7 Creative Strategies for Marketing Your Startup on a Tight Budget

Author : Matthew Toren

Date : June 22, 2016

Boostrapping builds character. There are endless ways to finance your ideas, but there's nothing like **marketing** a startup with a modest budget to encourage **innovation**. Limited funds give you an excuse to flex your creative muscle and truly share your vision with the world.

Don't rely on the same old banner ads and Google reviews. Instead, try these eight **marketing** strategies to place the spotlight on your business.

1. **Share your central "why."**

"What do you do for a living?" This simple question is one you're asked during almost every introduction. If you answer with a quick, "I'm an entrepreneur" (vague and a little diluted) or, "I run a small business" (makes people think of brick-and-mortar spots), you're cheating yourself out of an opportunity to generate word-of-mouth **marketing** for your business.

Instead, develop a narrative that differentiates your company from others and sparks conversation. Does your startup support a certain cause with every sale? Say so. Did you come up with your business idea during a troubling life event? Mentioning it may inspire those around you.

Sharing your central "why," as well as the story on how your startup came to be, will make your business more memorable to others. Plus, it will interest people more at parties.

2. **Don't just sell -- engage.**

As an entrepreneur, your instinct may push you to sell to everyone you meet. Though there's nothing wrong with flaunting your **brand** now and then, it's important to give your company relevance and participate in discussions that don't quite revolve around your business.

With **social** media, it's easy to engage your target demographic without looking like you're just trying to advertise. Some businesses may leave encouraging comments on photos of people's food; sports equipment retailers may "re-post" articles on a local high school basketball team's recent win. Build **brand** trust by showing your support, whether of your community or your online following.

Next time someone's looking for a product or service within your niche, they'll remember your kindness and go to you. Sharing someone else's content doesn't necessarily mean losing your audience's attention. You can use Start a Fire to create share-ready URLs that add **brand**ed badges to any Web page, so that when someone clicks on the links you post, they'll see you there, along with more content that you recommend.

3. **Carve a niche and build industry credibility.**

Your startup's shoestring budget can't keep you from carving out its own niche. Assemble a culture around your business by offering an insider's perspective to those on the outside. A blog can offer laymen the chance to understand your trade with a new perspective. A webinar or a podcast can help viewers (or listeners) feel like experts in your field. Speaking at an incubator, expo or niche event can put you in the role of the teacher and allow you to share your groundbreaking ideas with an immediate audience. The small business convention you attend every year is probably in need of a few more keynoters; why don't you try speaking instead of observing?

Networking and sharing your expertise with others can help you prove your abilities to your community. A variety of people, from journalists to aspiring entrepreneurs, can help to create buzz around your business.

Try offering your expertise to small business newbies through forum sites like Quora, where thousands of aspiring entrepreneurs ask questions for pros to answer. You can also share your story by connecting with journalists online via Help a Reporter Out (HARO).

4. **Help people discover your content.**

If your startup is fit for the twenty-first century, it maintains some sort of online presence. In fact, you may be satisfied with just a website, some **social** media pages, a blog, or even a pre-launch Web page. Just because your content is online, though, doesn't mean it's easily discoverable by your target audience.

With every post you publish, use keywords specific to your niche, like "vegan leather tote" instead of “handbag,” for example, to improve your Google rankings. You can also use these hyper-targeted keywords to power your **social** media-based audience acquisition. With Socedo, a **social** media automation tool, you can find Twitter users who post content using your niche keywords and engage with them over time.

Next, help people find your content by practicing a few SEO techniques, starting with your website. Title your pages with phrases unique to your business so they stand apart from other sites. Improve your website’s load speed by removing unnecessary plug-ins and long strings of code (perhaps a job for your Web developer), and always be sure to post original content instead of copying from another site. There are countless options for improving your general SEO ranking, but taking care of a few easy tasks will boost your content’s position in search results for now.

5. **Send out irresistible e-coupons.**

You’ve probably experienced coupon temptation before. Research shows that very few can resist the appeal of a great coupon; four out of five consumers use coupons regularly both in-store and online. Moreover, about half do business with a particular company because they were provided a coupon.

While you could go the old-fashioned route and distribute coupons via snail mail, exclusive e-coupons hit two birds with one stone by convincing more people to join your email list. There are also some clever ways to integrate e-coupons into your email **marketing** strategy.

Those who are already invested in your mission will appreciate the ways in which you thank them for their business. People new to your company will be more likely to join your following. It’s a win-win.

6. **Scratch their back, they’ll scratch yours.**

If you’re just starting out, you may have a hard time introducing your company to the public. A great way to build a niche and generate word-of-mouth is through samples and giveaways.

Try reaching out to eager members of your target audience and offering up your commodity (or a sample slice of it) in return for a review and shares on **social** media.

Those who participate get a cool new item or experience to share with their friends, while you get trust and visibility -- another win-win. You don’t want to give up your entire stock all at once, but sharing it with a select few could give you a **marketing** edge.

7.

Co-sponsor an event within your niche.

Every industry hosts its special events: the annual Carnegie Conference for traditional and **digital** marketers, VeritageMiami for U.S. winemakers and the Interior **Design** Hall of Fame gala for -- you guessed it -- interior **design**ers. Unless an event is owned and managed by a single company, most planners seek out sponsors to help fund the event.

This provides you with a fantastic niche **marketing** opportunity. Next time you're thinking about attending an event within your industry, see if it has any sponsorship spots open. Better yet, ask whether you can present there (or otherwise spotlight your company) to further engage attendees. Aside from giving you a good name, co-sponsoring a niche event allows you to meet and greet with your target demographic, network and generate new leads.

Your modest **marketing** budget doesn't have to stop you from showcasing your startup. Leveraging connections, special events, skills and the Web can give your business a special twist. What creative **marketing** strategies have you used to spotlight your startup?

This article first appeared in www.entrepreneur.com