

THE ZERO-BUDGET MARKETING PLAN



A Resource Guide: Leveraging Today's Best
Free Marketing Tools for Widespread Visibility





Every professional business consultant will recommend creating a marketing plan as one of the first important steps for any business. However, this step is often overlooked by boot-strapping entrepreneurs operating on a minimal budget.

Let's face it - traditional advertising is expensive! But luckily, with a little creativity, there are a variety of ways that businesses can "get the word out" about their products and services without breaking the bank!

Here are some top suggestions and resources to help you create a marketing plan that can lead to worldwide visibility for your business without spending a dime:

WRITE TO YOUR TARGETED AUDIENCE WITH ARTICLE MARKETING

Article marketing remains one of the hidden secrets of business promotion. Have you ever wondered where all those articles come from in magazines, on websites and even in blog posts? Usually, if you read between the lines, someone is covertly selling or promoting a product or service. It's not a direct marketing tactic, but it can be even more effective, especially if you gear your article's message to emotionally connect with your target audience. Furthermore, having your articles picked up by the media and published can significantly include your website's SEO by creating valuable backlinks.



RESOURCES:

[Where To Submit Your Articles](http://www.submityourarticle.com/creative-article-marketing/places-to-submit-articles/) (<http://www.submityourarticle.com/creative-article-marketing/places-to-submit-articles/>)
[Article Marketing Tips](http://articlemarketingtips.org/) (<http://articlemarketingtips.org/>)

SOCIAL MEDIA

If your business doesn't have a presence on the major Social Media platforms, you're missing out on a huge audience.

Establish a page on FACEBOOK

Facebook statistics boast over 800 million users to date and growing, making it by far the #1 resource for free business marketing! Facebook has become so popular as a marketing and networking tool that people are now creating careers as Facebook consultants! Without a doubt, one reason for its popularity is that it is an extremely user-friendly application. Anyone can do it! Once your business profile is created, invite your friends, family and other contacts to "Like" your page, and be sure to post brief, informative, interesting items at least weekly and ideally once a day.

Link to prospective business contacts on LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is THE place to be if you are trying to market a small business. Like any other social media application, it's based on networking and therefore takes some regular time and effort. To gain maximum exposure on LinkedIn, join groups that attract your target audience. Then establish yourself by posting informative and interesting brief articles that your readers can quickly absorb, share and use!



OTHER ONLINE NETWORKS... Google+, Twitter, YouTube, StumbleUpon, Reddit, DiggIt, etc...and there are more available everyday!

RESOURCES:

[How Do You Use LinkedIn](http://www.jeffbullas.com/2011/09/07/how-do-you-use-linkedin-infographic/) (<http://www.jeffbullas.com/2011/09/07/how-do-you-use-linkedin-infographic/>)

[100 Smart Ways To Use LinkedIn](http://linkedintelligence.com/smart-ways-to-use-linkedin/) (<http://linkedintelligence.com/smart-ways-to-use-linkedin/>)

TIP: Promote your social media pages in your email signature block, stationary, brochures and other marketing materials and you will soon see your fan base grow.

SET UP AN EMAIL CAMPAIGN ON MAILCHIMP



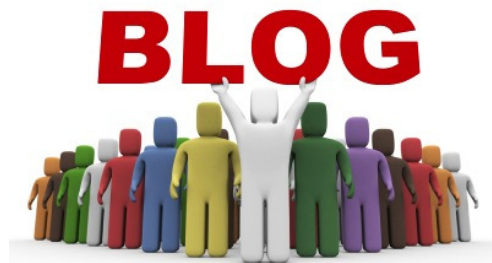
Sign-up for a free MailChimp account to send professional looking emails and newsletters to up to 2,000 subscribers. This outstanding service provides beautiful designer templates as well as several integrated features, including automated blog-to-email, Facebook integration and more. It's simple to use and will give your email correspondence a professional, cutting-edge feel. Be sure to practice legitimate list-building techniques and reward your contacts with regular emails or newsletters providing valuable information.

