



NDSU Extension

Small Business Newsletter

Business Owner Tips and Resources

April, 2013

This month has been busy. Did find time to get away to visit family in North Carolina. While there, I had the opportunity to visit a farmers market and several small businesses. It is always great to get new ideas but also to see that ND businesses are ready to take on the competition. Had fun.

I need someone to tell me though why it takes so long to catch up when you are gone for even a day. With mobile devices I am able to manage a great deal of my work but things still seem to pile up. Oh well. ,

I am experimenting with new ways, as if I need one more, to get information that should be useful in operating your small business. Have started with Slideshare (<http://www.slideshare.net/glennmuske/> - you will find my slides from a recent sessions in Mandan, Starting Your Business) and am posting links on Delicious, <https://delicious.com/>. Love to hear your comments.

Till next time,
Glenn Muske
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Quotes of the Month

Usually I use this space to put something that inspires or encourages. This month we are just going for a smile.

Another month ends. All targets met. All systems working. All customers satisfied. All staff eagerly enthusiastic. All pigs fed and ready to fly. – Anonymous

Hope your pigs are flying.

This Month's Tips

Big Data – Have you heard the term?

If you haven't heard this term yet I might be a little surprised. It comes from the idea that businesses can, or already have, large amounts of data available that they can tap into.

Why tap in? To better learn who their customer is and what they want. And there is a great deal written about how large businesses not only have more data but the resources to do the analysis.

The article below offers a different take on the situation. Data comes from customers and who better knows their customer than the small business owner.

So the advantage goes to the small business. I once heard a speaker say, “before you have data, you have stories.” Those stories are what the small business owner can hear, if you listen. This gives you a huge advantage and a big head start on the big competitor. So, using a tennis phrase, **advantage small business**. - <http://smallfoodbiz.com/2013/04/18/big-data-for-small-businesses/>

Price Matching – Does This Work as a Business Strategy?

Intuit takes a look at the age-old business strategy of price matching. As they note, this used to be achieved by watching the ads and going from store to store. Today we just hop on the Internet, often using mobile tools, and find the best deal.

So where does that leave the small business owner? Intuit's first point is that price matching is here to stay. And certain stores will use it at their mantra. Yet from my perspective, slightly higher costs will not cause customers to stop shopping at your store. First if they are in the store, there are the opportunity costs of having to go somewhere else (an old economics concept that does hold true). As a small business owner you also need to realize that price matching is typical for commodity items and usually smaller ticket items. Most importantly, there are other ways to compete. See the rest of the story at: <http://blog.intuit.com/marketing/can-price-matching-help-your-small-business-compete/>

Building Your Brand – Social Media is Becoming an Expected Tool

You are probably tired of hearing about getting on social media. But ask yourself, have you had need to contact someone about a problem? What platform have you turned to? Was it an online tool? Then ask 10 of your closest friends and family members (make sure to find a diversity of people). By the time you perform this quick survey, you may have a different take.

But the catch comes in this next part. It is not just having the tools but using them. **The customer experience is what is important.** I have just went through a customer experience where they ignored the tools they offered. I was less than pleased and will be looking elsewhere next time. Read this article to get further insight into the customer experience we are looking for. <http://smartblogs.com/social-media/2013/02/04/how-the-customer-experience-sets-you-apart-in-the-age-of-social-business-part-2-the-value-of-community/>

Marketing During Your Off Season

If you run a seasonal business it is easy to just kick back and relax (well not really) when things quiet down. There is always plenty to do. Of all the tasks that need doing though, one in particular is often neglected until you get closer to the new season. That task is marketing. Remember consumers forget. You need to stay engaged with them. Actually you may have some time to do some extra marketing. Hubspot offers some ideas - <http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/34122/8-ways-to-market-your-seasonal-business-during-the-off-season>

Getting the Press to Pick Up Your Release

Free publicity is great. But you have tried news releases and no one has been in contact with you. One key to getting coverage is to establish a relationship with the media. Small Food Business then suggest that what makes the story interesting is not the product but YOUR STORY. That is what peaks the interest. Read more at:

<http://smallfoodbiz.com/2013/02/05/before-you-pitch-a-story-to-reporters/>

Market Surveys

Want to do a market survey. Then you need to ask questions that get to the information you are looking for, whether good or bad. Hubspot offers some good tips on how to do just that at:

<http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/34145/how-to-design-a-marketing-survey-that-yields-legitimate-results>

Want more information on how to analyze your intended market and where to find the data – Try: <http://www.sba.gov/content/do-your-market-research>

Engaging with Your Influencers

“Engage with your influencers as people, not prospects – Zoe Geddes-Soltess”

We talk a great deal in social media about engagement, especially about engaging your audience. Yet often we consider them as prospects. That is something many of us need to work on.

