



**ONLINE MARKETING  
TIPS & TACTICS TO BOOST  
YOUR SMALL BUSINESS**

**SCORPION**

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# INTRODUCTION

Running a business certainly isn't easy, given the ongoing struggle to stand out from the crowd in an extremely competitive economy, but matters are substantially more difficult for those who manage a small company that generates far less revenue than the "big name" corporations known the world over. For a small business owner, it's important to take advantage of every tool available to you, as even a tiny fluctuation in revenues can make the difference between bankruptcy and your continued viability. But it's an undeniable fact that, as a small business owner, you don't have the kinds of resources available to larger organizations. What can you do?

One of the keys to success for small businesses is their ability to exploit the benefits of modern-day online marketing techniques. Luckily, it's possible to do this without spending massive sums of money—in fact, for the most part you can build a strong online presence by using the kind of technological tools available to any average consumer. With a little time and effort, you can develop a wide-ranging online marketing presence that will attract significant numbers of customers, and you may even be able to pull consumers away from bigger, better-funded companies. With that in mind, let's take a look at the world of online marketing as it stands today, and how you can use its various aspects to your benefit.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DIGITAL MARKETING



There's no need to explain what marketing is—we're all inundated with it on a daily basis. Billboards, TV commercials, radio spots, magazine ads, and more, the variety of marketing materials we encounter seems staggeringly large. Without a doubt, this ongoing flood of promotional matter is highly effective in getting consumers to remember the names of nationwide companies, and influencing the purchasing habits of the general public.

For the most part, however, the ads and similar materials we see every day are produced by big corporations with millions and sometimes even billions of dollars in yearly revenues. A small business owner cannot draw upon these kinds of resources when planning a marketing campaign. In fact, nearly half of all small businesses spend less than \$5000/year on their total marketing efforts.<sup>1</sup> This is due to lack of funds, not any lack of desire or inability to recognize the benefits of marketing.

Naturally, this state of affairs limits the options of small business owners when it comes to promoting their goods and services. The good news, though, is that it's not necessary to spend vast sums of money in order to capture the attention of consumers. To a large extent, this happy development is due to the advent of the Internet and the easily accessible digital marketing options it can provide. Nearly everyone is on the Internet these days. The increased availability of Internet-connected smartphones and related portable devices makes it easier than ever to get online whenever you feel like it.

Even in the seemingly free and democratic environment of the Internet, small businesses tend to have trouble keeping up with huge big-name companies. As a small business owner, you will not be able to build a vast online empire in the way that Amazon and Apple have. Yet with some sound planning, you will be able to substantially increase your customer base and succeed in today's tough business world.

Maintaining a website for your business is an important first step toward carving out a space on the Internet—but you can't stop there. You need to stay active online, using a variety of digital tools to attract busy consumers.

# CHAPTER 2

## DIGITAL MARKETING TACTICS AND STRATEGIES: *SOCIAL MEDIA*



It's time to get down to the nitty gritty. By now it should be obvious that digital marketing is immensely important in today's economy, but what must a business do to capitalize on this trend? The path to success in digital marketing is not a clearly defined one. There are a number of tactics that businesses can employ, and which ones they select will depend on the type of industry in question, the budget of the company, and other considerations. The following should be regarded as a list of suggestions for those who are putting together a comprehensive marketing strategy.

### USE TWITTER (AND RELATED PLATFORMS)

Anyone who has spent five minutes on the Internet is no doubt already aware of Facebook and Twitter, to mention just the two most prominent social media platforms out there. But not all business owners succeed in exploiting the flexibility and potential influence that these platforms can provide. You should create Twitter and Facebook accounts for your business, and try to stay reasonably active on them. It's completely free of charge!

It's a perfect way to announce time-sensitive discounts and promotions. Some consumers resent emails from businesses; many more do not visit your website often enough to take note of promotions announced there. By contrast, it's easy to send messages to your followers through social media. It's also an opportunity to create a rapport with your customer base. Bear in mind that not everything has to be about promoting your products and services. "Joke of the day/week" posts or playful chatter with your online followers help to put a human face on your company.

### FOLLOW YOUR ONLINE REVIEWS

Online review sites are fairly new in cyberspace, and a lot of small businesses simply aren't following this trend like they should. Of course, consumers have been posting online reviews of businesses for years now, but these were spread all over cyberspace in a more or less disorganized fashion.

The creation of dedicated business review sites like Yelp changed that haphazard practice. Now consumers have access to websites where they can look up customer feedback on nearly any business that serves the general public. It's not uncommon for businesses to attract dozens or even hundreds of reviews—more than enough for a consumer to notice patterns that could encourage them to patronize a business, or shun it altogether.

All of these reviews are grouped on a page devoted to a particular business. Unlike a Twitter or Facebook page, these review pages are created without the permission of the businesses in question, but that doesn't mean you have no say in the content found on them. In general, you are allowed to add information to your business' page on a review site. You should take this opportunity to add photos of your business, update contact info, etc. In addition, you should also take every opportunity to respond to the reviews posted to your page, whether these are positive or negative. This shows that you are willing to engage with your customer base, and you can also correct any false information that may appear in a review.

