



Don't Let the Economy Get You Down *Real Tips for Growing Your Business*

It's tough out there! Your business is your lifeline and you need to keep the doors open and you need it to thrive. But how can you do it on a shoestring budget?

It's possible. You can't scale back all of your marketing and advertising, you need to keep getting new customers in the door. You also need to focus on keeping your current ones happy, coming back and telling their friends about you. How do you do it all, while keeping the business running?

This guide is designed to give you real world ideas on how to find new customers while keeping your current customers excited about your products or services on a shoestring budget.

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Affordable Ways to Find New Customers

Finding new customers is tough, especially if you're trying to do it on a small budget. So how do you go about getting people to notice you if you don't have a lot of advertising dollars to spend? Here are a few ideas to get you thinking and you don't need to lay out a lot of cash to do what you need to do, and that's get traffic in the door, offline or online.

1. Find Your Key Influencers

Finding people that refer your business whenever possible can be a key to your success. Invite them into your offices or your store and go the extra mile. Find out what they like about your business and do more of that. Make sure to tell them how much you appreciate when they talk about your business.

2. Visit a Convention

If there is a convention in your town that either has visitors that might need your products, go to it and pass out flyers or coupons to all of the booths or tables represented. Make sure you collect business cards from the booth and ask permission to send them email. Be careful not to waste their time since they've paid to be there to sell their own products. Then, follow up with an email marketing campaign reminding them of how you received their information, and ask them to join your mailing list.

3. Local Partnering

Drive reciprocal traffic to a neighboring business so that each of you can promote the other businesses as an add-on. It can be a nice cross promotion and it reminds customers of both businesses when they're visiting your neighborhood. If you are not neighbors but may be online, try partnering with them. You can pay each other for each new customer the other drives, and you both win out in the long run.

4. Email Signature Files

Make sure you include a signature file in all of your outgoing email – personal and business – with a special offer to get visitors to your location, or a link you'd like to promote on your web site. You can change these as frequently as you need to.

5. Merchandise With Your Logo

Give your customers and employees great things to wear with your logo on it. Drop a gift in a shipment to your customers with your branding on it. If it's useful they'll either wear it or put it somewhere prominent. It's a great branding tool.



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DON'T FORGET SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING – GOOGLE

Since Google drives so much Internet traffic it's important for you to be seen there.

Google Adwords is a pay-per-click engine meaning, when someone does a search on your keywords and your ad appears (usually down the right-hand sidebar), you pay when someone clicks on your ad.

How does it work?

Basically you create an account with Google Adwords that you fund with your credit card. You select your keywords and write your ads. When someone clicks on your ad, Google deducts the cost-per-click charge that you agreed to pay, out of your account. This is a great form of 'performance marketing' since you only pay when an action (a click) occurs and you control your budget.

Target your ads.

It could be country, state, city specific and radius around a zip code. This is important because if someone is searching for something that you deliver locally, you'll want that click versus the one from an area you don't serve.

You're in control.

Your ads will start running only when you're ready to push the launch button. Best of all, you can halt them at any time depending on how much you have to spend.

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6. Chamber of Commerce

Become a member of your local Chamber of Commerce and attend the regular gatherings. If you can't attend send a representative from your company with business cards and coupons. You'll surely meet a potential customer or two.

7. Advertise On Your Car

If you find that your business has you driving around town or parking in visible spots, why not use your car to advertise for you. Put a magnetic sign with your logo, phone number and web site address on it. It's the only great thing about sitting in traffic, you can actively advertise. While you're at it, buy a license plate frame with your info on it as well. That person behind you on the highway might just take note. (Just don't cut anyone off or drive badly or they'll remember your business for that too!)



8. Contests & Awards

Have a contest where visitors and customers submit a favorite picture of their smile (dental office), favorite dog picture (groomer/kennel/vet) or favorite pose or strut (retail clothing). Ask them to post the video or picture to Picasa, flickr, or YouTube so you don't have to host anything. Then post information about the contest to your web site and send an email campaign to your current email list announcing the contest. They'll upload their content, and send their friends to see it, and you'll end up getting more traffic. Make sure you reward your entrants with discounts or cash.

9. Post Videos of Customers

Why not ask your customers to take videos of themselves talking about how they love your product or service. Then upload the videos right to YouTube. Don't forget to tag the video with your company name and some keywords so you'll come up high in the search engine rankings. There's no better advertising than your customer testimonials. This can get you a better ranking in the search engines as well.



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10. LinkedIn®

If you don't have a LinkedIn account create one, it's free. Then fill out your profile with as much information about you as you feel comfortable displaying. When people search on your business name or your name, often times your LinkedIn profile displays on the first page so make sure it's good! Also, answer questions in the "Questions & Answers" feature in the categories you choose to. It turns out to be a great way to get known as an expert in your field.



