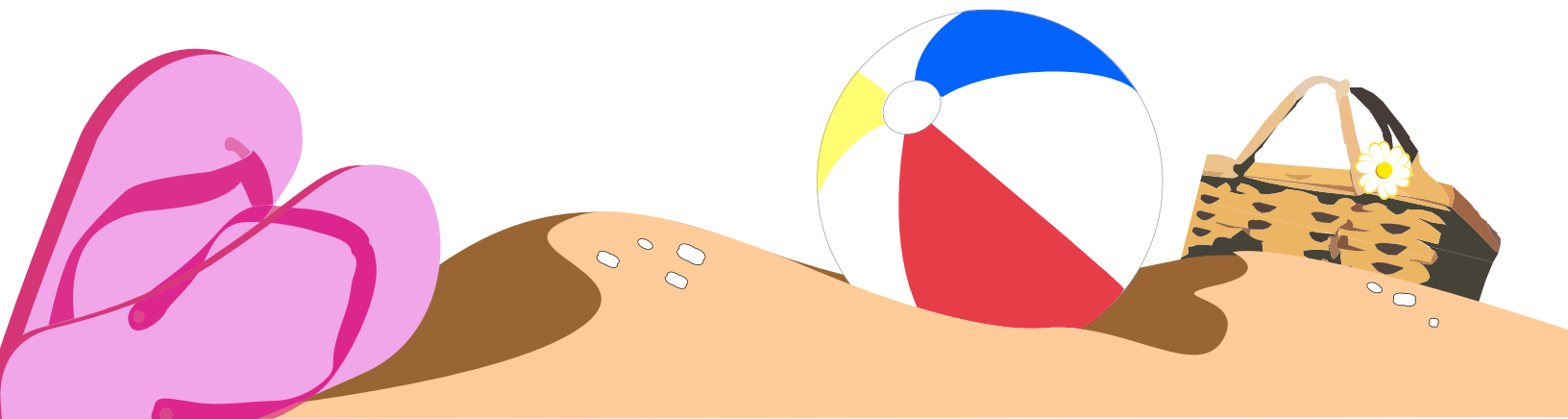


# Guide to Sizzling Summer Marketing

Proven Ways to Grow Your Business This Season

**BONUS IDEAS  
FOR  
EARLY BIRDS!**

Brought to you by





While summer can be a boom time if you're selling ice cream or pool cleaning services, it can be a slow season for many businesses. With people going away on vacations or simply taking time off, many small businesses feel the pinch of slower business activity. But summer doesn't have to mean lower revenues – it can be an excellent time to solidify existing customer relationships and take advantage of a slower pace to execute professional, tried and tested marketing techniques. VerticalResponse, a leader in self-service marketing for small business, has put together the following list of ideas to boost your business this summer for sizzling success.




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## Generate Word of Mouth Marketing

Chances are your happiest customers are the best and cheapest marketing tool you have at your disposal. People who are already fanatical about your company's products or services will be the first to tell their friends, coworkers, and personal network about the quality of service they receive. So here are a few ideas to get your best customers talking more about you:

- **Ask customers to spread the word.** Don't be afraid to ask your most satisfied customers to tell their friends, colleagues, or family members about your business. Consider offering them some exclusive service or benefits that they can brag about to their friends; try a VIP  email newsletter list that puts customers "in the know" about new products, sales or promotions before anyone else. Then add a link to every  email marketing promotion you send that allows them to forward the message to a friend. Soon, their friends will want to get in on the action, your VIP list will grow, and so will your business.
- **Give people something to talk about.** One customer with a family-friendly restaurant started offering stroller valet. Word got out that not only could you enjoy a great meal there, but you could also bring your kids without worrying about inconveniencing other diners when deciding where to park the bulky stroller. This tactic is especially helpful in busy downtown locations or shopping areas. Another restaurant promotes Tuesday nights in the summer as "family night". What was once a slow night for their kitchen now encourages local customers with children to come in and feel right at home. A preset kids' menu and a few decibels noisier, now it's the most popular place in town for the family crowd. As a side benefit, the customers without children, who appreciate a quiet meal, know to make plans for any other evening. Think about ways you could offer a memorable service experience and get people talking.
- **Make it easy.** If you're selling products by mail or in stores, consider including something memorable or noteworthy in the box or bag. It can be silly, inspirational, or whimsical, but it should remind them who you are and that you offer more than your competitors. Better yet, include two items and ask them to give one to a friend.

**CHECK OUT  
OUR NEW  
SUMMER  
PROMOTION  
LAYOUTS!**

- **Make your network work for you.** It's not just your satisfied customers who can refer you business. Consider asking any business partners, vendors, and friends to help you get the word out. This can be as simple as placing postcards  in the shop next door or asking a local hotel concierge to send people your way.




To learn more about Word of Mouth Marketing we recommend the latest book by Andy Sernovitz, a word of mouth guru, titled *Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking*.

## Offer Financial Incentives

If summer tends to be a slow time for your business, consider reducing prices to generate a higher volume of sales activity.