## WRITE A GUEST BLOG

It's no secret that blogging is big these days, but not everyone wants to bother with the hassles involved with writing daily or weekly blog posts. Fortunately, guest blogging allows you to take advantage of the influence of blogs without the burdens involved with maintaining your own. Many popular blogs allow guests to come in and write a post relating to the primary theme of the site, and this provides a good opportunity to reach an unfamiliar audience.

Your guest blog can be about virtually any topic, so long as it fits the subject matter of the site. You could write about an event or tradition in your community, explore a specific topic relating to your company, compose an instructional guide (e.g., How to Change a Tire), or anything else that might be appropriate. Whatever you do, be sure to promote your business along the way, either by explicitly relating the theme of the blog to your business or by simply mentioning your company (and its URL, etc.) in the bio section of your post.

# CHAPTER 3

## DIGITAL MARKETING TACTICS AND STRATEGIES: *OTHER TOOLS*



Social media is powerful, but don't ignore the other tools available to you—including some old-time strategies that have found a new life in the digital age.

### SEND DIGITAL COUPONS TO CUSTOMERS

One great way to keep your customers coming back for more is to email them coupons offering discounts on goods and/or services. There was once a time when businesses had to pay for direct mail or newspaper ads to deliver coupons to customers, but email has changed that old practice. It's not difficult at all to email customers a digital coupon that they can print out and bring with them the next time they visit or shop. Alternatively, you can provide a code that they can enter for a discount for their next online purchase.

You can gather an email list by simply asking customers for their addresses when they visit your website or when they're at the checkout area of your brick-and-mortar store. Bear in mind, however, that not everyone is thrilled about getting emails from businesses. They can seem intrusive and "spammy." It's best to create a clear email policy that reassures customers that they'll get a manageable number of emails from you—maybe one a month, if that.

### DISTRIBUTE ONLINE PRESS RELEASES

The press release is yet another of those old-fashioned promotional tools that have been significantly updated in the digital age. The traditional way of distributing a press release—which is basically a brief article promoting a company's or individual's products or achievements—usually involved sending it via fax directly to journalists or editors. These days, press releases get posted onto the Internet for the whole world to see.

This development means that press releases are no longer seen by only a select few media professionals—they have become promotional materials for the entire public. This provides another opportunity to sell your products and services to your consumer base. Sites like PRBuzz and PRWeb provide easy-to-use services that will distribute your press release for you.

In general, you need to ensure that your press release is about a “newsworthy” topic, but this standard is easier to meet than you might think. Press releases are often devoted to promoting a temporary discount, a new product for sale, or even just a website redesign. If you’re not sure how to put together a good press release, you can find plenty of examples on the Internet that you can model yours after. Once the press release has been posted online, it will be findable by anyone searching on Google—and it will stay out there for years to come, capturing the notice of Internet shoppers who type in relevant keywords.

## GO LOCAL

As we have already said, small business owners do not have the funds of nationally and internationally based corporations. One way to counter this disadvantage is to concentrate on pulling in customers from your local community. Many people believe in “supporting the community,” and for that reason they are willing to patronize a local brick-and-mortar business even when a national chain in the area can provide the same products and/or services. Even if this isn’t a relevant consideration, your business may be able to offer better deals than better-known companies.

None of this matters, though, if local consumers aren’t aware of your business and what it can provide them. Therefore, you need to make them aware. You can do that by exploring a handful of local marketing tactics.

**Be active on local Internet forums** – Is there an online forum dedicated to local issues? A lot of popular sites (e.g., Reddit) have sub-forums where residents of a particular city go to discuss community matters, like mayoral elections or unusual weather conditions. By being active on these forums, on an account that is linked to your business, you keep the name of your company fresh in the minds of those in your community.

**Put local keywords on your website** – When consumers search for businesses in their community, they usually include the name of their town or the nearest big city (e.g., “pizza shop Las Vegas”). Try to make sure that your site prominently features the name of the city where you are located, as well as the “areas served” in adjoining communities. It’s also a sound SEO practice to post your street address on every page of your site, rather than just on the home page as so many businesses do.

# CONCLUSION

For small business owners, the increased popularity of digital marketing provides a wide range of opportunities to promote their goods and services, even in a crowded economy dominated by larger, wealthier corporations. Social media, digital press releases, guest blogs, and other tools allow small businesses to effectively “spread the word” at a reasonable cost.

# SOURCES

1. <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/7348-local-marketing-tactics.html>

# ABOUT SCORPION COATINGS

Located in Cloverdale, Indiana, Scorpion Protective Coatings, Inc. distributes truck bed liners and other high-quality protective coatings. Established in 1996, this family-owned business has thousands of clients across the globe.

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