

**PRACTICAL MARKETING TIPS FOR SMEs FROM**  
***The Outsourced Marketing Department***

**Number 1 – Research**

If you can't afford to spend any money on research, doing a little yourself is better than not doing any at all. Identify the sorts of people likely to buy your product or service and ask them what they think of your idea. Ask family, friends, ex-colleagues, local businesses, Business Links – anyone you can think of. Most people like to air their views and the most unlikely people may just give you invaluable feedback or ideas. You might also find that it is an excellent way of generating business.

DIY research won't be as good as professional research, but it will be better than none at all.

**Number 2 – Company identity and logo design**

When you are having your company logo designed make sure the designer knows all the different places you intend using your logo. For example, letterhead, business cards, compliment slips, website, shopfront, vehicles etc. What works well in one medium may not work so well in another. Also, remember that generally the more different colours your logo has, the more expensive your print bill is likely to be!

**Number 3 – Pricing**

Selling your product or service at a loss is very easy, selling at a profit is much more difficult. When you are setting up in business, don't be tempted to sell 'at any price'. Make sure that you set the 'right price' from the start. The 'right price' is one that customers will find attractive and that makes you a profit. Once you've set a price it is extremely difficult to increase it and keep your customers – reducing the price is much easier.

**Number 4 – Monitoring**

There are many different ways to promote your product or service: advertisements, direct mail, internet, posters, leaflets and so on. Whichever method(s) you use, make sure that you measure the results. Ask customers how they heard about you and keep a note of what they say. This information is vital when planning future marketing campaigns.

### **Number 5 – Public relations**

Every company can use simple and inexpensive Public Relations methods to promote itself. Press releases are the simplest way. Local newspapers and trade magazines will always be interested in relevant and interesting news items. Including a good quality photograph with the press release will always increase the chances of getting it printed. But remember that editors are fiercely independent, so there is no guarantee that your story will be printed and you have no control over what the newspaper or magazine actually prints.

### **Number 6 – Direct marketing**

When you're expecting customers to respond to any direct marketing you do (such as direct mail or advertisements), give customers as many different ways to respond as possible. Some people like to fax back a reply coupon, while others feel happier to 'phone up. Email has quickly become a popular way of leaving a message, while others still rely on the traditional postal methods. Don't assume all your customers will all want to reply in the same way.

### **Number 7 – Copywriting**

The words in your promotional materials and on your website represent your company in the same way as the design does. Poor grammar, spelling mistakes and 'typos' portray a poor image of your company in the same way that a badly designed leaflet does. Whilst you can save money by writing your own materials, make sure you get as many people as possible to read them and re-read them before going to print – it's very difficult to spot your own mistakes.

### **Number 8 – Keep your website up-to-date**

Websites have quickly become a popular way for companies to promote themselves. Websites are relatively inexpensive to design and can be changed quickly and – again – relatively cheaply. However, companies beware. If your website is designed to carry topical information, you must update it regularly. Slogans that promote your Easter sale work well in Spring, but seem a little pointless in August. Also, where a home-designed website may win on initial outlay, it may lose in terms of performance in delivering leads. Professional website designers work in conjunction with search-engineers to ensure that site performance is optimised.

### **Number 9 – Customer satisfaction**

Knowing what your customers think of your product, your service, your staff and the company as a whole can help you to improve everything you do and identify potential problems before they occur. Add a few words in your brochures, on your website, even on the bottom of a bill or invoice, encouraging customers to tell you what they think. Alternatively, if you know who your customers are, send them a simple questionnaire with just a few questions asking what they think of what you do and how you could improve.

### **Number 10 – Moments of truth**

The points at which your company comes into contact with customers or potential customers, can be described as 'moments of truth'. Every time you see, talk to, write to or come into contact with a customer in any way, is a 'moment of truth' and could affect whether or not they become or remain a customer in the future. Consider those 'moments of truth' from the customer's point of view, would you like to be treated in the way you're treating your customers? If not, make sure you put it right.

### **Number 11 – Adding value**

'Adding value' is a popular marketing phrase and is all about giving the customer that 'something extra'. Keeping the customer happy is extremely important; the customer should be at the heart of any business – the focal point. It is well known that retaining present customers is considerably cheaper than recruiting new ones. Adding value wherever possible, whether through product or service, is a good way of maintaining customer relationships and can lead to competitive advantage.

### **Number 12 – The database**

For a database to be of any use, the information stored must be accurate and regularly updated. A customer database can be a vital source of information and a good starting point for any direct marketing campaign. However, if data is missing, or you suspect it is wrong, it may be worth contacting the person/company to bring the information up to date. It is also worth noting that if the relevant information is collected, a database can be used to tailor particular offers to particular customers.

Make sure when collecting data that you comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

### **Number 13 – Re-ordering printed items**

As a cost-saving exercise it is important to avoid unusable stocks of stationery and other printed matter that indicate out-of-date 'phone numbers, addresses, etc. Assess the usage rate of these items, and when you become aware of imminent changes (STD codes, new phone numbers, web site addresses, etc.) adjust your ordering, in terms of date and quantity. This will enable you to schedule the minimum amount of old stock before the new version comes into effect.

### **Number 14 – A 'professional' image**

For a professional appearance to your correspondence, set up templates on your PC for letter heading, fax heading, invoices, and any other documentation you use. Have your company logo scanned in, or use the same style and size of font for the company name on all documents. When entering text, keep to a specific page set-up, and use the same style and size of font throughout.

### **Number 15 – Know your limitations**

They say if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well. Because successful marketing is absolutely essential to a company's continued growth and profitability, this is one job that requires a lot of careful attention. If you think that you have the time and ability to do 'DIY marketing' well, and if all your customer feedback indicates that you are on the right track, with a clear vision of how to stay there, all well and good. If, however, you find that your marketing initiatives are failing – either because time is too short or you are losing customer support – don't hesitate to call in external marketing support from professionals.

***The Outsourced Marketing Department*** delivers professional outsourced marketing services to local and national businesses wherever and whenever they are needed. To find out more, visit [www.tomd.co.uk](http://www.tomd.co.uk) or call 01279 657555