

Build Your Business With 3 “M’s”

Whether your business is just starting or it has been around for 100 years, the need to remain visible is constant.

“You need to give today’s consumer a reason to stop at your business,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “Some have forgotten you exist, others get busy and still others may not realize what changes you may have made, such as introducing a new line of products or offering new services.”

You also have the continuous change of people in the community. No matter how small or big a community might be, people always are moving in and out.

Whatever the reason, business owners need to maintain their presence.

“Remaining visible takes some time and money, however,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “More importantly, it takes planning on where, when and how you keep in front of your audience.”

“One way to think about it is in terms of the three “M’s,” he continued. “Two of the three overlap. That’s OK. It just is important that you remember all the pieces.”

The first “M” in being visible to your audience is marketing. Marketing is a broad term, but in this context, it first means understanding who is your target audience. Who are your best customers? What do they buy and how often do they come into the store? The most important thing you want to know from this group is what else they need or want. Also knowing why they do business with you is useful information.

The second part of marketing is remembering the three channels you have and that you need to use all three. They are marketing you pay for, or advertising; marketing that largely is free, such as newspaper articles about your business or services you offer; and marketing that comes from activities or events you sponsor, such as sponsorship of a charity event or a youth program.

“These definitions are broad,” says (Insert last name). “The important thing to remember is that they all are available, but access to each one is controlled in some fashion. It is important to learn more about each one and to work with the local media outlets regarding their use.”

The second “M” stands for media. Most small-business owners think of the traditional media outlets of print such as newspaper and fliers. But print also includes materials such as business cards, letterhead and brochures.

Of course, traditional media include radio and television. Many business owners may consider those as too pricey, but getting some great deals is possible. And just like in the print media, you can become the local expert on a topic and may be able to get a two-minute radio spot just responding to questions that viewers submit.

“Traditional media is only part of it, though,” says Muske. “Today the business owner also must think about new media channels and how to integrate them into his or her marketing efforts. Start small, probably with a static website, but have a presence.

“Learning is easy,” he added. “Just get online and see what others do. Lurking is OK.”

The final “M” is mingling, or old fashioned networking. Join, belong, participate, support.

Mingling today also occurs online. You may not have anyone in your area or even your state who does just what you do. But the chances of finding someone like you on the Internet are very high. So get in touch and stay in touch. Networking online goes by the same guidelines as effective networking in face-to-face situations.

Want to build your business? Try the three “M’s.”

For more help, check with your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz or Twitter at @gmuske. Another online resource is www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship.

Joining groups such as your local chamber of commerce can be helpful, too. The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and Service Corps of Retired Executives, also can be valuable resources.

###

For more information, contact glenn.muske@ndsu.edu or call (701) 328-9718. You also can visit our website, www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness.