



Time to Stretch Your Marketing Budget

10 Ways to Get the Most from Your Marketing Dollar

By Drew Zagorski
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Times are tough. But the bottom line is that now, more than ever you need to stay in front of your clients and prospects. Those who don't will find themselves in a heap of trouble when things eventually do turn. Marketing your business - in tight or boom times - doesn't need to cost an arm and a leg. Here are 10 ways you can stretch your marketing dollar...

1. Eat everything on your plate

OK, so maybe you don't like Brussels sprouts. But Mom put things on your plate because they were going to be nutritious for you. In other words, eat it all - you'll get a benefit from everything there.

The same is true with everything you do from a marketing perspective. For instance, if you do e-newsletters, use every bit of it to do some good for you.

- ☛ Don't start and end with the email by placing the whole newsletter within the it. Just place teasers in the email and use those to drive folks to your web site. On your site you can offer up the entire newsletter.
- ☛ That web page that your newsletter is on then becomes spider food, which will contribute to boosting your SEO.
- ☛ And offer a downloadable print version. Not everyone likes to read things online. And, with a print version, you never know how many eyes will see it as it's noticed on someone's desk or passed along.
- ☛ Use the newsletter, especially if it contains truly important information (tax law changes? government regulations? new technology that can save you \$\$?) as a mailer to your clients and prospects. This way they get it in print and via email. And, not everyone that's on your client/prospect list may not be on your email list.
- ☛ Going to a conference or trade show? Print up a stack of newsletters and use them as handouts or in your information packet.
- ☛ Print out a handful as you head out for your sales calls and use the newsletter as part of your leave behind.
- ☛ If you're sharing a really, truly groundbreaking, game-changing concept that you've developed in your newsletter, send it to people in the media - editors, reporters, bloggers, etc. You may get some press out of it.

So, listen to Mom and eat everything on your plate.

2. Socialize... intelligently

Use social networks such as LinkedIn, Plaxo, Facebook, or Twitter to stay in front of and connect with new prospects. But be intelligent about it. Make sure you know where your highest probability targets are. LinkedIn is a purely professional social network; Facebook is more social in nature (vacation pictures, etc.); Plaxo is somewhere in between and not quite as big as LinkedIn or Plaxo; Twitter is annoying to a lot of people but to others it's the best thing since sliced bread (if you want people to know when you're going to the kitchen to slice some bread and if those people actually care that you're doing so).

Bottom line is, figure out where most of your constituents are and be there! Whenever you meet someone at an event and they're a true prospect or relevant to your business, or whenever you land a new client, invite them to your social network of choice. Then, make a social network date on your calendar. Once or twice a month, at a minimum (you need not make a career of social networks), spend an hour or two exploring your contact lists to see who they know and what they're up to. It's one of the easiest ways to find warm leads and new business.

3. The good earth of your web site... Organic results rule

Budgets may be tight but that doesn't mean you can't get great search results with your web site. Dig into its soil and make sure you've fertilized your site's roots by making sure your site is optimized to win in organic search. If you've got cash to do it, adwords campaigns will get you some results to be sure, but ensuring you're doing everything you can with regard to organic search is what will pay huge dividends for you. Several studies (not just our most recent poll question) have indicated that natural - organic - listings attract 60% or 70% of clicks as opposed to 40% or 30% for paid listings.

Organic SEO tips

- ☛ Dial in your title, description and keyword meta tags. Unless your business name is keyword rich, don't lead with it in a title. "Jones Enterprises" won't do as much for you as "Portland international shipping company - Jones Enterprises."



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- ☛ Identify of keywords for each significant page on your site. Don't use a generic batch that you slap into every page. Using 3-5 keywords that are germane to the content on the page is the way to go.
- ☛ Put those keywords into a keyword meta tag. It's true that some of the search engines place low relevance on it but others do, so you'll be covering your bases.
- ☛ Content is king. OK - I've heard the argument a million time... "Gee that's a lot of words to put on a web page. Nobody will read that and my site doesn't look as pretty with all those words on it." Get over it. I agree. PEOPLE won't necessarily be reading all that content, but SPIDERS will! And that's who you need to feed. And, by offering relevant, deep content, you'll also benefit because you'll become an expert and a resource for the people who visit your site, you'll have content that others will want to point to creating the all important inbound link.
- ☛ Watch your analytics. Use the tools you have available for monitoring your web site content. Most will show keywords that are used to find you, where people are navigating to within your site and how long they stay there. Use that data to drive your marketing strategy.

4. Be you and use the phone

Most readers of the Grey Matter are entrepreneurs. As such, sales - or business development - is a primary activity. Unfortunately, many entrepreneurs didn't launch their business to become sales people, but ultimately that's a part of the deal. So, what these folks say (and you know who you are) is "I don't do cold calls," or "I'm not a sales person."

