



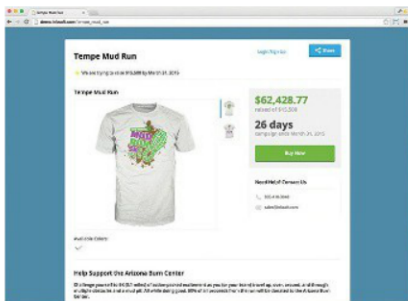
Keep Your

Biz

Abuzz with Marketing

Being the best means nothing if no one knows who you are. Use these five tips for maximum exposure and sales.

By J.P. Hunt, Contributing Writer



DOES YOUR WEBSITE PASS the “seven-second rule?” If you can’t catch someone’s eye in seven seconds, you are losing sales.

marketing is an investment. It can be hard to look beyond the time and money you have to put into it, especially if you have a small business. But if you want your company to grow, you must shift the paradigm and focus on results.

Marketing yields sales and spending on it isn’t a luxury — it’s a vital part of developing your business and increasing its revenues. But with today’s constantly expanding range of options, where do you start?

Begin with your business. What can you do to help someone discover your company? How you can put your business in front of the people who need your services? Answering these questions requires dedicated time and making the process a priority.

Marketing is about planning and delegating, and it’s an ongoing effort. Block

out time on your schedule for a regular daily meeting to work on marketing initiatives and assign people on your team to implement them. Set aside 10 minutes each day for “scrum” meetings to align the team, update everyone on where projects stand and what’s on the day’s schedule. Meetings like this not only generate ideas, but they also enhance communication and foster an understanding of a project’s impact from various perspectives. Most of all, they reinforce the company’s commitment to marketing itself.

It’s also important to invest time in benchmarking, or evaluating what other businesses are doing to market themselves. What are they doing correctly? There are lessons to be learned.

In developing a marketing strategy, five areas stand out as “musts.”

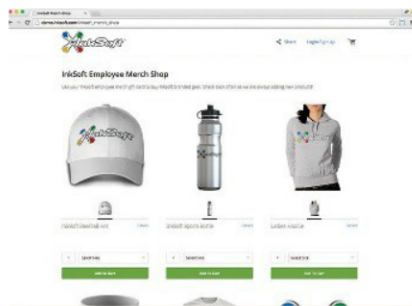


1.

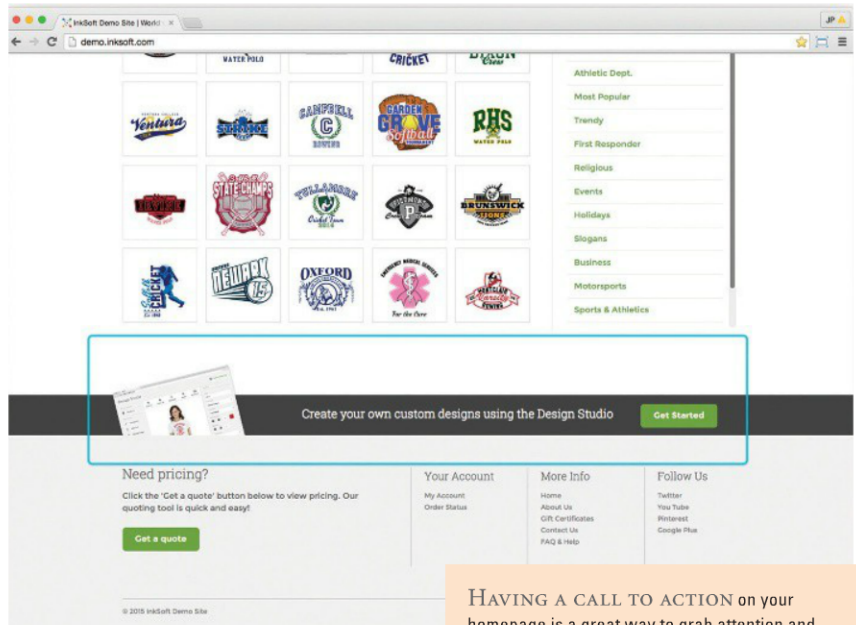
Your website. The big things here are the image your company projects (quality) and how it encourages and engages visitors (function). Focus on three key elements: professionalism, brand and image alignment, and clear messaging. Your website is the nexus of your social media marketing, so it is critical that it makes the right statement about your business. It needs to reflect your brand in a professional way that appeals to your target audience. Your logo should speak to consumers and your website needs to work with it.