12. Twitter & Facebook

You want to be where your customers are and you can bet many of them are on Twitter & Facebook. You can tweet on Twitter and post to Facebook what's going on at your company. You can include links to some great articles you run across, and give your followers up-to-the-minute information about your company and product. You can also tell them that you've just launched your email marketing campaign and include the hosted link to it. Just remember to keep your updates short and sweet.

13. Online Reviews

Having your customers do the selling can be stronger than you selling your own product so now it's time to think of how to get your customers shouting from the rooftops about your products or services. One way to do it is ask them for a quote about why they like you and what problems you may have solved for them. Another way is to direct them to review sites where they review your product or company.

Your Company



Getting new customers is the hardest thing to do, but you need to keep your momentum going, especially in this economy. And you don't have to do it all, pick and choose what's right for your business and your time.

Build Your Email List

Once you have these visitors coming to your site, you'll want to build your email list. They may buy from you on their first, second or third visit or they'll sign up with your opt-in form. Your mission is to get them to do something.

Opt-in forms can be a very important part of your marketing, especially when you need to grow your list, which is important for every small business. Here are 9 places to place your opt-in forms so that you can obtain email addresses from the areas on and off your site where you interact with your visitors.

1. Home page

Make sure you place an opt-in form or a link on your home page so that anyone visiting you has the opportunity to opt-in to your email newsletter. You'll also need to tell your visitors the value they'll be receiving from you and how often you plan to email them something.



2. Sub-pages

Place your opt-in form on each sub-page of your web site. If you don't have the space to put an actual form on all of your sub-pages, at least have a "Newsletter Sign Up" link on them directing them to a page where you'll tell them about the value they'll be getting in return.

3. Blog

Not everyone subscribes to RSS to get information from your blog if you have one, so you'll need to include an actual form for your readers to sign up to get email updates from you. You don't want to lose the opportunity to get email addresses from people who might be interested in knowing about your regular updates and important information.

4. Pop-Up Window

Include a pop-up window when someone leaves your web site with an opt-in form on it. Not everyone will sign up, but some percentage of people who might not want to buy from you today, may want to know more about you in the future. Note: some visitors have their browsers set to block pop-up windows, but you'll surely get some visitors able to view them and you'll get a few more registrants.

Don't Let the Economy Get You Down

Real Tips for Growing Your Business

KEEP YOUR EMAIL MARKETING OPEN & CLICK RATES HIGH

Maintain Expectations –

Stick to the promise you made your recipient when they signed up to get your email, so they'll want to continue opening it. Over-mailing your recipients can result in list fatigue, which can lead to an increased unsubscribe rate. Conversely they may forget you if you don't mail them enough.

Get into The Address Book –

If they accept you into their address book, you'll fly into the inbox.

Subject Line –

In 40 characters describe the value in the email for your recipient.

Keep your important information at the top of the email; "above the fold" if the email was opened or viewable in the preview pane before it is opened.

Keep it Relevant –

Don't clutter your email with offers that won't matter to your customers. They'll not only refuse to click but may also unsubscribe from your future emails.

5. Landing Page

If you have a separate landing page you send people to, whether it's from your search engine pay-per-click (PPC) campaigns or any other advertising campaign, include a sign up form on it especially if you're giving them something for free like a downloadable document. The value that you want is their email address and permission to send email to them.

6. Email Marketing Campaigns

You can include an opt-in form or link inside your email marketing campaigns. This way, if the email gets forwarded to someone who isn't on your list, you might get a new subscriber.

7. Retail Counter

Don't forget to put a sign up book at your counter or somewhere prominent in your place of business. Make sure to ask people at the register if they'd like to join your email list. Then enter those email addresses quickly into your contact manager and send them a welcome email right away.



8. Taking Appointments

If your service business is centered on making appointments with your clients, ask them for their email addresses so you can confirm the times. Also ask if they would want email offers from you and make a note of their answer.

9. Tradeshow Table

You've spent a lot of money to be at a tradeshow so if a visitor doesn't have a business card you don't want to lose the opportunity to add them to your list. Make sure you have some kind of sign up form or book at your booth or table. After you collect the email addresses make sure you send an email right away thanking them for taking the time to stop by your booth and give them a nice offer for doing so.

All of these things are very easy to do so don't miss out on any opportunity you have to build your email list. Make sure you tell people what they'll get for giving you their information whether it's hot tips, discounts, special offers or invitations. The more value for them the better.

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KEEP YOUR BOUNCES & UNSUBSCRIBES LOW

Mailing frequency –

Send offers or newsletters at least once per month so your recipients are used to receiving your email and don't lose touch and forget you.

Provide value –

Provide offers or newsletters that your recipients will miss if they change email addresses.

Phone or direct mail follow up –

If you do get a bounced email, either call or mail your recipient a postcard to let them know their email bounced and ask them to update their information.