OK, don't be a sales person. Be you. But get yourself in front of people at networking events and... pick up the phone and work at making things happen. Don't make cold calls. If those scare the ---- out of you, then only make warm calls. Only call people who you've been referred to and use the referring person's name as a softener.

This is where social networks are a great tool. Look at who your contacts know. If you see that your client, Sally, knows Bob, who owns a business and seems like he'd be a great fit as a client, call Sally and ask her permission to use her name to get in front of Bob. 99.9% of the time when you call someone and use this

type of referral, you'll get a meeting out of it, and often that meeting leads to new business or another referral. The phone is your friend. Use it.

5. Understand your customers

Who are your best customers? What's the common thread among them? Do they have similar problems? Do they tend to be women, men, older, younger? How are they connecting with you - phone, web, networking events? The answers you get from profiling your customers will give you a better understanding what makes them tick and what makes them buy. Work at getting your hands around that understanding.

Knowing your customers will allow you to not waste valuable time chasing after a low probability prospect.

6. Show your value, not your cost

You've got a great product or service and you've got it priced right. How could anyone possibly not want what you have to offer?

No matter how great your offering is, if you're focusing on your price (as great as it may be) will inevitably back fire on you. Money's tight everywhere, and regardless of your low price, you're still asking someone to part with cash. And, but focusing on your low cost, you may inadvertently be interpreted as a low quality option.

Rather, think about how your offering can save time and money for your prospect. Here's an example from a person I was recently talking with, let's call her Jane. Jane's offering is a virtual office manager service. She'll come in and handle the sorting of your mail, word processing, billing, put mailings together, etc. A great resource for a smaller business. Well, Jane had priced her services extremely low and she was still getting beat up on it. Because she was priced low, the value of her service was perceived as low. What Jane needed to do was to increase her price (so it was a wage that would produce an actual income after her expenses) and shift the conversation to the value she provides. By posing the question of what her client's time is worth and how many hours per day or week the client spends on the tasks that Jane could fulfill, she puts the value of her service right in front of her prospect. The end result, she could



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charge double what she originally thought and still be saving her clients a boatload of money.

7. Two words: E - MAIL

Email marketing is fast becoming the most effective means of reaching an audience and generating business. Why? Because is super cheap to do. You can send out 500 emails a month for less than \$20, versus hundreds, if not thousands of dollars for a printed piece. Now, all of my friends in the printing business, settle down. Printed matter absolutely has its place, and it's very important in terms of marketing any business. But that's another column.

With email, you're sending a message to people who know you, so your emails are very likely to at least be opened, and you can stay in front of them as often as you need to and that your budget will allow. That said, I recommend no more frequently than twice per month. Once a month is probably ideal. You don't want to become a pest.

Email will drive traffic to your web site (as in the newsletter example mentioned earlier). Email gives you an opportunity to present information that positions you as an expert. Email gives you a vehicle to place offers and coupons in front of your customers and prospects regularly. Email tools give you information that's actionable and can lead to sales (following up with emails that bounced, calling the people who clicked on a specific link, etc.).

If you're not using email as a primary tool in your marketing mix, you're missing a huge opportunity.

8. Negotiate ad rates - and always make sure you get online as part of the deal

Right now, you can find tons of deals in print and broadcast advertising. Because timid business owners have been pulling out of advertising in print, online and broadcast venues, there are bargains to be had. These advertising channels have a surplus of inventory.

True, many newspapers, in the traditional sense are rapidly declining. But they also have online versions that are very viable and increasing in readership. Radio and TV are still viable media, depending on your offering and target, and all have online presence.

If you choose to advertise via these channels, now's the time to negotiate a killer deal. With their inventory surplus, you'll likely get a lot more than you could have even a few months ago if you just ask. And always make sure that some type of online ad is part of the deal. Someone hears you on the radio on their drive to work, then goes to the station's web site to stream it at their desk and sees your ad there, you've just got two touches!

9. Webinars and white papers or case studies

Do it yourself marketing. By offering a webinar on some topic - then inviting your constituents to attend with your email newsletter, you'll position yourself as an expert, build goodwill for the free information you're offering and be able to add relevant content to your web site. Same with providing a white paper or case study.

All of these things you can create by yourself. Of course, if you're not much of a writer or graphic designer, you may want to engage someone who can help with that, but it's by no means a requirement. These tools also help you illustrate that value you have to offer.

Invest some time to consider offering a webinar or paper. It can pay big dividends.

10. Do something... anything

Now is not the time to be timid and perfection isn't a requirement. But if you do nothing to remain top of mind for your customers and prospects, nothing is exactly what you'll reap. Do anything you can to keep your name out there, even if it's not perfect. Your competition, who is pulling back, is who you need to beat. If they're doing nothing, you've got an easy task.

All this said, it's always best to get professional help in marketing your brand and your business. But that doesn't mean you need to break the bank. There are plenty of cost effective marketing ideas and resources available if you just make the effort to find and follow through on them.

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