Also, aesthetics count. The trend is toward a contemporary, corporate look that is flat, minimal and clean. This is another area where benchmarking is useful. Look at what the major players are doing and compare it to your website. Is what you're doing current or dated? Are you sending a clear visual message? Since apparel decorating is a visual industry, photos and graphics posted on your site are particularly important.

Size matters, too. It's important to have your most relevant content on the homepage of your website, and that the page be large enough to grab the viewer's attention and clearly present your content. The "seven-second rule" applies: Someone should be able to discern what your company does in seven seconds; otherwise, don't count on them sticking around to figure it out. Is your message "above the



YOU CAN KEEP WEBSITE COSTS LOW by using templates that provide a range of choices in colors, fonts, banners, etc.



HAVING A CALL TO ACTION on your homepage is a great way to grab attention and draw viewers further in to your website.

fold" (toward the top of the page) where viewers can get the full impact without having to scroll down?

Your content can be an at-a-glance description of your services or a call to action. You need to determine what, as a business owner, you are trying to achieve. What action do you want the consumer to take and how are you going to drive him to do it? Do you want to generate a lead? Get visitors to see your specials? Make sure your message is clear and obvious. Provide contact information to make connecting with you easier.

Getting credible outside input also can be helpful. Ask people you respect to go to your site and share their impressions from a seven-second visit. What did they learn? What was their overall takeaway? Test different looks and layouts, and compare the feedback.

Consulting with a professional web designer might be worthwhile, even if you do the actual labor in-house. Purchasing website design software is another option. Firms offering licensed website solutions typically have staff who are experts in user-interface engineering. They can draw on tons of data that you can leverage to optimize your site — everything from the best color for buttons to the right font size.

Templates can minimize development costs while helping to achieve a custom look. Many of these are theme-driven; they provide a range of choices in colors, fonts, banners, etc. Although the structure will be consistent, the myriad possible combinations allow for distinctive displays.

Another key consideration is website functionality. Just as the nature of their

business calls for printers to pay particular attention to visual elements, it also requires them to focus on self-help in their site design. Their websites must be functional and transactional. Can a customer get information on products and art content, as well as a price quote? The ability to take orders and handle transactions is part of self-help. Customers are accustomed to instant gratification, and facilitating transactions is critical to creating a successful website in our industry.

2.

Social media. This type of online presence is a must for marketing today. Consumers use it to learn about your company and its identity. Social media presence is a validator. The expectation is that if you are a legitimate business, you will have it — similar to a phone number or business card. Customers use it to get sense of your company's identity and influence.

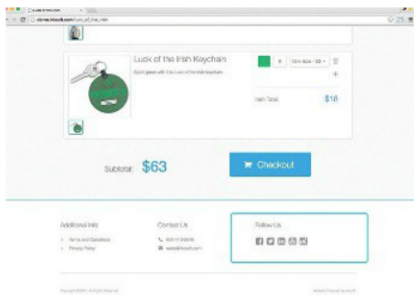
Like your website, your social media representation should mirror your branding. But whereas your website is static, social media is a conversation. It's not a news channel for presenting information about your company; it's an opportunity to engage with others. What kind of conversation are you having with your customers? Does it reflect your company's personality? The goal is to be involved in the community, and the best way to do this is by asking engaging questions that make your social media exchange dynamic and interactive.

