business, it should never stop completely.

**Underestimating Market Costs:** Once you’ve determined your planned marketing activities, determine the anticipated cost of those activities. You may find that marketing and advertising are more costly than planned.

**Not Tailoring Your Marketing to Your Customers:** In order for marketing efforts to be effective, the marketing plan must be tailored to the audience. The foundation for developing effective marketing strategies is to thoroughly understand your customers. Marketing without keeping the desired customer in mind will not produce the impact you desire.

**Assuming That Your Business is the Best:** Many business owners assume that customers will automatically choose their business because it is “the best.” Attracting customers is never easy and marketing is always necessary. Never assume marketing is unnecessary. New businesses need to market to attract customers; existing businesses need to market to retain customers and stay relevant in the ever-changing marketplace.

**Relying Solely on Paid Advertisements:** For a small business owner, relying solely on placing paid advertisements is typically ineffective due to budgetary constraints. Since marketing is more than just placing ads, it is important to develop creative and cost-effective ways to target your customer. In addition to the tried and true method of networking and/or direct communication with potential customers, internet and social media (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) are proving to be low-cost and majorly effective methods for small business owners.

**Neglecting to Track Marketing Efforts:** It is important to track your marketing efforts when possible in order to see what techniques are working and which ones are not. Tracking your efforts allows you to adjust your planned marketing activities accordingly.

**Inadequate Time Devoted to Marketing Activities:** Not only does marketing require financial resources, it also requires time. While scheduling time for marketing may seem impossible to small business owners, marketing is critical to business success. It is important to have a regularly scheduled, disciplined approach for marketing in both times of success and struggle.

**Expecting Immediate Results from Marketing Efforts:** Marketing is a long-term process. You will not always see immediate results from marketing efforts, which makes it all the more important to market on a continual basis.

**Marketing Training**

The UGA SBDC at Kennesaw State University offers marketing training for those looking for basics and those looking for more advanced marketing instruction. Contact our office for more information.