

MARKETING FOR BUSINESS

Mary Cloonan lays out the key components for a successful marketing strategy.

ISME estimates that there are over 200,000 small and medium-sized enterprises in Ireland employing over 68% of the country's private sector employees. So how do you ensure your SME clients, many of whom are likely to be busy business owner-managers, are getting the best possible results for their marketing efforts?

There are a number of questions the business owner must ask before embarking on any marketing investment. Who is the target audience? What is the strategy for the business, and how can the market development strategy support it? And how can you best reach your audience? Once the business owner has a clear view of the above, she or he can then consider an investment in marketing.

LAY THE FOUNDATIONS

When adopting a conscious market development strategy, consider the following:

- **Leadership:** leaders should lead and while this might sound simplistic, it is important that the organisation's leaders are prepared to lead the marketing effort;
- **Strategy before tactics:** I frequently meet businesses that say, "We tried marketing, we took an advert or even made a video... it didn't work for us". Many businesses tend to get busy 'doing' marketing without clearly considering the best approach and strategy for the target market;
- **Engagement:** don't just plan it, do it. Build deadlines into your plan and stick to them;
- **Action and commitment:** many marketing plans gather dust as business owners get busy. If you want to expand your marketing reach, you must take action and execute the plan;
- **Measurements:** we tend to overvalue the things we can measure and undervalue the things we cannot. You need to measure your marketing results in some way – track visitors to your website, to your business, mentions in press, enquiries, proposals, customer numbers and value per year, the

number of prospects per month and so on.

Businesses should also experiment with digital marketing as it is easy implement and measure, and can be targeted to where the prospects live and work. It also provides a relatively cost-effective branding opportunity in addition to a call to action. Below are some of the key channels businesses should consider as part of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy.

WONDERFUL WEBSITES

Even if business doesn't sell online, Google is now embedded in today's culture and it's important that potential customers can find you easily. People regularly Google a business to get a phone number, check its location or see if there's parking available, for example.

A mobile-friendly website is now a necessity. Also, ensure that the site is covered by Google Analytics, so you can measure the number of visits and understand the effectiveness of certain marketing actions.

Google has transformed how small businesses market themselves with some excellent low-cost or no-cost applications that allow business owners to maximise the visibility of their business. You can map your business location, customise your business email, ensure your website is mobile-friendly, and optimise your website to improve your search engine ranking, most of which cost nothing.

It is important the search engine optimisation (SEO) is carried out with the businesses clients or customers in mind, and you will need to consider how the customer might search for your business.

GET SOCIAL

Social media can seem overwhelming, and I regularly encourage business owners to choose one social media platform your customers, prospects, and industry leaders engage with the most – be it Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter, for example. Start building a presence there.



Social media is important for a number of reasons. It enjoys high penetration rates when it comes to the main platforms mentioned above, with many users checking their accounts daily. Social media mentions also influence how Google views your business online. More mentions, shares and likes your business has on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, for example, the higher your business will rank in Google search results.

Social media allows businesses to deliver regular messages to an audience that has chosen to follow them. This presents an opportunity to build profile and influence people. For example, a hotel or restaurant can share details about special offers, events, awards, competitions or staff news.

Once you have set up a Facebook page for your business, start inviting people to like your page. Share your content. Join discussions and engage with the audience. Keep your social efforts frequent and, above all, relevant to your audience. Businesses that have customers on their premises should also encourage customers to 'check-in' to the business virtually to build brand awareness.



3. ADVERTISE

With approximately two million Irish people accessing Facebook every day, the platform provides a huge opportunity for small business owners to build a relationship with their target audience by sharing content and updates and interacting. The more a user interacts with a page, the more likely their friends are to see, and this in turn increases the potential reach of the business. Facebook advertising is worth experimenting with as you can be very specific about who sees your advertisement. Facebook also provides excellent tools to help you create your advertisement. There is no long-term commitment or contract, and you can edit or cancel your advertisement at any time. Most importantly, you can set a maximum budget per day.

Facebook also offers a range of options from boosting posts to targeted ads, remarketing (to people who have visited your website) or mirroring (targeting people like your customers). Most other social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter offer similar advertising platforms and opportunities.

4. GOOGLE ADWORDS

Business owners must be targeted in their marketing efforts, especially if their product or service is location-specific. Pay-per-click (PPC) advertising offered by Google AdWords is one way to achieve this goal. Similar to Facebook adverts, it is easy to control your budget and build a target profile to dictate who will see your advertisements.

5. BLOG OR VLOG

A blog is one of the best ways to provide informative content through your website. It can also positively impact your SEO. The more you blog, the more traffic your site will receive from Google, as you are adding fresh content to your site. Business owners and managers should also consider guest blogging on other relevant websites. Vlogging – the trendy term for video blogging – is also very useful.

6. EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing is great for engaging prospects and customers. As with other marketing strategies, email works best when integrated into your overall plan. For example,

if you run a Facebook competition, increase the number of potential participants by notifying your email group also.

7. PRESS

By including press releases as part of an integrated marketing strategy, small businesses can get their content directly in front of consumers by connecting with journalists and their readers. Build relationships with editors and see how you can work together.

Combining a few marketing strands and focusing on a consistent message is a potentially powerful and impactful approach. Marketing and profile building in particular are often similar to a drop of water on a stone – it can feel like you are not making progress but, if committed, you will make an impact.

Digital marketing in particular allows businesses to experiment and once the foundations are in place, they are easy to build upon.

Mary Coonan is Founder of Marketing Clever and a freelance marketing professional.