- **Straight discount.** Test the market by offering a 10 or 15% discount on certain services in July, or discount a few of your slower selling products and see how it goes. You can always extend the offer if the promotion is working, and if it's not yielding results, you've only risked one month. Try sending an  email announcing the offer to a previously non-responsive segment of your list to gauge response and expand from there.



Find out more  
about postcards at  
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- **Package deals.** Give customers a discount if they book more than one service, such as carpet cleaning and upholstery cleaning together for \$200 instead of \$250. Offer a manicure and pedicure for \$25 instead of \$28. You get the idea.
- **Shipping deals.** If you're selling items online, increase your average order size by offering free shipping for orders over \$100 or a free shipping upgrade, such as overnight delivery for the price of 3 day. Make sure that the offer is highlighted in the subject line to increase open rates.

## Create a 'Buy One Get One' Offer.

This promotional tactic probably dates back to the dark ages, so you know the drill. Buy one widget, get one free or at a discount. Buy one full priced entrée and get another at half price. This is similar to the package deal offer.


## Give a Gift with Purchase or Referral

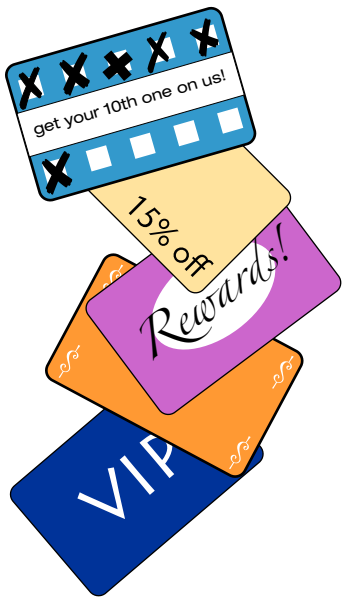
Every woman in America has spent \$25 in order to get the cute summer bag or cosmetics kit at the department store make-up counter. But giving a gift with purchase is not just for make-up. Think about what you could offer your customers for free when they buy your product or service - a lesson in something, your own list of tips, a booklet of recipes with wine club shipments, an upgrade in service level. And don't forget about gift certificates or gift cards. Here's a secret the big retailers have known for years - gift certificates and gift cards work really well because 1) it gets the recipient in the store where they'll possibly spend more than the allotted amount and 2) they're not always redeemed, thus costing you nothing. Here are a few newer takes on this old technique:

- Spend \$200 online or in the store and get a \$25 gift card.
- Buy a \$100 gift card and get a \$10 gift card for yourself or to give to someone else.
- This can also tie in with word of mouth marketing. A dentist sends a \$20 gift card every time a customer refers a new patient. Sometimes it's from a bookstore or a favorite coffee chain. In this case, he's not offering free dental services, but whenever anyone new moves to town, his customers tell them all about their favorite dentist.

## Encourage Customer Loyalty and Repeat Business




We all know that it costs more to acquire a new customer than to keep an existing one. So start rewarding your customers for their loyalty to keep them coming back. Here are a few simple ideas to get you thinking:

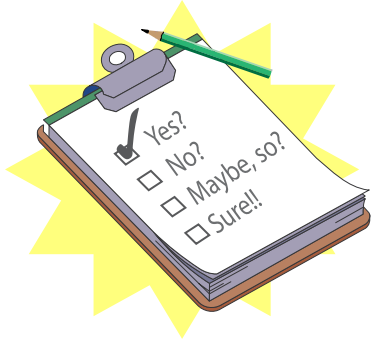
- **Frequent customer cards.** We see nail salons, cafes, and sandwich shops use stamp cards to keep their customers coming back. Every time you have a manicure, buy a coffee or sandwich, you are one stamp closer to a freebie. When the card is full, it's your turn to reap the rewards.
- **Avoid the 'one and done'.** Encourage first time customers to come back by sending them an email  offering them a discount off their next service or meal. You'll create another opportunity to provide them with a memorable experience and to build affinity with your business. Use an offer code or include a coupon in an email following their first service so that you can calculate the program's return on investment.



## Launch a Customer Win-Back Campaign



This approach ties into the notion of customer loyalty. While your competitors may be taking the summer season in stride, your message will resonate loud and clear. You miss them and want them back. To win back a previous customer, it'll cost you less than acquiring a new one. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

-  **Send lapsed customers a survey.** Find out why they've taken their business elsewhere. Was it a service or price issue? Is there something you can do to win them back? Just asking the question shows that you care and you'll probably learn something new about your business in the process.
- **Offer an incentive to come back.** Send them an  email or  postcard and offer them a discount off a product or service. It might be just the reminder that you mean what you say. Create an alert in your survey if someone answers a question reflecting a poor service experience. If they come back, work extra hard to change their mind. The difference now is you know why they left in the first place.



