



10 top tips to improve your
Marketing
(for free!)

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Ten Top Tips to Improve your Marketing for Free

The first thing we all do when we set up a business is spend money – business cards, websites, leaflets, advertising ...

But there is so much you could do for free! The truth is that most of us spend too much money, but not enough time on marketing!! So what should you spend your time doing? Here are some ideas....

1. Tell people what you do

Sounds obvious, doesn't it? But you'd be surprised how often I find it is quite difficult to understand what a company does, particularly if it is offering a service, and also what makes that company better than its competitors – its Unique Selling Point.

Just do a quick Google search for your type of business in your area – how many are there? So the first question is how are you going to compete with all of these established businesses?

You need to define your Unique Selling Point – what makes you different from all these other businesses? It must be something that makes you stand out from your competitors – something which is unique to you, and differentiates your business. It needs to answer the question “Why should I choose you?”

How can you work this out? You need to put yourself in your customers' shoes – so often we love what we do so much that we forget how our customers perceive us. You will need to understand what motivates the customer's behaviour and buying decisions – the psychology behind the purchase.

You could also look at what your competitors offer and see if there is a gap which is not being filled by any of them – but make sure it is something which the customers want!

The best way to be sure that your USP is effective is to try it out on both existing customers and new prospects and get their feedback. If you have some customers, ask them why they bought from you in the first place – it may not be the reason you thought! If you are part of a networking group where you know each other well, this can be a great exercise – do the other members know what your USP is, and is what they think it is the same as you do?



If you are a one person business, your USP may very well be about you, your personality and how you relate to clients. This can be difficult to put across in written materials, so you will need to think carefully about ways to express it, but asking your existing clients will help. They may even give you some glowing testimonials which you can add to your promotional materials.

It could also be about your personal story – what motivated you to start this type of business. This is not the time to be shy, but to talk about your story, which may strike a chord with a potential client.

Actions:

- Define your USP
- Work out how to tell people what you do
- Check it is on your promotional material
- Check you are using it

2. Target your customers

To do this, you need to know who are they – their age, sex, socio-economic group, nationality, industry sector etc. When do they use your product or service? What do they read or watch? What do they do? Where do they go?

You might have more than one target group – this is called segmenting the market. It does not mean that you will turn away any other clients, but by targeting these markets which are a good fit with your Unique Selling Point, you have a better chance of your marketing messages reaching the right people.

There may also be different groups that you need to communicate with in the same market sector. For example, a business supplying care to the elderly or disabled will have two groups – the elderly and disabled themselves, and their relatives, who often have to research and make the decision about care for their parents and grandparents. The elderly will use traditional sources of information such as local newspapers, Yellow Pages, leaflets and recommendations from friends. However, their younger relatives will be more likely to use social media such as Facebook, and to search the internet for care providers, and the recommendations taken by the younger relatives may be via social media. So the care business needs to consider different means of communicating with their two different target markets.

A business to business organisation needs to consider what size of business they are targeting, whether they are new start-ups or established businesses, and what sectors the businesses serve. This can help decide where they will find these businesses, and what messages will appeal to them.

Taking this a step further, you may want to offer different services for different target markets, and this will need to be reflected in the promotional material you use – from business cards, to leaflets and your website.

3. Use this information

You can then use this information to reach your potential clients. This could be speaking at the events they go to, writing articles in magazines or newspapers or blogs they read, socialising where they do, putting your leaflets where they are...

If you are selling a medical service, put your leaflets in the doctor's surgery, if for students, leaflet the halls of residence, if Business to Business, work out which trade press they read, and which conferences they attend. For more ideas on how to do this, read Tip 4 Repeat the Message, and Tip 5 Free Marketing Tools.



4. Repeat the Message

Perhaps one of the reasons that businesses so often perceive that their marketing efforts have failed is that they expect one action to move a prospect through the whole sales cycle to placing an order. It is much easier to understand how marketing works if you think of everything you do as a “nudge” for the prospect to keep them moving in the right direction, with the ultimate goal being the prospect buying from you.

Marketers use the acronym AIDA to remind them how this process works. AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, Action. So you should be aiming to gradually move the prospect through this process. Rarely do we make an impulse purchase, though purchasing confectionery when you are buying petrol in a garage is a good example. But when you reach for the Cadbury Dairy Milk or a Mars Bar, remember that over a hundred years of advertising has gone into building each of those brands.

