

The Top 5 Small Business Marketing Challenges

AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

You've built something special with your business. But let's be honest — providing an excellent service isn't enough to stand out in today's market.

Here are the most common brand and marketing roadblocks we've seen that keep small to mid-sized businesses from reaching their full potential:

1 Driving Without a Roadmap

Let's face it...without clear brand and marketing strategies, you're essentially navigating blindfolded. Sound familiar?

THE BUSINESS IMPACT:

- Money wasted on tactics that don't move the needle
- Competitors seizing opportunities you should own
- Potential customers don't understand why they should choose you

THE SOLUTION:

First, develop a sound marketing strategy and plan.

Those two documents are key in helping you get the right message to the right people at the right time.

Next, determine your budget. Focus on where you can get the most benefit. Does a well-positioned billboard make sense? Or are you better served by a targeted social media campaign? Armed with keen customer insights, focus on meeting your prospective customers where they are (both physically and online) as well as where they are in their customer journey (a.k.a. the sales funnel).

Don't forget...marketing involves a bit of trial and error—especially with so many options to promote your business. Getting results requires being willing to nurture various campaigns and customer outreach efforts over time. Track your results and after a reasonable period you'll see which tactics are more effective for you. Continue to boost those efforts while letting go of some others. And don't be afraid to add new tactics so long as they align with your strategy.

2 Marketing that Misses the Mark

When your marketing team operates in a separate lane from your broader business strategy, the disconnects become painfully obvious.

THE BUSINESS IMPACT:

- Marketing that misses your true competitive advantages
- Resources focused on the wrong priorities
- Investments that deliver disappointing returns

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2 Marketing that Misses the Mark

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THE SOLUTION:

Business goals are often developed via a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats). Based on that, companies determine what they want to achieve in the next year and devise a plan to do it.

Any goals that require communicating with:

- 1) **customers (current/past/potential)**
- 2) **current or potential employees**
- 3) **donors, partners or other stakeholders**

...should be translated into marketing goals.

You must have marketing and brand leaders included in those strategic planning meetings...this can't be stressed enough. Only then can you truly leverage both marketing and your brand to effectively support your overall business objectives.

And if at any point you consider shifting your business goals (adding or eliminating products/services, adding new revenue streams or brand extensions, targeting new markets, etc.), include brand and marketing leads in those conversations as well. Not only do they play a key role in effectively supporting the new goals, they can also bring valuable insights and consideration points to the decision-making process.

By including brand and marketing leads in your strategic planning, you ensure your entire organization will be working in unison to achieve your goals—thereby increasing the likelihood that they will be achieved.

3 Blending In When You Should Stand Out

In a sea of sameness, why would customers choose you? Without meaningful differentiation, you're forcing an unwanted comparison.

THE BUSINESS IMPACT:

- Your true value gets lost in the noise
- Price becomes your customers' deciding factor
- Even your superior offerings struggle to command premium pricing

THE SOLUTION:

- 1) **A competitor audit is crucial.** You must analyze your competition. Understand how they're positioning themselves, their offerings, the marketing tactics and channels they use.
- 2) **Think about how your service meets your customers' needs.** How will it make their lives better? Or easier? What problem are you solving? Gather insights through focus groups or customer interviews, and craft your Unique Value Proposition (USP). (You might have multiple, depending on your various audiences.)
- 3) **Distinguish yourself** not only by WHAT you say, but HOW you say it (brand voice) and how you LOOK AND FEEL (visual expression). Look and sound different from your competitors in a way that is true to who you are and support it through EVERY customer interaction.

4 Valuable Insights Falling Through the Cracks

When your sales and service teams aren't talking to marketing, you're missing out on a goldmine of customer insights. And you risk developing materials that won't get utilized or be as effective as they could be.

THE BUSINESS IMPACT:

- Marketing messages that miss the mark with prospects
- Campaigns that generate plenty of leads—just not the right ones
- Sales materials that don't actually help close deals
- Longer sales cycles and frustrated sales teams

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4 Valuable Insights Falling Through the Cracks

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THE SOLUTION:

In order to optimize resources spent on marketing or building your brand, you must truly understand your customers AND your sales process. Don't work off assumptions or old data. Timely feedback and insights are key, and you're likely sitting on a goldmine of customer insights within your own walls.

- 1) **Gaining insights from your sales team is crucial.** Have your marketing team schedule regular check-ins with your sales or customer service teams. This isn't a one-and-done exercise, but rather an ongoing conversation.
- 2) **Create customer journey maps and develop marketing materials and tools that meet customers' needs at every stage.** What do they need to know and when? Are there helpful tools or materials that could be created to help answer questions and emphasize the value of your offering?

Is there a tool that could quickly explain your services to help aid in the buying decision?

- 3) **Now go beyond that...identify any holes or hurdles in the customer's journey and devise a plan to fix them.** The fact is we live in a fast-paced world with a focus on personalization and convenience. So how easy is it to work with you? What are the pain points (and there always are some to various degrees)? What can you do to alleviate them as much as possible?

While sometimes these answers may require more in-depth customer research, your frontline sales team can often provide great insights into common concerns, complaints or decision-making factors. And unfortunately they are an all-too-often untapped resource.

Essentially, your goal is to understand the buyer's emotional and logistical path to purchase, so you can leverage your marketing to send the right message at the right time and maintain a consistent sales pipeline. Establishing ongoing communication between your marketing and sales team can provide you with a substantial amount of insights and feedback so you can optimize your marketing messages and tactics throughout the year.

5 Trying To Do Everything with Too Little

Your small marketing team is juggling a dozen different channels and responsibilities. No wonder things feel scattered!

THE BUSINESS IMPACT:

- Your brand presence lacks the consistency needed to build trust
- Reactive firefighting instead of proactive planning
- Marketing efforts never build enough momentum to drive real results

THE SOLUTION:

- 1) **Prioritize your efforts strategically.** Determine where you get the most bang for your buck. With a smaller team, being strategic and decisive in how time and budget are allocated is crucial. Identify targeted opportunities such as ads in industry publications, event sponsorships, or hosting booths where your potential customers gather. Leverage

customer insights to pinpoint the best opportunities and nurture those relationships.

- 2) **Focus on 3-5 key marketing opportunities for the year.** Commit to them, avoiding distractions like shiny objects or discounted ad rates. A defined strategy beats random, last-minute efforts any day. Avoid the trap of sporadic marketing by establishing a clear plan that guides your team's efforts consistently.
- 3) **Distribute responsibilities wisely.** Be cautious about assigning too many tasks to one person. If you have a small team, allocate specific tasks to different team members. Periodically re-evaluate processes and explore tools that can enhance efficiency.
- 4) **Seek external support for significant moves.** Don't hesitate to bring in external agencies for brand and marketing strategy, planning, and creating on-brand tools and templates. Once you've established a solid strategy and have key assets, your in-house team can handle day-to-day tasks with ease.

By implementing these strategies, you can navigate limited resources and time constraints, giving your brand the boost it needs.