

# LOW COST MARKETING SOLUTIONS

HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS EFFECTIVELY IF YOU'RE  
ON A BUDGET

FIONA HUMBERSTONE  
01483 401 818  
FIONA.HUMBERSTONE@PRINTING.COM  
WWW.GUILDFORDPRINTING.COM

**printing.com**

## “I haven’t got a big budget, what’s the best way to promote myself?”

An interesting question, and one that sparked fierce debate and plenty of ideas at the Women’s Marketing Telesummit in Autumn 2006. As the owner of a small business myself, with a very fixed marketing budget, I have to be sure that my marketing spend works as hard as it possibly can. And the women setting up small businesses who come to my company for help with their marketing often ask us for ways to get the most out of their budget. Marketing on a budget isn’t just about doing everything on the cheap; it’s about spending the money **where you need to**, cutting back where you can and **maximising on the responses** you get. What I’d like to do is share with you some of the ways I think you can **effectively promote yourself on a small budget – and still get results!**

Let’s start by addressing the big one: why haven’t you got a big budget? Are you reluctant to invest? Have you had a bad experience in the past? Or do you simply not have the cash? I would never advocate spending willy nilly on advertising and marketing, but I do believe it is worth investing in the right marketing in the right places. Invest carefully – what’s going to pay off for you? With an existing business you should know this if you’ve been measuring the success of previous campaigns. If you’re starting a new business can you talk to competitors? Or friends in the same industry as you?

For me, shrewd low-budget marketing is about getting as much for free or low cost as possible, and spending your budget where you believe it’s going to pay off the most. That means going back to traditional methods like good old fashioned selling and relationship building, and ditching the expensive advertising and pay-per click online lead generating that can swallow your marketing budget before you can say “yahoo”.

Looking at what’s going to pay off the most for you is key, and to do that let’s start by looking at your need. To give you an example, when I started my graphic design and print business in June 2005 I was tucked away in a business centre with no passing traffic and no easy way to generate leads. I could’ve spent days cold calling

(though I must admit that in my personal experience I don't get a great conversion rate from that) but instead I invested a hefty £2000 in an exhibition. Did it pay off? You betcha! Now that doesn't mean I'd advocate going out and throwing away £2k on your nearest exhibition (the next one I did was a flop – so choose carefully!). But by careful planning, a lot of enthusiasm and plenty of follow up telephone calls I managed to convert 70% of the 100 leads I picked up that day into paying clients. And I still credit that exhibition with kick starting my business. My need at that point was to get leads – **what's your need?**

What do you want your marketing to achieve?

**More leads?** Spreading the word about your business can be exciting! But if you're not managing to convert these enquiries into sales then you could be wasting your money. Start by addressing the fundamental issues – why aren't the leads you have buying from you– aren't they interested? Or is it that once they've enquired you're losing touch with them (or not making contact in the first place) which means that they simply forget about you?

**Higher conversion rate of enquiries to customers?** How often do you keep in touch with your enquiries? The hint is in the paragraph above, but all too often we spend time and money chasing after new business when we have a perfectly good bank of interested potential clients waiting to build a relationship with us. (and I'm sure there's a very good marriage / adultery analogy there but let's not go there shall we?).

**Repeat business?** Now we're talking! In the world of low budget marketing your existing customers are an absolute goldmine. They're already big fans of yours (hopefully) and if you can just maintain your relationship with them then we would hope that next time they're ready to order, they'll come back to you. Marketing to existing customers usually means that you'll get a better response rate than if you work with 'cold' enquiries (people that have never met you before). So if budget really is an issue, focus on your existing enquiries and customers.

## What is your budget?

In the pursuit of low cost and 'free' marketing solutions it's easy to overlook the cost of your time. Generally marketing will either cost time or money. Particularly if you have a service based business, your time is money – is your time best spent designing a flyer for half a day or getting out there and selling your business? So bear in mind that when I say 'free', I haven't factored in the cost of your time.

### > Free marketing ideas

**Links to and from your website.** Getting your website further up the search engine rankings is key to making the most of your online assets. The more links that you can get from websites into yours will improve the way search engines like Google 'rate' your website and push it further up the page.

**Get articles published** on other websites or in newspapers, local directories and magazines. Great PR, fun to do (if a little time consuming), and best of all, it adds value for your potential clients and shows you're not all about the hard sell.

**Recommendations from clients.** A massively underrated 'marketing' tool and yet recommendations are very low cost and often have high conversion rates into clients. What can you do to encourage existing customers to recommend friends? In addition to providing a fantastic service can you reward those clients that recommend people (we send our clients chocolate as a thank you!).

**Build a database – and use it!** Do you log all of your customers and enquiries on an electronic database? Do you use it? Your own list is the best quality you're going to get. Here are people that are actually interested in you – make the most of it!

### > Low cost

**Email newsletters.** A fabulous way of building a relationship with your clients, sharing your knowledge and adding value to their day. Make sure you provide tips and hints that are worthwhile – whilst special offer emails are great marketing tools they are *not* newsletters, so don't dress them up like them!

**Email marketing.** Another low cost way of keeping in touch with customers and enquiries, but promoting a specific offer. They're measurable, low cost and fast. For best results, send them out monthly.

**Client questionnaires.** Finding out what clients really thought about you can be a great way of improving your service, but it's also another way to build relationships, maintain contact and ask for referrals. What are you waiting for?

**Talk to people.** We're encroaching on sales territory here, but low cost marketers need to be prepared to overlook boundaries in the pursuit of business development. Build relationships with your clients. Keep in touch with them. Find reasons to call them (whilst still maintaining professional boundaries!) and watch your business prosper.

## > Worth investing in

**Professional graphic design.** I know, I know, I *would* say that. But the bottom line is that if you can find a design agency that not only makes what you're doing look good but also fulfil your marketing objectives, they really can make the difference between engaging clients or not (our clients tell us that printing.com in Guildford are very good – or call 01483 401 818).

**A well designed website.** You've heard of the three second rule? Great design isn't just about turning your clients on, it's about making sure they don't leave your site within the first few seconds, which can often be the case with home made sites. Either find a great web designer, or use a template driven site that guides you through the steps to a professional-looking website.

**If you're going to do it, do it properly.** If you believe that a piece of marketing will work, then it probably will. Take the time to research, plan, execute as effectively as you can and then measure the results. And if you believe that it will work, then invest the money in it. Brochures are expensive, so don't try to cram the contents of a brochure onto a leaflet – it'll just look naff. Either save up and get a brochure designed and printed professionally, or scale back your ideas. Think about what you want your leaflet to achieve, just promote one message and do it well.

Finally make your next campaign even more cost effective. Measure! How many leads did you get? How many did you convert into clients? How much did they spend? Evaluate. What did you get right? What would you refine next time?

Life would be very dull if we didn't make mistakes, so learn from them and try to ensure they don't happen again. But most of all, have fun!

Good luck!

If you would like some help or inspiration with your marketing please call Fiona on 01483 401 818 or email . Or visit [www.guildfordprinting.com](http://www.guildfordprinting.com)