But perhaps more importantly, what about those people who influence you? How do you respond to them? Do you just admire or do you respond, inquire, ask, etc. This quote sums it up well. So how can you do this? Check it out. This is true whether we are talking about social media influencers or anyone who has influenced you before or now.

<http://wisdomforfutureleaders.org/appreciation-and-collaboration-is-the-key-to-success-30-ways-to-engage-your-social-media-influencers/>

<http://www.radian6.com/blog/2012/02/30-ways-to-engage-your-social-media-influencers/>

Effective Marketing – Do you remember stories or statistics?

Marketing Profs provided this idea. But it is really much bigger than their Super Bowl example. Think in general of what you remember about yesterday or last year or a decade ago. It is something usually wrapped up in a story. So marketing is getting people to know your name and then getting them to take action? What motivates – Stories or Statistics?

<http://www.mpdailyfix.com/super-bowl-stories-vs-statistics-which-won/>

Marketing – What to Budget and What to Expect

SCORE suggests that you should invest 10% of revenues and one-fifth of your time. Expectations they say should be \$10 for every dollar invested. Remember these are just rules-

of-thumb. <http://blog.score.org/2013/jeanne-rossomme/three-rules-of-thumb-for-setting-up-your-small-business-marketing-budget/>

Mobile Payments

Just wanted to share this article not only to make you aware of some options but to get some insight into things that are coming. Check out the Square discussion – walk up and say your name. Your picture will be displayed for confirmation. Or how about TabbedOut where order history and preferences are captured. Just something to help you keep in touch - <http://www.networksolutions.com/smallbusiness/2012/12/6-mobile-payment-solutions-for-small-businesses/>

UPC Bar Codes

For many of you this topic has been covered a long time ago. Yet for some, the idea of a barcode is something that just has not been an issue yet. Depending on where you hope to place your product, this simple little item may mean the difference from getting your product on the shelves or not. Plus as the article notes, you want to make sure that it is your code and not partially someone else's. Some stores will even be willing to help you out at times but again how does that hinder your growth potential? Check out the article at: <http://smallfoodbiz.com/2013/02/08/the-most-boring-piece-of-your-packaging-is-the-most-important/>

5 Things that Increase Business Failure Rates

Chasing all the rabbits is the first. You see lots of idea and opportunities. But you lose focus and spread yourself too thin. The last one mentioned is burnout. This is very common as the excitement wears off and the pressure builds. Set priorities, do the 20% of things that mean 80% to your business, and find others (maybe unpaid family members). Read the rest of the ideas at: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/blog/225672>

Need a Photo – Maybe the Government Can Help

You know you should have visual elements for effective marketing. But where do you find the photos? Try the US Government. The photos they take are public domain and several agencies have sites where you can find them. For more help, check out - <http://www.smallbizsurvival.com/2013/02/the-us-government-has-tourism-photos.html>

The Business Card Remains a Key Marketing Tool

With rapid and massive increase in digital devices, some business owners are considering not having business cards. This is a mistake and will probably always (that is a dangerous word to say) will be. Remember there will always be people who won't have a digital device. And there are others who will forget theirs at home. Also business cards never go down or need recharging and they still are considered a sign your business is legitimate. For more on this topic, check out: <http://sbinfocanada.about.com/od/businesscards/a/Why-Use-Business-Cards.htm>

Search Engine Ranking – How to Improve Yours for No Cost

Want to improve how your business ranks on Google? Then you need to show your address according to US Postal Service protocol. Don't believe me. Then read Intuit's article. They also talk about Google Map Maker, photos, reviews, and more. See the rest of the article at: <http://blog.intuit.com/local/how-to-get-your-business-to-rank-highly-in-local-search-results-for-free/>

Hiring an Attorney

All business owners need professional help provided by attorneys, CPAs, and insurance agents. Often though the owner does not consider this until there is already a problem or it is already too late. That is not the time to find the person you need. Finding the right professional should be a careful, thoughtful decision. Entrepreneur offers 10 questions to ask before hiring your attorney. The first question is one that I always try to recommend, "how much experience do you have with my industry?" Some business questions are generic but some require special knowledge. Know what you need. This may mean having a couple of attorneys on your team. Read more at: <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/225395>

The Consumer Buying Process

This article from Marketing Profs, <http://www.marketingprofs.com/charts/2013/10078/ditch-the-funnel-purchase-loop-echoes-buyer-behavior?adref=nl021313>, suggests that the buying process is more complicated today than ever before. In some ways this is true when one considers the vast number of choices and tremendous number of resources one can study. The take away from this article, for me, is the reminder of the behaviors that drive a purchase:

1. Openness
2. Realize want or need
3. Learning and education
4. Stressing ideas and inspiration
5. Research and vetting
6. Post purchase evaluation and expansion.

