

## Tough Economic Times? Time to Get Creative

Building business is challenging enough when the economy is strong. When the business climate cools off, you need to get more creative with your marketing.

Here are some tips designed to keep customers coming back:

1. Market consistently. If you want to maintain visibility and not be a one shot wonder, it's important to keep your name out in the marketplace. Don't give your customers a chance to forget about you.
2. Focus on your customer's needs. Learn what they are **by asking**. Never assume.
3. Make customer care a priority. A positive customer experience may be the difference between keeping a customer or losing her to a competitor. Vow to make every customer experience a positive one.
4. Design your marketing material to be used in a variety of ways. A #10 envelope size card can be mailed along with a letter, used in counter displays, used as leave-behinds when making sales calls, or passed out at networking events.
5. Keep your marketing message consistent. Do not keep changing who you are. Not only does that muddy your brand building, but it confuses your customers.
6. Find a WOW" about your business.... and let everyone know about it. If you can't find one, create one. It's the reason customers talk about your store. One-of-a-kind products. Custom designs. Styles that are always a few steps ahead of the crowd.
7. Read *Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping* by Paco Underhill. It's a great book that explains what triggers peoples' "need that" button.
8. Don't get discouraged. Our economy is cyclical. Business always comes back. And when it does, you want to be first on your customers' "visit lists".

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Rickey Gold & Associates is a small, smart Chicago-based marketing communications firm. They develop marketing messages that turn prospects into customers.

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## Best Bet Marketing Tools For A Tight Budget

### Low cost or free.

- Word-of-Mouth (WOM)  
Get people talking about your business. You want customers to have a **great experience...** to leave happy with plans to return...and to tell all their friends about you. Your goal should be to have customers walk out of your store thinking “what a great (fill in the blank\_\_\_\_\_store, selection, place to browse, etc.).”
- Viral Marketing  
Think *marketing that spreads like a virus*. Encourage people to share information with their friends and colleagues. But tell them! Some ideas:
  - At the bottom of your e-newsletter, include a line that says “Share this with your friends.” It can be a box to type in the friend’s email. Or a “forward” link.
  - Buy one, give your friend a coupon for 50% off her next purchase.
  - Email out a special offer. If the recipient shares it with a friend who comes into your shop, they both get a special gift (discount, card for a free coffee at Starbucks, etc.)
  - Start getting used to saying, “Tell your friends about us.”
- Networking  
LPCC members don’t need to be told how effective this is. Attend events. Get to know your chamber colleagues. People recommend people they know and like.  
  
Don’t limit your networking to events. It’s ok to talk to strangers on the bus, in line at the bookstore. You never know when a conversation can turn to business needs.
- Show off your products.  
Sell clothing or accessories? Wear them. Have your salespeople wear them in the shop (and out).
- Write articles or tip sheets.  
Submitting articles to websites and article directories can get your name out and help build your brand as well as your expertise. You can always write something for *The*

Source LPBDI page or the *LPCC E-newsletter*. Contact Rickey Gold if you're interested.

## **Affordable**

- Handouts, Postcards, Leave Behinds, Bookmarks  
Especially when one piece can be used for a variety of purposes.
  - Vista Print and 4x6.com will print cards at very affordable rates. Service is fast and the quality is fine.
  - If you have some creative staffers, let them make handmade handouts: bookmarks (ask Gail Z !), gift certificates, etc.
- Focus on customer care  
Re-connect with customers you haven't talked to in a while.  
Companies with strong customer relationships build loyal clients.
  - Pick up the phone and call just to say hello.
  - Call a customer when something comes in you know she'd like.
  - Send a note thanking customers for their patronage.
- Cause-related marketing
  - Do a joint event with another retailer or service provider. A pet supply/toy store can work with or a groomer and donate a percentage of sales to PAWS.
  - A restaurant can pair up with a spa. Offer a gift certificate for an afternoon treat for your special lady, ie. a massage and long lunch.... with proceeds to a women's shelter or breast cancer research.
- Get your website up to speed  
If you want to be found by potential customers, you need to be visible when they search online.
  - Keep your site fresh with regular updates
  - Have links to and from other sites so visitors can find more information (and you become a resource!)
  - Make sure your copy is keyword-rich. If you can't do it yourself, hire someone. It's worth outsourcing to get it right.

## **A Little Pricier**

- Host events at your shop: to introduce a new product line, to celebrate Spring, to promote a new indie designer, artist or author.
- Hire a publicist to spread the word about your products or services.
- Start using video to introduce new products on your website. Or to demo something. Or to show how to turn a quick'n'easy recipe into the highlight of a weekend get-together.
- Create a snazzy new brochure....or several for new products you're introducing. Ask some neighboring retailers if you can display them on a countertop in their store or restaurant.
- Do some print advertising....but not if you can't run at least 3x in a six month period (per publication).
- Do some radio spots on stations that reach your target market.

Stay visible. Don't cut your prices to ridiculously low numbers. Doing so makes your products or service appear less valuable.

Market as much as you can comfortably afford. When the economy turns around, you'll be a known name, one with brand recognition.