

Avoid common marketing mistakes

Here's a quick list of the ten most common marketing mistakes business owners make - plus tips for how to steer clear of them.

Mistake 1: Failing to accurately identify your target markets.

Many businesses fail because they try to tackle too many types of customer on a limited marketing budget. Trying to sell to every member of the public is a recipe for disaster. Even companies that have universal demand for their product like big soap manufacturers have specific target markets for each of their products. Identify those customer groups that are most likely to need/ want your product then go after them.

Mistake 2: Not doing market research.

How do you know if people are going to want your product or service and how much do they think it is worth? Before committing yourself in a new business, do some market research. The Internet is your best source of published information. You can use chat rooms to get instant feedback and input without spending a cent. Or you can test the market using surveys or focus groups among members of your target audience. Testing can keep you from making costly mistakes based on false assumptions about your product, service or customers.

Mistake 3: Relying on just one or two marketing tactics.

It's only natural to rely on the marketing tactics you're most comfortable with. If you like meeting and talking to new people, you may focus on networking. If you're shy, on the other hand, you might rely solely on direct mail. Such single-mindedness is a major marketing mistake because customers invariably need to be exposed to your message in at least three different ways before they will consider responding to the message. So when you are planning your marketing program, choose from a variety of tactics.

Mistake 4: Failing to communicate your point of difference.

As technology and education continue to improve, the market place is getting more and more competitive. Your product or service has to have something special or unique about it so customers will choose it over similar one's provided by your competition. This is what is known as a point of difference. However it is no good having a point of difference if your customers don't know what is, so you should include it in your marketing message.

Mistake 5: Using non target specific marketing tactics.

If your target market is homemakers, you are wasting your money when you advertise on a radio station whose audience is predominantly students (no matter how good a deal the radio rep says it is!). If your target market is lawyers, you are much better off using direct mail or telemarketing than advertising in the newspaper. The more directly you can reach your target market, the more cost effective your marketing will be.

Mistake 6: Trying to say too much.

We live in a rapidly changing world where the pace of life is getting faster. People are being subjected to more and more information and have less time to absorb it. So you are making a big mistake if you try to tell people too much in one go. Chances are they will simply switch off and move onto the next piece of information. The key is to keep your message simple. Generally speaking it should be one main thought, fact or idea.

Mistake 7: Not spending enough on marketing and promotion.

Marketing and promotion are what stimulate your businesses sales, so it is important to budget for tactics that will enable you to achieve these sales. As a general rule of thumb we suggest between 3-6% of your projected turnover if you are just starting out and 1-3% of your projected turnover if you have been in business for two or more years.

Mistake 8: Marketing only when you have time.

A mistake business owners often make is they get so busy servicing the few customers they've got, they neglect to continue with marketing activities that continually reach out to new prospects. Since customer attrition is inevitable, marketing only during the slow times means that you could well end up with periods where you have no customers at all.

Mistake 9: Failing to present a professional image.

Your business cards, letterheads, invoices, brochures, premises signage, vehicle signage and uniforms all create an image in your customer's minds. The more professional they look, the more confident your customers will be that you can satisfy their needs or solve their problems.

Mistake 10: Underestimating the importance of current customers.

It is easy to get carried away with the excitement of attracting new customers and forget about your current customers. This is a big no-no, since studies have shown it costs five times more to win a new customer than to "resell" to an existing one. Keep a database of customers, and be sure your marketing plan includes tactics aimed at stimulating repeat business from these customers.

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- This information is provided by The Small Business Company:

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