



Jelf Top ten marketing tips for shop owners

Make the most of
your shop window

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You've got yourself good premises, selling quality products at respectable prices - but how do you make more people aware of your existence?



Marketing is not just for the big boys - all companies can grow their business with the right marketing strategy, it's just that when you're working on a small budget you might need to be a little bit more creative in your approach.

We've put together ten top tips to help small shop owners market their firm; not all may be applicable to your circumstances, but you're sure to find a good few ways you can get your name out there in an effective manner. Just remember: however you decide to market your shop, keeping a record of the campaign's success from the very start is vital - if your strategy isn't returning the right results, it's time to try something new.



Work out what you do

If you want to market your business, you need to **know exactly what it is you are offering** to potential customers - and importantly, how that offering differs from those of your competitors.

Think carefully about what you do in your business and include all the side-lines and additional services. For example, if you sell shoes - could you offer minor repairs? Could you market the fact that you also sell specialist footwear, such as steel-capped boots or walking boots? What you want to market is not simply your business, but **how your business stands out**.

If, after consideration, you decide you just want to focus on selling shoes, then you can still use this by playing on the fact that you concentrate on one particular area to deliver quality and value to your customers. Once you know what you are offering, it should help you focus your marketing strategy more effectively.



Understand your target market

You may consider everyone a potential customer, but when it comes to marketing strategy, the most sensible approach is to **focus your efforts on the groups of people** who are most likely to use your services or buy your products. If you're working with a limited budget - which most small business owners are - this will likely get you the best return from your outlay.

Do you sell mostly to a particular group of people with certain interests, or those in a particular industry? Knowing who your customers are allows you to speak to them through mediums they use - trade press or niche publications, for example.

If you're unsure as to the specific demographic of your customers, you could try asking them to - voluntarily - complete a short survey with each purchase. If you keep it simple and just ask a few basic questions - age, profession, etc. - and maybe put all participants in a prize draw or give them ten per cent off their next purchase, you should gather some valuable information about the types of customer you are attracting.



Optimise your online shop front

The internet has transformed the way we shop. A recent study by the retailer John Lewis has revealed that 30 per cent of all sales were generated online - yet 40 per cent of these orders were picked up in-store. Furthermore, 40 per cent of the company's online transactions came from mobile devices, and the retailer even found that shoppers are using their mobile to compare prices online while they are actually in the shops browsing the products.

While a small one-shop retailer cannot be expected to offer an online presence like John Lewis does, the

study does show that consumer shopping habits are changing, so aligning yourself with this as best you can by using an attractive website which works on mobile devices is a good approach.

Being able to offer an **online presence to customers is an important aspect** of support for your marketing strategy; if a potential customer sees your advertising and wants to check you out online before heading down to your store, not having that presence may mean they don't bother and instead use a competitor that does have a website.



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Social presence

Social media is no longer just a way to keep in contact with old school friends - it has become a part of many people's daily lives; research from the Pew Research Center suggests that two-thirds of all internet users use social networks. Companies, too, are making the use of sites like Facebook and Twitter key parts of their marketing strategies. From informing customers about new deals to promoting their brands as more accessible and engaging, there are **many possibilities for using social media to market your business.**

Facebook, for example, has built-in ads and anyone can turn a post into an advert to share with the community. However, just having an online profile costs nothing, and can keep existing customers up-to-date with your business and give potential

customers a place to get a look at what you're all about. As with your website, having this presence is becoming increasingly important.

As there are many social networks, think about which ones might be best for you. If you have regular updates to make you could try Twitter, but if you want to showcase your shop on a larger scale, then Facebook may be more beneficial. Think of your target market too, as this may have a bearing on the social network you choose: the Pew Research Center study also showed that women are five times more likely than men to be using Pinterest. If your products need to be seen to be believed, Pinterest offers an amazing opportunity to showcase your wares and retail direct from the site.



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Search the free publicity

There is a lot of free publicity available out there if you're prepared to be creative. For starters, make sure your shop is listed on as many free business directories as you can find - many people use these to find specialist retailers in their area.

Try and **reach out to your local newspaper**, too. Journalists really value their contact books, and whenever a news story that impacts on small business breaks, they like to get the local angle by getting comments from local traders. By putting your name forward with your local paper - you'll find contact details for individual journalists above or below their articles - you may find yourself contacted for a short response on the latest news story. For a few minutes sharing an opinion over the telephone, you may find your name and your business

mentioned in a local newspaper read by thousands of people.

