

Florida Trend

Florida Small Business

Small Biz Sales Pitch

By Jeff Brooks - 3/2/2009

Fly fishing enthusiasts know it takes more than just casting a line to catch that prize trout: Knowing where to fish, using the right bait and giving fish exactly what they want when they want it.

When it comes to sales and marketing, small business owners are wise to follow the fisherman's lead. Know your customers, find the most effective ways to reach them, build relationships and customer satisfaction and the cash drawer stays full. In today's jumbled and highly competitive economy, finding the best way to market, sell and position a company's brand and its product and service to the right audience can be quite challenging, says Karin Arden, owner of Tampa-based JFD Advertising & Public Relations and immediate past president of the American Marketing Association, Tampa Bay chapter.

"Traditional advertising is just one small facet," Arden says. "It's becoming a lot more challenging to dump a lot of marketing dollars into print ad campaigns when we really need to figure some smarter means to reach the target audience."

Here's a look at some 21st century strategies to reach those valued customers. Some of the ideas use new technologies while others provide a new take on tried-and-true marketing tactics.

Personalized Websites

BroadBased Communication's Jan Korb focuses much of her attention online.

[Photo: rockawayphoto.com]

The Internet's rise changed the way buyers buy and sellers sell, says Jon Cummins, chief executive officer of Jacksonville-based Paramount

Performance marketing, who is using PURLs — Personalized URLs — to help his clients boost business. PURLs are personalized websites with unique web addresses for every customer on a business's direct mail list. They can be used for nearly any type of interaction between a company and a target audience, such as generating leads, updating databases, measuring response or getting customer feedback.

Customers receive a piece of direct mail that directs them to the personalized URL. Once a customer logs in, he is greeted with his name and a website with graphics or text designed just for him using the direct mail sender's database.

"Here's the real key," Cummins says. "If you send out a piece of personalized mail and you get them to a site where you can engage them, you know exactly where that lead came from."

Cummins says a recent PURL campaign had a 65% response rate compared to a 1% or 2% response from traditional marketing. Jan Korb, CEO of Jacksonville-based BroadBased Communications Inc., used a PURL to help a pediatrician's office update its database. "The cost of a PURL is not inexpensive," Korb says, "but the results are fantastic."

Korb says many businesses are redirecting their traditional advertising and print funds into websites "because they understand it's the most important marketing tool there is. If you're not online, you're going to miss out."

Twitter

Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that allows users to send and read other users' updates, or tweets. It started as a "teenager thing," says Cummins, but has found its way to the business world.

"Twitter is based on a mini-blog," says Korb, adding, "You have 140 characters to say what you have to say." Businesses or individuals set up a profile page, and customers or individuals can sign up to receive the tweets on their cellphones, e-mail or the Twitter website.

Small businesses can use Twitter to promote products, sales and events, says Korb. "It's a very effective marketing tool for people in the retail arena," she says.

Coupons and Offers

Everyone is looking for a good deal these days, and JFD Advertising & Public Relation's Karin Arden says that an old marketing standby — direct mail — can be an effective tool. The mailing has to have a purpose and a real offer. Arden says that one of her clients, Doctor's Walk-In Clinics, takes a tactical approach when it opens a new location, sending personal direct mail to the people within a three-to-five mile radius of that location.

"The way we know it works is the people come into the clinic with the card itself because we're offering them something, either a discount or a two-for-one flu shot," Arden says. "We know our dollars are being spent wisely."



Christine Najac uses networking and special events to build sales at Really Good Cookies, her Boca Raton-based Internet gourmet food company.

Photo: Eileen Escarda

Networking

In any economic climate, an effective way to grow sales is to meet as many potential customers as possible and then stay in touch with them. Christine Najac, who owns Really Good Cookies, a Boca Raton-based Internet gourmet food company that sells cookies, brownies and gourmet confections, networks routinely with several organizations, including hospitality groups and local chambers.

"I do a lot of special events," Najac says. "Organizations ask people like myself to come and set up a booth and give out samples of their products. It gives me a chance to give people a sound bite about what I do."

She stays in touch and expands her network further by e-mail. "My market e-mail blast is sent out normally twice a month and during the holidays twice

a week," says Najac, adding, "My original e-mail is passed along to others, so I'm not sure how many people are receiving it."

Jason Evers, president of Coastline Window Cleaning in Fort Myers, builds business by getting to know service providers in related fields, everyone from remodeling contractors to party planners. In business since 1994, he started the Southwest Florida Service Directory last April with the goal of bringing qualified companies and homeowners together. Currently the directory has about 50 members who share referrals and advertising costs. They meet monthly to discuss sales techniques and how to use Google to increase business.

"Referrals were the largest part of my business, and relationships are the more important aspect of my business," Evers says.

Catering to Customers

Cassanna Dwight owns Wedding Elegance Boutique in Polk County near Haines City. When she started the business in 2005, Dwight invested in a lot of print and radio advertising, including local church-based magazines, which "paid off really well until the economic crisis."

"We started taking a hit because we were a luxury item," Dwight says. Dwight started a marketing list of potential brides. She then paid teenagers to put fliers on cars and pass them out at the local high school for prom and homecoming, "which brings in a lot of business."

Customer service, Dwight says, took on a heightened importance, and she started offering layaway and discounts. "It took about one month to catch on," she says.

Pierre Kopec, owner of OXXO Care Cleaners in Doral, a suburb of Miami, tries to keep his customers as happy as possible by offering the "Thanks Again," program, which rewards patrons with airline miles. He also offers an ATM service, which allows customers to pick up their clothes after hours, one of the first businesses in the United States to do so.

"Thanks Again is a good pull for new customers," says Kopec, who opened his business five years ago by purchasing the franchise from Spain-based OXXO. "I do a lot of direct mail and also do coupons. It's all good for customer retention."