So whichever marketing tools you use, you will need to keep up a steady flow of press releases, mailings, emails, exhibitions, networking events, adverts, social media posts etc – once is not enough! We all complain about how often some adverts are on TV, but there is a reason – repeating it works. So often I hear, “we put an advert in, but got no response”, but you cannot usually get response from just one advert – and advertising needs to be combined with other marketing activity.

For an individual in business, or in a service based business, you need to think about the Know, Like, Trust principal. Before anybody will do business with you, or recommend you to others, they have to move through these stages of knowing you, liking you and trusting you and your business. Something to think about the next time you go to a networking event...

Every business really needs to create a sales funnel – a regular source of new enquiries that feed into the business. Think about what has been the most successful marketing tool for you, in terms of leads that convert to sales, and how you could replicate this.

How to Repeat the Message:

- Personal letters
- Emails
- Christmas cards
- Newsletters
- Lunch
- Coffee
- Phone calls
- Send an offer
- Press coverage
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Linked-in

5. Use Free Marketing Tools

There are lots of free ways to promote your business. Here are some ideas for off-line marketing – more on online marketing later.

Enter Competitions and Awards

Local papers, networking groups, professional associations and chambers of commerce often run business awards, and are desperate for entries. Don't wait to be nominated – often you can nominate your own business. Make sure you read the rules, enter in exactly the way described and meet the deadline. Don't just copy existing marketing materials – focus on exactly what the judges are asking for, and give as much evidence of your success as possible, if possible using actual data.

Once you have won an award, use it to get free press coverage for your business, and put the award prominently on your website and social media profiles. If the award has been made by a local newspaper or business publication, then they will ensure you get coverage in their publication.

Actions:

- Research what awards are available in your business sector or area
- Work out which award categories would be the best fit for your business
- Put the deadline in your diary, and start on your application
- Focus on what the judges are looking for and tangible results
- Use the award to get media coverage
- Display the award on your website, promotional material and social media profiles

You can research awards on the Award Agency website.

Get in the Media

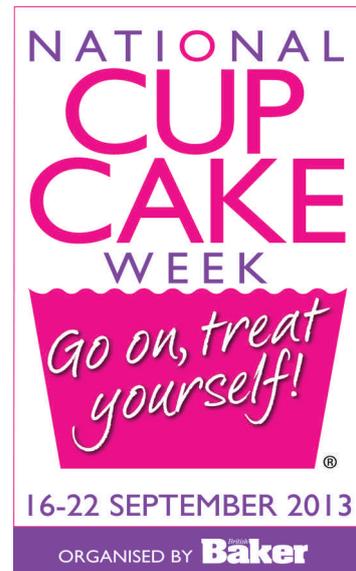
Many people find it confusing – while you have to pay for advertising in the media, if you have a news story, this can be covered free of charge. Of course, you can't control exactly what the media say about you if you are not paying for the coverage as an advert, but you can influence it by approaching the media yourself with a well written story.

One of the best ways of doing this is to send in a press release or a news release. This should be written in an appropriate style for the publication or media you are approaching, and you may have to create different versions for different media. You need to refer to yourself or your business in the third person, as if the journalist is writing about you. You are making the journalists job easier – if you do this well, all he or she has to do is copy and paste what you send.

Journalists will probably edit your press release to fit the space or time they have available, so make sure the most important stuff is in the opening paragraph. As a quick test, check the first paragraph answers who, what, why, when, where and how. If they only use the first paragraph, will it work on its own?

You may not think you have a newsworthy story, so here are some suggestions:

- Links with current news/celebrities, particularly if you can link a national story to you for the local media
- Occasions and special weeks – National Cupcake Week anyone?
- New products and new uses
- Send a free sample of something unusual to journalists
- New employees – trade press often have a special feature on these
- Surveys – your own or other peoples
- Winning awards – see above



Actions:

- Research which media are most relevant to your business (local press, radio, TV, trade publications etc) and find contact names of editors and journalists
- Work out what stories you have that are newsworthy
- If necessary, do something newsworthy – win an award, create a charity event
- Draft a press release and get a photo if possible
- Send to your contacts
- Make sure you can be found online if people see the article and Google you – it may not contain a link to your website

Speak at Events

Jerry Seinfeld made a great joke about speaking:

“I read a thing that actually says that speaking in front of a crowd is considered the number one fear of the average person. I found that amazing – number two was death!! **That means to the average person if you have to be at a funeral, you would rather be in the casket than doing the eulogy.**”

But if you can muster the courage, speaking at events can be a very effective means of promoting your business. Don't feel you need to be an after dinner speaker – if you can share useful information with others, then they will be happy to hear from you. If you are nervous, start with smaller groups and work up to bigger groups once you have built up your confidence.