Another way to grab a little free publicity is to piggyback events that come to town. Contact event organisers and offer to sell tickets or stock promotional materials in your shop. That way, your store's name will be included in the event's expensive marketing campaigns.

Lastly, you could try contacting your local university - if it runs a marketing course. There are thousands of marketing students each year looking for short-term work experience to fulfil their course requirements, and you could harness their skills by letting them run a short marketing campaign for you, free of charge.



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Sponsor events

If you have a little extra money available for marketing initiatives, then you could think about **sponsoring some local events.** From charity fundraisers to local business-networking workshops, there are a variety of events going on in local communities which will provide valuable exposure for your business in return for a very modest cash payment to help with running costs. If you look for events related to your specific sector those attending should be largely consistent with your target market. But it may also be beneficial

to use this type of sponsorship to broaden your general customer base, depending on your business plan.

If you sponsor a charity event, it's also worth noting that this may be tax-deductible. The rules are quite specific so check out the section on sponsoring a charity on the **HM Revenue & Customs website**, but this could prove to be a very cost-effective way to get the name of your shop out there.



Networking events

If part of your customer base is other businesses, then networking events are a great place to **market your company the old fashioned way** - with a good sales pitch. For events like this, you should practice what they call the 'elevator pitch': a short statement which quickly and simply gets your point across - in this case your business, what it does and its value to others - inside one minute. You may not get much time with the people you want to speak to, and besides, you don't want to leave a bad impression by taking up too much of their time, either. A good elevator pitch will hopefully open up a short conversation, and exchanging business cards is the next step to striking up an ongoing relationship. Some consider business cards to be a little outdated,

but at networking events you can meet a lot of people, and a business card provides a visible reminder of your conversation.

Even if you're not looking for potential customers within the local business community, then it is still valuable to get to know those who are also working within it. Sharing experiences can help business owners avoid the pitfalls that others have encountered, and developing relationships with owners of similar-sized business could even lead to co-operative marketing opportunities.

Check out your local business publications and websites such as findnetworkingevents.com to track down business networking events in your area.



Co-op marketing

Co-operative marketing involves two or more companies **pooling resources** for a combined marketing campaign. While you won't want to do this with competitors, teaming up with your suppliers or non-competitive but complementary local firms can reap benefits in some cases. Through co-op marketing, you could offer discounts, or pool funds to sponsor local events, increasing your exposure by tapping into the other firm's customer base.

However, it is important to understand that you need a strong relationship and shared understanding with the partnering firm to make the most from co-operative marketing. All partners need to have

similar ideas about the type of marketing they want to undertake and what constitutes 'success' in the campaign. This last factor is important because the relationship will quickly break down if the early results are satisfactory for one firm but not for another, which is trying to pull the campaign in a different direction.

That level of trust should also extend to the products or services the **other partner firms provide**; if a customer comes to a partner firm through co-operative marketing involving the name of your company and is then dissatisfied with their service, then your company could be harmed by association.



Communicate with your customer base

Some small businesses get so caught up in trying to attract new business that they can forget that their existing **customer base is an already-won target market**. Keeping in contact with customers who have already bought from you before and experienced your service is helpful for ensuring repeat custom.

If you were a customer who bought something from a local enterprise, would you be sure to remember where you got that product from when you wanted to buy another similar item a year or so later? Just keeping the name of your store in people's minds can

be beneficial in generating return custom. Sending out a simple email newsletter every month to existing customers can achieve this, and if you include details of special offers and discounts then your emails are more likely to be **read by their recipients**.

If you are a specialist in a particular area, you could also try emailing out articles of interest to firms who share an interest in your particular sector. Not only does this keep your company name fresh in their minds, it can build your reputation as a trusted and knowledgeable vendor.



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Referrals incentives

When shoppers are weighing up whether to buy from a particular shop, they want to know that the products they buy will prove to be of high quality and value, and whether the service will be **trustworthy** and reliable. Many websites offer customer reviews and feedback on retailers, but nothing beats a personal recommendation from someone you know and trust.

From your point-of-view, therefore, try and encourage your existing customers to recommend you to friends

and business associates by offering them a discount for doing so. Something as **simple as offering** an existing customer ten per cent off their next order if they recommend your shop to someone else can help you broaden your customer base and secure more orders. As long as your products and service standards are up to scratch, you're likely to secure further purchases from that new customer in the future - and maybe even another recommendation.