## Get Personal


When times get tough, it's your loyal customers who get you through a slow down. This summer, try to improve your service level through personalization. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Get to know your frequent clients.** Try to remember their first name when they walk in the door. One customer describes a nail salon they have been to a few times in the neighborhood and they never remember her name or even recognize her. It is a lost opportunity to create a memorable service experience. Simply calling someone by their name when they walk in the door can really make an impact, especially when they come in with a friend. Customers will feel popular and reassured they made the recommendation.
- **Thank your customers for their business.** This can be anything from a handwritten note or phone call, to a personalized  email or  postcard. Thanking your customers is just another opportunity to remind them that you value their business.
- **Check in on your staff.** Do you really know what the front desk or service experience is like at your company, shop, salon or bar? Big retailers have been using mystery shoppers for years to find out what the in-store experience is really like. Remember – marketing isn't just what you say, but what you do. Do your employees share your passion for your business? If the answer is no, then ask yourself why are they representing you in a prominent position in front of your clients?

Find out more about  
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Include customer photos and quotes in your email newsletters!

- **Ask for feedback.**  Why not create an online survey that automatically gets sent out to someone who buys something from you or submits a service request? Ask about the sales or service experience, the quality of the product, etc. You might uncover some opportunities to create memorable experiences for your customers in the future.

## Offer Discounted Off-Peak Specials

We're all familiar with early bird dinner specials and discounted matinee movies, but off-peak and off-season pricing is not just for the senior citizen circuit. Think about how you could minimize the slow times and incent people to avoid your typically busy periods:

- If midday or midweek is slow for your spa or salon, offer discounted pricing for all services Tuesday through Thursday before 4pm.
- Are Tuesday nights typically quiet at your restaurant? How about no corkage or half-priced bottles of wine?
- No one coming to the bar on Monday night? Why not host Bingo or Trivia with food and drink specials to attract new patrons?



## Launch a Mini-Service



By launching a mini-service, you can attract customers who wouldn't normally commit to a full-service and are on the fence about spending money in a slower economy. It's a great way to acquire new names of people to whom you can market in the future and hopefully convert to full-service clients. Also, you make the connection with regular customers that much stronger and possibly increase the frequency of their business.



- Sell coffee and dessert for two at a great price to attract theatre-goers or couples out for an evening stroll. They might not be up for a full dinner but it generates some revenue, gives the appearance of a full restaurant, and gives you the chance to wow them with your delicious desserts and dazzling service. Don't forget to include an opt-in form in the check folio that you bring to the table with their bill. It's an excellent way to build your email list to market future special events and promotions.
- Do you offer a service that customers only need on a monthly basis? Find a way to offer a mini-service, like a polish change instead of a pedicure or exterior only car wash rather than a full detailing service. It's a lower cost option for customers, and keeps them loyal in between major services.


## Use market research as a B2B marketing tool.

You don't need to pay a market research firm a ton of money to learn about your customers and prospects. Creating customer or user surveys is easier than ever, and can generate content to power your marketing initiatives for the rest of the year.

- **Data-driven research reports as lead generation offers.**  Send a survey to everyone on your opt-in list and ask them what their priorities are for the rest of the year. Capture demographic information, spending patterns and priorities for the second half of the year, and take the pulse of your target market. Slice and dice the data and analyze it by vertical marketing, geography, and company size, then turn it into a report. You'll be set with a great offer for a lead generation campaign in the fall.
- **Survey data steers product and marketing strategy.**  Wouldn't you like to know if a certain segment of the market was more likely to buy the product or service you're planning to launch in the fall? Or that your best customers all are screaming for one feature or service over another? Leverage survey data to guide investments in product design, management and promotions.

## BONUS IDEA!

Get ready for the holidays! It may sound crazy, but it is never too early to start gearing up for the holidays. Here are a few ways to prepare for the madness:

- Why not launch a Christmas in July program to get people to start their holiday shopping? They can smooth out their expenditure and avoid the January credit crunch.
- Start thinking about what merchandise or services you can offer and how to market them. Create your email or  postcard campaigns in your VerticalResponse account now so you'll be set for busy holiday season come this fall.
- If you typically purchase and send gifts to your clients at the holidays, or just have a busy tradeshow schedule, why not shop for deals now? If you wait until October, you'll be paying top dollar. Segment your list today into 3 categories; VIP customers, infrequent customers, and win-backs. Then get your gift ideas purchased and set aside based on the value of the customer. Then when the holiday rush hits, you've got time to focus on capturing new business and communicating your message.



So whether you're selling widgets or services this summer, hopefully a few of these tips will help you keep cool while your revenues heat up!

The ideas don't have to end here; VerticalResponse wants to hear from you so we've created a group in our online community, the VerticalResponse Marketing Lounge. It's a hot place for cool marketing ideas. Go to <http://lounge.verticalresponse.com>, create a profile for you and your business then share your ideas on what works and what doesn't with other VerticalResponse customers.



To learn more about how to send professional-looking emails, postcards, and online surveys that generate results, check out our live weekly demo or the "How to Do Everything" section of our website under Education & Support!

If you don't have an account, go to <http://www.verticalresponse.com/sizzlingsummer>

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