

## **NDSU Extension Offers Low-cost Marketing Tips**

Mention marketing to small-business owners and their first thought is probably cost.

All of us are aware of the large, extensive and expensive campaigns that large companies offer.

“Yet marketing need not be costly, especially when it comes to local marketing,” says (Insert name) of (Insert title and county). “In local markets, traditional media outlets such as newspapers, radio and even local television can be quite reasonable.”

Many other local marketing tactics may be as effective and cost even less.

“A simple business card drawing is one such idea,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “Ask your business customers to drop their business card in a bowl and draw one out on a regular basis for some prize. Doing this helps engage the customer and provides you with a database of business owners who come to your store.”

An idea such as a business card drawing can be built on simply by posting the winning cards each week. People will stop and see who has won. This means a longer time in your store and some publicity for other businesses in the area.

Don’t forget your customers. While a business card drawing works with your business clientele, you may want to run a drawing for customers at another time. Look for how you can make the drawing into a marketing tool. Perhaps you could limit entries to those who refer new customers, or maybe those who make referrals get additional chances to add their name to the bowl.

This idea of cross-promotion is another great opportunity for business owners to support each other. Good cross-promotion begins with an understanding of what other business owners offer in terms of products and services. Hold regular social events in local shops after hours as a way to get visibility. These events also encourage networking, another cross-promotion tool.

“Remember, nothing beats a handshake and a business card,” Muske says.

Such networking can result in shared-cost advertising, such as flier distribution, coupons that offer increased deals if both parts are used, and little things such as business card or brochure displays in other stores.

“Another similar low-cost marketing tip is to ask customers where they are from,” (Insert last name) says. “Take that information and put it on a large map displayed prominently in your store. You not only show the draw of your business; you have created something that will generate ‘buzz’ or talk about what is going on.”

When asking where customers are from, do not forget to ask what else they might need or what attractions interest them. Then direct them toward what might meet their needs.

A key element to success in local promotions is to ensure that your employees also have information about the local area. How often have you asked, “what is there to do around here?” only to be told, “Nothing.”

“Find ways to not only help your employees know what is in the area but provide them with discount coupons to try out these stores and attractions,” says Muske. “First-hand experience provides for a much better sales pitch to others.”

A final low-cost marketing tool is supporting local charities.

“While owners sometimes complain about being overrun with requests, the owner who selects in advance the charities he or she wants to support can get some great visibility,” (Insert local name) says.

Don’t forget to think about ways to make the donation something that gets people in the store, such as a gift certificate. You also could provide the charity with coupons that give them \$5 for every \$10 spent in your store. You know that not all the coupons will be redeemed, and you also know that some of those who do use the coupons will be new customers.

“Good local marketing can be done inexpensively and with the goal of generating new business,” says Muske. “Ideas that use your products and services in an innovative manner to bring people in instead of just spending money are what you want.”

For more information on marketing, visit NDSU’s small-business website at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness). Sign up for the monthly newsletter. You also can contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address] or visit [www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship](http://www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship). Federal and state resources such as the Small Business Administration and Small Business Development Centers also are prepared to help.

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