The type of event depends very much on your target market – work out where they go, whether it is trade conferences or the University of the Third Age, and then how your content can be tailored to their needs. You could even run your own event, or plan a joint event with a business in a related sector, but remember you will then have to market the event too. Don't use it as an excuse to sell what you do – let your skills shine through so that they want to know more about you.

Actions:

- Research events for your target market
- Plan some topics you could speak about
- Approach the organisers with your topics
- Rehearse, rehearse and then rehearse some more
- Think about how you will follow up the contacts you make

Create Content

With the advent of social media came content – no, not really! Content marketing has been around for decades, but social media has given us an additional route for sharing it. Content marketing is the creation and sharing of useful and relevant information to your target market. If you are preparing talks for presentations, writing newsletters or press releases and articles, then you are already creating Content. Variations of the same content can be used in many different ways, from blog posts, email newsletters, and free downloads to Ebooks. You can then link to these from social media eg Google+, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook.

The key point about Content is that it is not sales or promotional material – it is useful and relevant information for your target market, which positions you and your company as experts in the field. Here are some great examples.

- Online printer of business cards, post cards and stickers Moo targets start-up businesses with an Advice from the Experts section on their website, with lots of useful tips on writing business plans, approaching banks, and testing your business idea. This also forms the basis of a newsletter which links back to the site, and subscribers to the newsletter get free Postage and Packing on orders.
- Bifold door manufacturers UK Bifold offers a free buyers guide on their website, which covers choosing the right material, glazing and insulation, UK planning and safety laws, security, and installation planning, aftercare and maintenance. All useful stuff for anybody wondering what kind of bifold doors to buy.
- Copy writer Andy Maslen offers a free white paper How to Brief a Copy Writer, and a newsletter on How to be a Better Copywriter on his Sunfish website. Is he giving away his knowledge for free to potential competitors? Yes, but he does offer copy writing training too. Some of those who download his advice will realise that he is a much better copy writer than they ever will be, so will pay him to do it, and others may book training with him.
- Clothes retailer Joe Brown's sells a range of "unique and original clothing". In one of their summer email newsletters, they listed the dates and locations of upcoming festivals – showing great understanding of their target market. It also illustrates curation – collecting together things that others will find useful or interesting.



Actions:

- Go back to your target market described under Tip 2, and think about what help they need. It may not be directly related to your product, as with Moo and Joe Brown, but it is related to their business or interests.
- Use the offer of free content to collect email addresses as in the above examples.
- Keep them coming back to you for more advice with a newsletter and via your social media accounts, so that you have your name in front of them when they are ready to buy.
- Consider how you can re-purpose the content you have created to get maximum value. A series of blog posts could become an E-book or white paper, or an email newsletter.

6. Use free online tools

There are lots of free marketing tools available online, such as Mail Chimp and Constant Contact for email marketing, Survey Monkey and Smart Survey for online Surveys, and WordPress and Typepad for blogs. If you haven't already got Google Analytics on your website, add it so that you can see how many visitors you get, and how they found your site.

Email Marketing Tools

Email marketing is a great tool as there is no postage to pay, and it is a way of keeping in touch with prospects and clients so that you are repeating the message and moving them through the sales funnel. By using a system such as Mail Chimp, you can track who opens and clicks on your emails. Using this information, you can then follow up – with another email, a brochure or perhaps a phone call. (I wouldn't advise mentioning that you have seen that they clicked on your email – they might find this a bit spooky!).



While we are all getting a bit overwhelmed by our email in-boxes, open rates for a small list of known prospects can be as high as 40%. The key is to send useful and relevant information, which will keep interest high and unsubscribe rates low. Spend some time thinking about your subject line, as this has enormous impact on your open rate. You can split test by sending half your list one subject heading and half another to see which type of headline gives the best open rate.

Mail Chimp is free for lists of up to 2,000 subscribers, and you can send up to 12,000 emails a month for free, after this monthly plans start at £6.13 a month (January 2014), so it is great for starting out with email marketing. It automatically handles unsubscribes, and there is a lot of information on the site to get you started.

Actions:

- Build your own data base of prospects and clients (a spreadsheet with the contact information in separate columns will do fine)
- Think about what content would be most useful for your clients and prospects (hints and tips, industry news, events...) and how you can source and write this
- Choose an email marketing tool, check out services offered and prices, and download your contact list – you are ready to create your first email campaign!

Online Survey Tools

Online survey tools mean you can easily send a link to get feedback from prospects and clients. Tools such as SurveyMonkey (no relation to Mail Chimp it seems!) also collate and analyse all the responses for you. These are great time savers, and a very professional way to create a survey. Remember to keep your survey short, or responders will not complete it, and you could offer a discount or freebie to those who complete it, or enter them in a draw for a bigger prize.



Survey Monkey is free for surveys of up to 10 questions, and up to 100 responses a survey (April 2013).

Actions:

- Build a list of people to survey
- Register with an online survey provider, and draw up your questionnaire
- Email it out to your list (this can be done via the survey provider or your own emailing system)
- Check out the results – what actions will you take as a result of this?

Blogging Tools

Blogging is an excellent way to show off your expertise, and by having the blog as part of your website, you will be able to attract people to the website too. Even better, Google ranks blogs highly as it likes fresh content. By doing some research on the Google Keyword tool, you can make sure you optimise each blog post to get as many hits as possible.

Wordpress can even be used to create a whole website, not just a blog (the Ridgeway Marketing website was created using a template in Wordpress). It has a number of features that make it very search engine friendly, and constructs the site well, making it Google friendly.

Don't feel that a blog has to be full of your personal musings – regular articles on

subjects relevant to your target market are what you should be aiming for. You may not want to call it a blog – it might be Resources or News. It may seem a lot of work, but the blog posts can also be used for an email newsletter, and shared on social media, so you will get great value from them. They may even form the basis for an E-book!

Actions:

- Talk to your web designer about adding a blog to your existing site, or if you are planning a new site, work out how you are going to incorporate it.
- Plan some blog posts for the next few months – problems encountered by your clients can be a good starting point.
- Decide who will write each blog
- Check out the relevant search terms on Google's Keyword Tool for each post
- Get sharing the content on social media and email

Google Analytics

Google Analytics is a free tool from Google which shows how many visitors your website is getting, how they found the site, what search terms they used, which page they landed on, and how long they stayed on the website, amongst other things. Using this information will help you improve your website, and get more conversions from it.

Actions:

- Open a Google account if you don't already have one
- Copy and paste the tracking code into each page of the website (or ask your web designer to do it)
- Check the analytics regularly, and keep a record so that you can see what changes and what difference the changes you implement make.

7. Use the basics of Search Engine Optimisation

So many businesses' websites cannot be found in Google, even for their company name. This is a result of web site designers not doing their job properly – so whoever builds a website for you, make sure that you both understand the basics of Search Engine Optimisation. It is bit like buying a car – if you don't understand what goes on underneath the bonnet, you are at risk of being ripped off.

If you are in any doubt about how important this is for your marketing – just think about how we all turn to the internet when we want to know anything now. We use smart phones, tablets and laptops all the time – whether we are out and about, shopping or watching TV, whether we are concerned about a health issue, how to raise our kids, or want to book a holiday. We look at websites, blogs and reviews, or ask our friends, family and colleagues on social media, to help us make these decisions.

The UK retailer John Lewis found in 2010 that multi-channel shoppers (ie those using the internet and the stores) were 4 times more valuable than store only shoppers, and with the growth of smart phones since then, this effect can only have increased.

Apparently there are 200 different factors that Google takes into account, but at least get these main bits right! The basics of Search Engine Optimisation include:

Having the right page titles

This is the text on the tab at the top of each page. You have up to 60 characters to play with, so make the most of them – have different terms on each page. Don't waste them on terms that nobody would search for (Home page, Welcome, and About Us are a complete waste of space!). The Page Titles need to reflect the content of the page.

If you want to know what people are searching for, use the free online Google Keyword tool. This will show you how many searches are made locally and internationally for the search terms you are thinking of using, and to find alternative words that you could also use.

Links on High Ranking Sites

This is a bit confusing, because Google has started to penalise websites that have been creating lots of links from low ranking sites, but having genuine links from good sites that are related to your business is still an important part of SEO. If you register your business with online directories such as Yell, which is free of charge for a basic listing, this will also help.

How do you know what is a high ranking site? You could use a free tool such as SEO Moz which will give you a guide. You could also use your own judgement – if it is a large organisation with a large website that has been established for some time, it will probably be a high ranking website. So anything like a professional association, a local authority, or a university will have a high ranking site.

Google Places for Business

If you want to rank higher for local searches (ie people searching for something in your town or city), then Google Places for Business is where you want to be. It also means a map will appear with your location on it when people search for your business.

This is another free service provided by Google, and you just need a Google account to access it. You do need a mailing address, as Google will send you a post card with a number on it to register your business, so that Google can check you really are where you say you are. If you do not want to show your actual address on Google (if you are working from home, for example), you can specify a "service area" and hide your actual address.

Checking your Website can be Read by Google

Once your website is up and running, you can do a quick check that Google can read the text on the website by typing info: followed by your website address into the Google search bar. This will then give you the option to "Show Google's Cache" of your website. From the cache, on the top right is another link "Text Only" which will show you the text that Google can read. If there is no cache or no text, then Google cannot read your website, and you and your web designer have some work to do.

Actions:

- Check that you have good Page title tags on each website page
- Register with Google Places if you want to appear in local searches
- Check that your website can be read by Google

8. Use your Existing Clients

Have you thought about why supermarkets create loyalty schemes such as Tesco's Club Card, which give away lots of freebies, from days and meals out to flights and holidays? It is not just for creating loyalty – these cards give the supermarkets valuable data about their customers.

When I haven't shopped online for a few weeks, I get a voucher to entice me back. They send me vouchers for money off wine as they know I don't buy their wine. We too have lots of information about our customers and clients, so we need to use it.

We all tend to emphasise getting new clients, but it is much cheaper to sell more to the ones you have. Make sure you keep them happy, get recommendations and testimonials from them, and use the information you have about them to sell more to them. How much more it costs to get a new customer varies by sector, but it can be 5, 50 or 500 times more expensive than retaining an existing customer.

Give Excellent Customer Service

The first step is to ensure you keep the customers you have by giving excellent customer service. To learn more about customer service, I recommend you download Marylou Booth's book "How to increase your profits by giving excellent customer care" www.trainingworksuk.co.uk

Keep Reminding Them

You do need to stay in touch with previous customers to remind them that you are there (see Tip 4 on Repeat the Message for some ideas how to do this).

You could use emails and social media to do this, but there are other ways. A great example is Buy Spares, who claim to be the UK's largest supplier of appliance spares and accessories. Any order sent out from their website www.buyspares.co.uk (no matter how small) includes a fridge magnet and pen with the company's contact details on it, so that next time you need a spare part, you have the company's name in front of you – a fantastic way of encouraging repeat business.



Actions

- Think about your market and how you are going to keep in touch with previous customers.
- Set up systems so that each customer is added to a database for email marketing, social media or other means of staying in contact.

Get Reviews and Testimonials

Genuine testimonials and recommendations from clients and customers are essential to giving your business credibility, particularly when prospects first come across your business on the internet. There are now a number of ways of getting testimonials from customers via independent websites such as Feefo that can then be displayed on your website. These will display negative as well as positive feedback, but give you the chance to respond too. This makes it clear that the feedback is genuine, and in some cases you can make a negative a positive.

It also gives you important customer feedback which you can use to improve customer service and your products or service. Research shows that prospects view some negative feedback as a positive – if this is the worse your clients have experienced, that may be fine with them, or the issue raised may not be relevant to them. These types of testimonial services only allow genuine customers to comment, as they contact your customers by email after purchase using your business data. This is different from online review sites such as Trip Advisor where anybody can add reviews, and there is the possibility that others with a different agenda may comment on your business!

For those in a Business to Business market, where an individual is likely to be recommended, Linked-in recommendations are excellent as you cannot write them yourself – only chose whether or not to display them so they have to be genuine.

One further point on testimonials – always ask permission from the customer before using their words, and use their full name (and company name if relevant) as it will give it more credibility. You may also like to get video testimonials too.

Actions:

- Decide on a route for getting testimonials – can you approach customers directly or do you need to use an automated system?
- Approach existing customers or start using system.
- Ensure testimonials are displayed on websites, leaflets, brochures, with complete customer details to give credibility
- Consider other types of testimonials such as video

Get Referrals from Existing Customers

We all know that a personal recommendation is the best form of marketing, but do we do anything to encourage that referral? We are all busy, and to be honest, it might not occur to the big businesses you deal with that you are actually looking for more work! So you need to ask for that recommendation and possibly offer an incentive too.

