

15 WAYS TO MARKET YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS



IF YOU'RE A LOCAL BUSINESS, WHERE DO YOU START WITH YOUR MARKETING?

After all, you're in the same town as lots of other people with similar businesses to yours. How can you stand out? How can you differentiate yourself and most of all, how can you get more enquiries and clients? Don't worry! All is not lost, in fact things are decidedly rosy because I've got some suggestions that will help.

I've put together 15 ideas to help get your brain whirring.

Not all of these will work for your business but think about those that MIGHT work.

Don't discount any just because that's not the way accountants/beauty salons/marketing consultants do things - that's the whole point!

This isn't about doing what everyone else does or doing things the way they've always been done. This is about thinking from a new perspective and being brave – and you can definitely do that.



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1. LOCAL DIRECTORIES

Where I live there are directories of North East UK businesses, or even town-specific directories where you can list your business, your website and your social media links.

Search for business directories or sector-specific directories (arts, crafts, therapists) in your area and list your business. I know it can feel like a real chore to come up with what to say but remember, you never know where you'll be found first so make sure that all your business listings properly reflect your business and your professionalism.

Come up with some wording that talks to the people you're trying to attract (as opposed to trying to attract everyone) and that says in a nutshell what you do, for whom and why they should care.

Prepare a longer version and a short, snappy version in case there's a strict word count and literally cut, paste and edit every time you do a new listing.

This will help you get found on the search engines as these directories tend to have pretty good SEO (search engine optimisation) so you may as well piggy back it and drive traffic to your website.

2. BUSINESS CLUBS

Most towns have a business club or business network where businesses of all types get together regularly to network, learn and do business.

Find out about your local business club and see how you can get involved.

Some will have a monthly speaker, some have trade evenings or showcases, some have a website where you can list your business details as a member (see above).

There is usually a nominal joining fee but local business clubs don't tend to be too expensive as they are often not-for-profit.

See if you can get featured on their website or their social media accounts as a new member – use their social media reach to boost yours!

3. AWARDS

Many town/city councils run annual business awards, as do local Chambers of Commerce and other business organisations.

Why not Google 'business awards' for your area and see what comes up?

Business awards are great for PR as a local newspaper often partners with the award organisers, so winners and runners up get coverage in the local press as part of their prize.

If you are mentioned, you can set up an 'in the media' page on your website and share a link to the page on the paper's website.

You can also shout on social media about being mentioned/being a winner so that you squeeze some more mileage out of it.

Finally, it will be great for SEO again as your business name will be mentioned on a newspaper's website, and newspapers often invest a lot of time and effort in SEO for their own site.

Apart from anything else you'll feel like a total superstar and you'll be able to casually drop 'award-winning' into conversations at the school gates...

4. NETWORKING GROUPS

Apart from business clubs, there are loads of other networking groups out there - some paid and some free or pay-on-the-day. Find out which networking groups work for you - they won't all be a good fit so visit a few and try them out.

Think about who you're trying to attract and pick your groups accordingly.

Be selective about which you join. It's very easy to get into the habit of attending everything but you really just want those that attract your potential customers and give you a chance to get to know people who could help your business.

Think about how you can be easily referable, too, when you turn up at a networking event.

Have a sentence that describes what you do 'I help mums to get their children to sleep through the night' or 'I help women build brilliant businesses' or 'I create luxury garden spaces for anyone who can afford me' (!).

It's much easier to refer someone when you're really clear about what they do. It's easier to refer an accountant who helps women-owned small businesses, particularly crafters, than just 'an account'. Do you see? Be referable!

5. SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO)

Yes, I know it sounds scary. I know it sounds like something your web person should be doing for you and yes, that would be great but SEO is also YOUR responsibility.

You need to make sure you're creating regular new content for your website (blogging is great for this) and mentioning all of the things your ideal customers are going to be searching for. You need to tap into your inner psychic and figure out what YOUR potential customers are typing into Google and how YOU can appear in the searches.

For a local business, you want to be found when someone types in your type of business in your town, so 'reflexologist Darlington' or 'children's dance class Epsom'. What words and terms will they use? And how can you incorporate them into your website without it looking and sounding contrived? Make sure your about page says what you do and for whom. Make sure you have a contact page that says where you are, even if you don't include your full address.

Don't miss out on a chance to get found!

6. YOUR BUSINESS FACEBOOK PAGE

You might think that your Facebook page is just another marketing chore to do but actually, it could be bringing you business. Apart from the fact that Facebook appears in Google searches (often before your website) it's also a great platform to showcase what you do, build relationships, build credibility and drive sales and enquiries.

Facebook lets you upload short videos, post photos, run competitions, do polls (you might need to get an app for some of these), start discussions, run business clinics, all sorts of things that you could use to promote your business.

You can choose 'Local Business' as an option when you set up your page and that lets you include a map and have the reviews function available on your page.

If your ideal customers aren't on there, don't spend much time on Facebook but DO make sure you'll filled out your 'about' section just in case someone does find you on there first.

7. BLOGGING

Blogging is a great marketing tool for any business but it works really well for local businesses because you can use it to help you get found in the search engines.

You might not change the information on your website very often because the information on your business and your products might not need changing but a blog can make your website come to life. A regular blog, even just every month, can talk about what's going on in your business. You can talk about new suppliers or stockists, about events you're attending, you can have product reviews or product demonstrations on there – you can have videos as well as text and the beauty of all of this is it really helps your marketing. Why?

Well, first of all it's that SEO again – the search engines LOVE fresh new content, it gives them a reason to keep coming back to your site and every time you add new content, you're going to appear in even more search results.