There are a number of social media

options, including Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest. Being on any or all of these networks offers a prime opportunity to share content. Facebook, for one, has done a great job of understanding individual users, drilling down to demographics and age. It allows a business to follow or engage with people who could be tomorrow's customers. It can position a company where its prospects may reside. Furthermore, once the business has a presence, Facebook advertising can gain exposure for a shop's brand and position it to a precisely targeted market, filtering your ads to certain age ranges, interests, etc.

Social media requires a time investment. Apparel decorators should post content regularly, preferably daily. Scheduling it in advance simplifies the process and minimizes the time you spend. Most importantly, your message should indicate what your business is doing to help. What problems are you solving? These are ways to get people thinking about you with respect to their own needs. Incorporating photos with your posts will boost interest.

If you're using several outlets, social media apps like HootSuite and Buffer allow you to link your social media accounts and broadcast to all using one tool. This multiplies the return on your time investment. It also enables you to automate and schedule content, and build a queue. These apps also use algorithms to determine the optimal day and time to send content.



SOCIAL MEDIA NOW HAS become a critical tool to promote your business. The expectation is that if you are a legitimate business, you will have it.

3. Pay per click. For a fee, Bing, Facebook and Google offer business owners the ability to display targeted online ads based on



AT A MINIMUM, you should email your customer list once a month, whether you send a newsletter, coupon or new product release.

keywords. You can pay based on thousands of impressions (e.g., every thousand people who see the ad); you also can pay per click, or when a consumer sees your ad and then clicks on it to reach a destination.

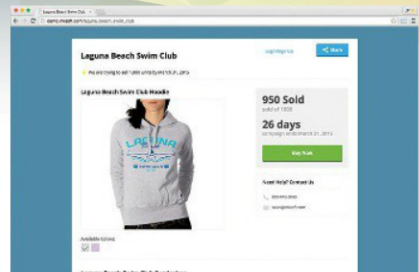
The latter is more effective because it drives people to your website rather than having them simply see your ad. You bid on keywords or phrases for ad placement. The relevance of your website also can factor into your positioning and what it costs you, as the search engine is concerned with customer satisfaction.

The most important thing here is tracking your results. Commit to three months, but check the responses you get daily. Also, be sure to ask people how they heard about your company and provide a way to track any coupons you offer. Facebook and Google offer tracking assistance. There should never be an instance where you don't know if a marketing approach is working.

4. Email marketing. This is another way to communicate with new prospects and existing customers. Existing customers are the easiest people to whom you can sell. Don't make the mistake of doing a job for a company and assuming you will get its repeat business. Once you have a customer, it's about staying in front of him and reminding him about your services.

Newsletters featuring new products and services are a great way of doing this. Email marketing is inexpensive, and many services provide templates and tools you can use. If you include something like a special offer that the reader clicks on, which sends you data, you also may consider sending him a secondary message. Email your customers monthly to reconnect them with your brand and identity.

Email lists are permission-based. You can include a form on your website or send customers an initial email inviting them to opt in to receive your newsletter.



OFFERING TO TAKE OVER the fundraising sales and order-taking/processing function for a customer gives you a big edge over your competition.

You also must include options to unsubscribe or report your emails as spam.

5. Fundraising. This is a great approach to online marketing. In today's economy, there are many organizations trying to raise funds and companies trying to fulfill orders. Offering to take over the sales and order-taking/processing function for a customer's fundraiser can give you a big edge over your competition, boost your margin, and raise your profile and customer base.

Instead of fulfilling orders collected by someone in an organization and selling to them at wholesale to be marked up, you can set up an online store, sell the fundraising items for near-retail prices and give the group a percentage-based commission or donation. This streamlines the process and reduces headaches for you and your customer.

You can expand the product offerings and sales, as well as the reach of your company and the organization, by having its member share the online store link. It's an extension of your company and the higher price brings in more money for the organization. Presenting this option that consumers are supporting to non-profit groups can attract new customers. It's a goodwill gesture and good marketing.

It's an investment of time and some money, but there's no better way to build your company than engaging in regular marketing activities. Hopefully these ideas will give you the motivation and incentive to get started. ▲

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