Something to think about.

Starting Online

Lots of business owners begin their online presence with Facebook because of the huge numbers of users. Yet others encourage that your website needs to be your core (I am among this 2nd group). Why? My reason is that you have control. If FB decides to change, you have to follow what they do. Other reasons include the options you can add to a webpage that are not available on FB. See more at: <http://blogonline.com/ceos-blog-why-a-facebook-page-is-no-substitute-for-a-small-business-website/>

Five Small Business Marketing Pillars – Where is Branding?

Duct Tape Marketing takes an interesting look at the key efforts small businesses should be focused on. The article discusses how the latest trend is branding. But it outlines four elements

that come first. Read more at: <http://www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/2013/02/14/branding-marketing-pillar/>

Why Customers Buy From a Website

It probably won't come as a surprise but the #1 reason is value. But value is more than the cheapest price, it also means service. The fifth reason is ease. I would say convenient. Another reason is depth of stock and knowing what is available at a glance. See more at <http://www.networksolutions.com/smallbusiness/2013/02/7-reasons-customers-buy-or-dont-buy-from-your-business-website/>

Markup and Margin – What's the Difference – Pricing Help

Small Food Business provides a simple explanation of these two terms. As a small business owner it is important for you to understand the differences. Your goal is profit and understanding your financials is an important step in getting there - <http://smallfoodbiz.com/2013/02/15/understanding-the-difference-between-markup-and-margin/>

More on pricing - <http://smallfoodbiz.com/2013/02/20/wholesale-pricing/>

<http://smallfoodbiz.com/2013/02/19/how-to-determine-your-retail-price/>

Building Your Business

Open Forum reminds small business owners of three basic steps to build your business like “get rid of the ‘wrong’ customers”, avoid discounts and offer something your competition can't. You know these. But take a second to sit back, read this quick article, and then ask if you are applying them in your business. <http://amex.co/12MiCH8>

Understanding Customers – Focus Changes with Income

It should not come as a surprise that people with different incomes desire different things. Not in terms of brands, etc, but in terms of basic underlying core values. This SBA article offers some insight into drivers for two groups. <http://www.sba.gov/community/blogs/6-ways-market-penny-pinching-customers>

Reasons for a Marketing Plan – A Marketing Routine

You have read and heard probably more times than you want that you need to plan. And I have often added my voice to that message. This article gives you reasons though for the plan. The focus isn't on the big issues of what planning offers but looks at the details, the routine it offers. Why do you need a routine? The first response is that consumers need to see your name continuously or they forget. You need to build momentum. I like the 3rd reason, a “routine helps when life happens.” How true! Of course it also provides something you then can monitor and see what is working. See more at: <http://www.stumbleupon.com/su/28LF1L/www.ducttapemarketing.com/blog/2013/02/20/marketing-routine/>

Upcoming Events

eXtension - Entrepreneurs and Their Communities

Spring Webinar Series

Second Thursday of every month

2:00 p.m. (ET); 1:00 p.m. (CT); 12:00 p.m. (MT); 11:00 am (PT)

Connect to webinar - <https://connect.extension.iastate.edu/etc-cop>

May 9 – Tracking Sales to Learn What Your Customers Really Think – Mary Peabody, UVM Extension

June 13 – Are You Supermarket Vendor or a Super Market Vendor – Ginger Myers, UMN Extension

Check us out on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/eXtensionentrepreneurs>
To learn more about other eXtension educational programs - <https://learn.extension.org>
eXtension Entrepreneurship - <http://www.extension.org/entrepreneurship>

Mark your calendars! The eXtension Entrepreneurship webinar series continues with some very timely topics. All webinars will air monthly on the second Thursday at 2:00pm (ET); 1:00pm (CT); 12:00pm (MT); 11:00am (PT).

No pre-registration is required and there is no fee to participate. About 10 minutes prior to the start time simply go the Adobe Connect Pro meeting room at <https://connect.extension.iastate.edu/etc-cop>. You will be presented with a login screen that has an "Enter as Guest" option. Enter your full name then click "Enter Room" to join the conference. You will be able to hear the audio directly from your computer's speakers.

More Information

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