

Small-business Savvy: Getting Others to Talk About Your Business

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Some marketing tools are good. Others are great.

One of the best marketing tools you can have is others talking about your business. These aren't the paid ads but your own brand ambassadors telling your story. One effective way to make that happen is through reviews of your products, services and business in general.

What makes those such an effective tactic?

We trust other people. That is why reviews on your home page or posted on the wall or review sites such as Trip Advisor or Yelp are so popular. And if we know the person who gave the review, or even know a person who knows the person, the trust factor increases exponentially.

The question for many owners, though, is how to get people to talk about their experiences with your business.

The easiest and most effective way: Ask! You aren't telling them what to say. You just ask them for their comments on their experience with your business.

To increase the response to your request, make responding easy. Hand them a comment card. Tell them the online sites on which your store has ratings. And don't forget to send them an email after they leave, asking them for their comments and providing a link where to go.

Also make their comments visible in the store (some stores have big bulletin boards) and online. Customers like knowing you listened. Remember, though, to offer them the opportunity to keep their comments anonymous. Maybe a guest book would work in your situation.

Some business owners wonder if customers are less open in their comments when posting on an internal site as opposed to third-party review sites. Each way has positives and negatives. People who have a negative experience may not share that on your bulletin board and, once they leave, you probably won't get a comment.

Third-party sites, however, have had fake review issues. Plus, people are more likely to offer strong negative comments online without giving you a chance to respond.

Just a quick note: Be sure to respond to all comments but especially to negative comments. Try to solve the problem, but if that doesn't work, at least tell people what you tried to do.

Most of today's consumers realize positive and negative comments are out there and usually don't make their decision based on one or two reviews. That is why getting lots of reviews is important. This also helps show the traffic your business is getting.

Other steps you can take include:

- * Set goals for yourself. This will encourage you to ask your customers to give a comment.
- * Use email. It helps build your email list, but it also gives you another chance to engage with the customer.
- * Be active in your local community. Having comments that include your work outside of the business is great. And just getting your name out there helps increase your search engine ranking.
- * Give a discount or freebie for a comment. Be careful, though, because some people will view this as buying the vote.

Word-of-mouth advertising always will be a great marketing tool. Customer reviews, either online or in writing, are a great way to make that happen. Get your system in place today.

For more help, visit our website, <https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness>, and sign up for the monthly newsletter.

More information is available at your local Extension office, as well as at <http://powerofbusiness.net> and www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, along with many other state agencies, also can be valuable resources.

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