Remind your recipients –

It's a nice idea to remind your recipients how or where they opted-in or were introduced to you. "You are receiving this email because you signed up for our Widgets Update Newsletter at Widgets-Inc.com."

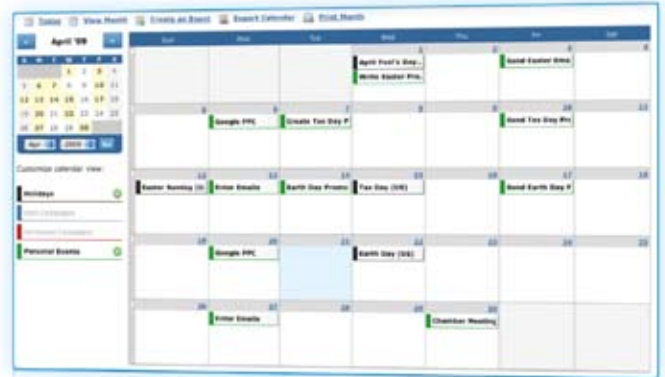
Keep Your Customers

Retaining customers in this economy is key not only to survival, but growth. It's far cheaper to sell to an existing customer than to try to get a new one. So after you've taken the preceding measures to get customers and grow your list, you'll need to think about the steps you need to take to keep them coming back.

You'll want to have a solid marketing plan as well as a superb customer service plan so here are some steps to get you on your way to great customer retention. Don't forget, your customers are in control these days, not you. If your customer service levels are dipping, there are many online outlets that your customers can use to voice their opinions about you on, so be careful.

1. A Well Thought Out Plan

Make sure you put all of your communications to your customers in a calendar. This will keep you on point with what you have to do each week in addition to all of the things you need to do to run your business.



2. Survey Your Customers

Listening to your customers can always give you a reality-check. It's easy to listen to good news, but what happens when a customer gives you bad news? Acting on bad news might just be the best thing you can do to make your business better. And if you think you won't get any "suggestions for improvement", you're wrong, no matter how great business is going. Everyone has his or her own opinions. So be brave, and learn what these opinions are, by simply asking.

3. Email Testing

Don't be complacent about your open and click rates in your email campaigns. Split your list in two and test different subject lines or different pieces of content and offers in your campaigns. There is always room to improve; you'll just need to keep testing to get there.

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4. Market to Your Non Responders

If you're lucky, 30-50% of the people you send email to open your email campaign. What about the balance? You still want to reach out and touch those folks. Why not send a campaign out to those who neither clicked, opened, bounced nor unsubscribed and change up the subject line. Maybe you'll catch them at a better time with a better message.

5. Pick Up the Phone

It's really important in these tough times to pick up the phone and answer customer questions as much as you can. Truth be told, consumers are jaded these days and really don't expect to talk to a "live" human when they call a toll-free number. You'll be amazed at how far a simple task like this can take you.



6. Answer Live Chats

If you've got an online business and are lucky enough to have someone answering a live chat from a customer, fantastic! Many online consumers don't really want to take the time to pick up the phone if they don't have to, so if they can pop into a quick chat and get their questions answered fast, you'll have a customer for life.

7. Support by Email

Answering a customer's email in a quick fashion can go a long way if that's how your customers want to interact with you. Doing this in 24 hours or less will go a long way with your customers. It doesn't matter if you're selling to businesses or consumers, we all have expectations, and we all want them to be met.

8. Go the Extra Mile

When you ship out a product, include a nice thank-you note that you hand-write to your customers. Call a client to see how they liked your service earlier that day. They'll be shocked you did it. Then your customers could tell their friends about this amazing thing you did and could potentially spread positive word of mouth.

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9. Loyalty Programs

We've seen a lot of shops be very successful with printed rewards cards. It's nothing more than a business card with 8 or 10 boxes to be stamped. Each time a customer buys a product or certain dollar amount, they get one of the boxes "punched" or "stamped". When they reach 8 they get a free gift. It might not seem like much, but loyal customers come back. We've even seen businesses store the cards on behalf of the customer, this way they don't need to remember to bring it each time they come in.



Even in tough times you can do a lot on very little to get new customers and keep them.

For more ideas from VerticalResponse on how to grow your business visit:

- The award-winning **VerticalResponse Marketing Blog** for small businesses (<http://blog.verticalresponse.com>).
- The **VerticalResponse Marketing Lounge** – A Cool Spot for Hot Marketing where small businesses are interacting on all things related to marketing that enable them to be successful. (<http://lounge.verticalresponse.com>)
- Also, if you haven't already, be sure to start your **VerticalResponse Free Trial** Today! Including our email marketing, survey marketing and direct mail postcard marketing tools. (<http://www.verticalresponse.com/economy>).