Actions:

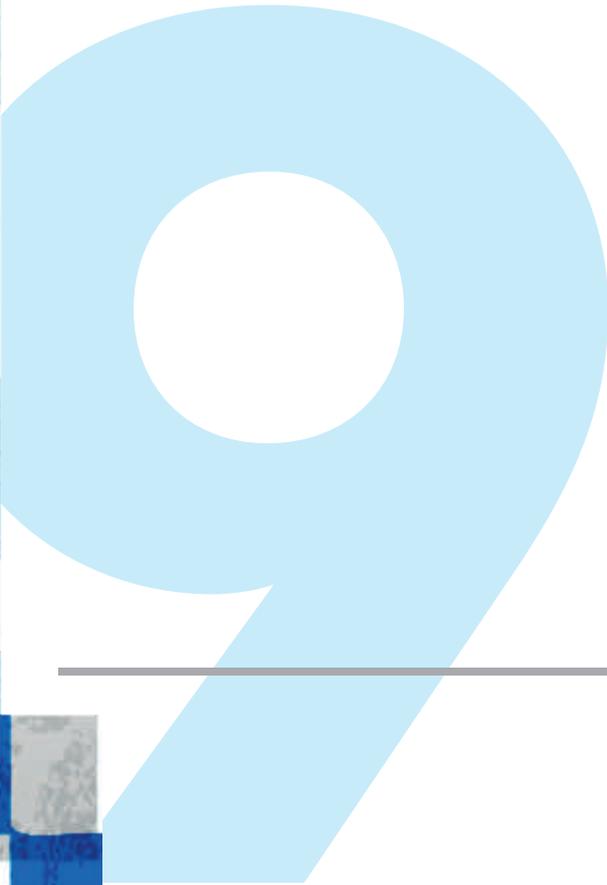
- Build in asking for a referral to your sales after care process
- Consider what might be an appropriate incentive for referrals
- Make sure you are using the same social media as your customers and prospects (Linked-in, Twitter, Facebook) as this can be a very easy way to recommend you.

9. Write an action plan

The best way to ensure you put all of this into practice is to write a plan with actions. Make sure you agree it with somebody else, to encourage you to put do it. Then when you have actioned it, monitor the results, revise your plan and start again!

There are no right and wrong answers in marketing – what works for one business won't always work for another, so it is a case of finding out what works for you.

To ensure you keep up your marketing efforts, try to plan a year ahead, using a spreadsheet or planner, showing what you need to do each month. You could also use this planner to keep a track of costs.



10. Measure the Results

You can use some of the tools mentioned above to help you monitor the results. Email marketing programmes will enable you to see who has clicked on what part of your mailing (and follow it up), and Google Analytics will show you how many people are responding to your marketing campaigns and clicking on your website. Just asking enquirers and customers where they heard about you can also help.

A whole host of social media tools exist to help you measure how effective your social media activities are. Facebook has analytics built into it, which can be viewed once you have 30 likes on your Business page. Remember to not just measure the number of fans or followers, but how engaged they are, what type of posts get shared most etc...

To monitor the effectiveness of any one part of your marketing activities, you need to consider not just how much it costs, but how much time it takes, and how much revenue and profit it generates. You may find that some marketing activities generate plenty of enquiries, but the work you do for the customers it generates is not generally profitable. Another type of marketing might not generate many enquiries, but the ones it does generate convert into long term profitable clients.

Actions:

- Put Google Analytics on your website, and monitor it regularly
- Use an email marketing programme
- Code mailings
- Talk to new enquirers and customers
- Use tools to monitor social media, such as Crowdbooster, Twitalyzer

Just Do One Thing!

If all of this has left you in a state of complete overwhelm, then why not just identify one thing that would improve your marketing, and implement that?

If you then want to make some long term changes to your marketing, you will need a plan of action, and some support. A Marketing Mentor can give you an independent view point, new approaches, and a clear focus on the actions needed to improve your business, as well as such much needed support when the going gets tough.

References

www.zeromomentoftruth.com/assets/files/google-zmot.pdf

About the Author

Beryl Pettitt is a Marketing Mentor and Marketing Trainer for small businesses and organisations across the UK. She has worked in marketing for over 25 years, and her experience spans both the corporate environment and running her own business. She understands the needs and pressures of managing a business, so clients find her advice both practical and affordable. Beryl has worked with a wide range of businesses, from consultants and accountants to artists and entrepreneurs, helping them to reach new markets and get more customers. She has an MA in marketing, is a Chartered Marketer, a SFEDI

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Ridgeway Marketing provides Marketing Mentoring, Marketing Training and Outsourced Marketing to small businesses and organisations across the UK. For further information see www.ridgewaymarketing.co.uk



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