RESOURCES:

[Getting Started With MailChimp](http://mailchimp.com/resources/guides/html/getting-started-with-mailchimp/) (<http://mailchimp.com/resources/guides/html/getting-started-with-mailchimp/>)

CREATE A BLOG

Once you've decided to take the plunge and create your own blog, you will find a variety of free platforms to choose from. Tumbler, Blogster and Wordpress are just some of the most popular. Whichever you choose, be sure to schedule your posts for regular distribution, be it daily, weekly or monthly. Keep to a schedule and assure that each post provides relevant information to your target market. And remember, your blog is a reflection of your business, so create a design identifies your brand and be sure that each post is professional and appealing. It's also a good idea to secure a proofreader to assure there are no typos or spelling or grammatical errors.



RESOURCES:

[Blogging Basics](http://www.bloggingbasics101.com/) (<http://www.bloggingbasics101.com/>)

[Blog Tips](http://www.dailyblogtips.com/category/blogging-basics/) (<http://www.dailyblogtips.com/category/blogging-basics/>)

CONTRIBUTE AS A GUEST BLOGGER

If you haven't had the time to create and maintain your own blog, or you would just like some added exposure, consider writing as a guest blogger for other complimentary businesses that share your same target audience. This is a very effective and easy way to gain visibility and credibility with the people you want to reach most.

USE A FREE WEBSITE HOSTING SERVICE

There are several services that allow even beginners to quickly and easily create a basic website with a professional design and additional features such as an integrated blog, contact forms, SEO functionality and customization. When designing your site, first decide on the purpose of the website, and then choose the colors, basic layout, navigational structure and basic intention of each page. Then begin populating your site with professional content and graphics. Again, it's wise to secure a proofreader before the site goes live to assure the content is a positive reflection of your business.



TARGET YOUR INNER CIRCLE



Contact your extended family, friends and associates to keep them updated on your business, invite them to subscribe to your blog or newsletter and offer them a free promotional item or report, etc. Your best fans are those who know and love you already! Keep them in the loop; they will be your greatest source of referrals.

ATTEND LOCAL NETWORKING EVENTS



Photo Credit: TungPhoto

In this age of online everything, it's easy to disregard the power of personal interaction. However, it remains clear that face-to-face networking is still one of the most effective forms of promotion. Networking is all about building relationships, and there's no faster way to do this than to actually meet and speak with your peers and prospective clients. Of course, be sure to promptly follow-up with your new contacts. Without follow-up, networking is just about worthless. So get out there and give it a try, if you haven't already. You'll be amazed at the results!

RESOURCE: [Why Networking In Person Matters](http://smallbiztrends.com/2011/02/why-networking-in-person-still-matters.html) (http://smallbiztrends.com/2011/02/why-networking-in-person-still-matters.html)

OFFER TO TRADE SERVICES

The barter system is alive and well! Once you've been introduced or have become acquainted with someone who you feel would be a potential client or good referral source for your business, offer to volunteer or trade services. This is an excellent way to 'get your foot in the door', become better acquainted and really spotlight your excellent product or service. In this case, it's definitely best to give more than you receive!

ASK FOR REFERRALS

We all know that word of mouth is often the most effective form of advertising. However, just sitting back and waiting for a client to tell their friends about your awesome product or service may not be the most efficient way to take advantage of this opportunity. Go out there and ask your top clients for a

referral! Be sure to also offer them an enticing incentive, and soon you'll have new clients knocking at your door.

GATHER TESTIMONIALS



Photo Credit: zirconicusso

If you are providing a quality product or service, eventually you will receive accolades for your hard work. And when you do, after expressing your gratitude of course, ask your clients if they would mind your quoting them as a "testimonial". 99% of the time they won't mind at all, and will actually be happy to be able to help in your promotion.

Post these testimonials on your social network profiles, your website and in your brochures to let your prospective clients know how much your products and services are valued by others.

This is just a sampling of ideas, but by now you see that there are enough valuable free marketing opportunities to keep you busy for a lifetime! Take it one step at a time, and soon you'll find that you're establishing some wide-spread recognition. In all of your marketing efforts, remember to stay true to yourself and only promote what you believe in. And for the most part, try to avoid the hard-sell approach. Instead aim to inform, enlighten and even entertain your audience. Your message will reflect your values, and customers will be instinctively drawn to your business.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Carol Aldridge, owner of Progressive Business Solutions, is an administrative consultant and support specialist with over 25 years experience in business management, focusing on the equine industry. Established in 2010, Progressive Business Solutions now serves a wide variety of businesses throughout the continental United States and Canada. For more information visit: www.ProgressiveBusinessSolutions.net

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