

How to Get Marketing Help When You Need It

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Does your small business have **marketing** and **branding** needs, but not enough money to hire an agency or a consultant? Don't fret, there are still many options open to you to ensure that you're getting what you need to start or grow your business.

Here are just a few no-cost and low-cost resources from my new book, [Beyond Your Logo: 7 Brand Ideas That Matter Most for Small Business Success](#).

Learn What You Can

Learn as much as you can about **marketing** and **branding** on your own. Even once the business can afford internal or outsourced specialists, some basic knowledge is highly valuable for small business owners and managers.

Classes, Seminars, and Webinars

A good start is to take classes and seminars. Many community colleges and universities offer a variety of small business **marketing** and **branding** courses. Some require in-person participation, others are available online.

(For topic-specific **marketing** seminars, **MarketingProfs** offers a variety of free and PRO [online seminars and webcasts](#), in addition to [MarketingProfs University courses](#), many of which include content suitable for small business owners and professionals who don't have a **marketing** background.)

Government Agencies and Nonprofit Organizations

Check for government agencies and nonprofit organizations that assist small businesses with dedicated microsites, business development centers, classes, or one-to-one consultations or coaching. Start with your city, state, province, or federal government website.

Here are some US resources:

- [National Federation of Independent Business](#)

- [SCORE](#)
- [US Small Business Administration](#)

And some in Canada:

- [Canada Business Network](#)
- [Canadian Federation of Independent Business](#)
- [Service Canada](#)

Marketing Vendors

Look for free whitepapers, e-books, and webinars from reputable **marketing** and **branding** vendors that offer free resources for their own lead generation purposes. There's no obligation on your part to use their services, but if you find their content valuable, share them on **social** media and with colleagues to help them gain exposure and search engine ranking. That's a sure way of showing your appreciation for their expertise.

Books, Blogs, and Websites

Regularly read **marketing**, **branding**, and customer-focused books, blogs, and websites to gain insight, learn new ideas, discover new tools, and dialog with experts.

Social Media, Associations, and Chambers of Commerce

Join select **marketing** and **branding** LinkedIn groups, question sites, small business associations, and chambers of commerce. They offer countless ways to learn more about **marketing** and **branding**.

In active LinkedIn groups, group members post resources and share their expertise, advice, and opinions in discussion forums. You can ask questions and share your own best-practices.

Question sites give you an opportunity to post your **marketing** and **branding** questions and have peers and experts respond. If you discover members with consistently good answers, you can choose to follow them, sign up for their e-mails, and access any free or low-cost webinars or publications they offer.

There are several small business associations across the country, some with national and local presence. Many offer **marketing** and **branding** resources, conferences, training, and educational programs.

Chambers of commerce are excellent groups via which you can access **marketing/branding** professional development opportunities and resources. They also offer valuable networking opportunities and can add credibility and exposure to your business, increasing its referrals.

Join or start a mastermind group or alliance. Being part of a mastermind group of small business owners or professionals can give you the opportunity to learn **marketing** best-

practices, tools, and ideas that others have used successfully. You can meet in person locally, or join out-of-town members using platforms such as Skype and other online conferencing programs.

Do Some Research

Bartering

Ask your network whether anyone knows of a **marketing** or **branding** agency that is willing to barter its expertise for your company's goods or services. You can also explore online bartering exchanges or local groups. There's even an association, the International Reciprocal Trade Association, dedicated to ethical standards in trading and bartering.

Higher Education

When you want to conduct **marketing** research or develop a **marketing** and **branding** strategy, check out local universities with entrepreneur or **marketing** programs. Some have professor-supervised, student consulting groups that will work on your project for free or a fee significantly less than professional consultants' or agencies'.

For smaller projects, look into college **marketing** and communications departments for students who would welcome a paid opportunity to add to their portfolios and practical work experience. Ask their professors or instructors for references to ensure students are good matches for your projects. To ensure that students' work is worthy of implementation, perhaps their instructors would be amenable to reviewing student results for an affordable fee.

There's also a website devoted to getting your problems "solved by the brightest college students in the world": [NoodleStorm](#) is free and confidential to use and includes universities such as Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, Texas A&M, and UCLA.

Internships

Hiring student interns during the summer or after graduation is another way to gain low-cost **marketing** and **branding** assistance. Some universities offer subsidies to employers for hiring their students. You can also investigate state and provincial grant programs.

If your small business is in Canada, the federal government funds supervised, career-related work experience for young workers to develop their skills and knowledge. Businesses can get up to 50% subsidy for an intern's summer minimum wages. Contact [Mentor Works](#).

In the US, read the Department of Labor's Fact Sheet on "[Internship Programs Under the Fair Labor Standards Act](#)" to learn about paid versus unpaid internships. There may be legal ramifications to hiring unpaid interns.

Another option is to look for new immigrant employment programs. Because many immigrants find it challenging to obtain employment in their fields without local work experience, they often

look for internships to gain a foothold in the labor market. There may be solid candidates in your area who have **marketing** and **branding** experience from their countries of origin.

At the end of such placements, you can hire your interns or write referral letters and say goodbye.

Freelancers

You can also explore freelance websites that allow you to post a specific **marketing** project and the maximum budget you are willing to pay. Then, you can sit back and wait for freelancer proposals to arrive.

That's a good way to access **marketing** professionals who may have time for extra projects, those who are starting out and need to gain hands-on experience, or those who want new clients, especially when business is slow.

One request: Please don't use sites where freelancers do the work first in order to "win" your job. Think about it: It's very unfair and takes advantage of people, many of whom live in third-world countries. Check their portfolios and references first, and then award your project.

Summary

The more you can budget and invest in **marketing** and **branding** expertise to reach and engage your target audiences with the right frequency, relevance, consistency, and professionalism, the sooner your small business can build and sustain a strong **brand** for success.

But, until you have the financial resources to hire or outsource professionals, take advantage of the many free and low-cost resources available to you.

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