Also, a blog is the more informal side of your business. Your website has to have your terms and conditions, your product descriptions and all the things that need to be on there for people to buy. Your blog can be more chatty. You can add your personality. You can talk about day-to-day stuff that your customers will love because it gives them a peek inside your business. That's not to say your website should be stuffy or boring by the way, you can still have personality all over your website but your blog is more like a little diary that shows what's happening behind the scenes.

Don't underestimate blogs, a prospective customer will always have a good dig around your website and if they see regular blogs that show your personality and how you do business, that's going to help them decide if you are for them.

8. TWITTER

Twitter works really well for local businesses as you can build up a local following.

Often there are local Twitter Hours for a town or region where you can get to know who else is out there and find new referrers, customers and networking buddies.

Lots of people put shout outs on Twitter when they are looking for a certain type of business or product or service and often there are hashtags for certain towns, to help people narrow down their search.

If Twitter takes your fancy (and it's not for everyone) start by following the editor of your local paper, the chair of your local business club, your local MP and any other well-known bods from your town.

This will give you a good idea of what's going on around your area and will also give you ideas for other people to follow and get to know. With Twitter it is about picking a small group of people and getting to know them, which is why local Twitter hours work so well.

9. YOUR OWN EVENTS

Events are an excellent way to market a local business - when I had a marketing agency we ran free social media training sessions for local businesses and it helped us get to know loads of really useful contacts, many of whom loved our training and turned into customers.

Think about whether you could run free or good value workshops and training sessions for local customers, if it fits with your business.

It's not always expensive – sometimes local cafes or pubs will let you use a room for your meeting for free as you're bringing people in who will buy food and drink.

It doesn't have to be swish, either – you're bringing together people who want to learn and all you really need is the ability to stand and talk to them. It's not hard!

10. FACEBOOK GROUPS

Depending on your type of business, Facebook groups could be a great way to get known.

Some towns have FB groups for local business owners, or for certain types of business. Search on Facebook for your town and the word 'business' and see what comes up. Also if you're targeting local mums, there are loads of mums groups you could join. If you're targeting runners, there will be local runner's groups. Where will YOUR prospective customers be hanging out on Facebook?

When you find them, don't scare them off – it's all about adding value and building relationships. By that I mean don't join groups and just spam/sell - that's going to switch everyone off you and lose you friends quicker than a skunk with dog poop on its shoe. Instead, see how you can help people, refer people and become known as a trustworthy person to approach rather than someone who takes every opportunity to foist their unwanted products on you.

11. PR

Public Relations or PR is a great option for local businesses and it's easier than you think.

Local papers get more readers by covering local people.

Local radio stations get more listeners by featuring local people.

So, they are always on the lookout for local stories and your business could be featured.

Think about what might be NEWS in your business.

- Have you won a big contract?
- Got a new member of staff?
- Moved into new premises?
- Got a business anniversary coming up?
- Won an award?

What could you include in a press release for your local radio station or newspaper.

And don't be put off by 'press releases' - my local business editor is always happy to get an email saying 'this is happening in my business, is it the sort of thing you could cover? - he'll fire an email back which is always 'not really, sorry' or 'tell me more'. It's easy peasy.

Also, get a good photo to go with it. Photos fill space and get you more coverage. Here's a top tip from my local business editor - DON'T always go for the boring 'shaking hands with bank person/landlord/customer' or 'team standing on stairs' type images! They see THOUSANDS of these every year and they are YAWN inducing. Be innovative! You're much more likely to get noticed and a good photo could get you featured where the story alone wouldn't.

12. E-MARKETING

Building up a list of email subscribers is a MUST for any business, but it's even more important for local businesses because you can drive sales right to your door if you do it right.

Come up with a way to get people onto your email list - either a discount code, or a free checklist or e-book, something your ideal customers will love. Then send out a really useful, interesting email newsletter every month.

If you're a professional services business, become known for sharing great tips and advice in your field. Become a 'go to resource' rather than just another accountant, architect, solicitor or whatever. Build relationships with your subscribers. Show you're credible.

I KNOW it takes time to put together a monthly email but put yourself into the mind of the people you're trying to attract and share what you know they will find useful.

This will set you apart from all the other similar local businesses out there. Also, when you DO have an offer or deal, you can whiz out a 'QUICK, DON'T MISS THIS' email to your subscribers and wait for the phone to start ringing. It's a way to get straight to their inbox and most people check their emails on their phone several times per day, so you can get their attention very quickly. Once you start, be consistent. Don't do 2 or 3 then give up. Make it a priority and after a few months you'll find it turns into a talked-about, fabulous marketing tool.

13. POSTERS AND FLYERS

These can be GREAT for local businesses, depending who you're trying to attract.

If you're looking for dog owners in certain neighbourhood, flyers are great.

If you're targeting pensioners, a poster in the post office or village hall could get you right in front of the right people.

If you're looking for town centre business customers, an afternoon spent leafleting and chatting to the business owners could drive a ton of business, and a poster in the local coffee shop or popular cafes could drive enquiries.

Be selective.

This won't work for every business and could actually waste a ton of time, money and energy unless it's properly thought through but for the right business, this could very quickly drive sales.

The main thing you need to think about is the message or offer. You have a few seconds to grab someone's attention so think carefully about the words you use, the offer itself, the image that goes with it and make sure it's instantly clear what it's about and what people need to do.

14. LOYALTY SCHEMES

Loyalty cards aren't just for coffee shops and beauty salons (although they do work brilliantly for that type of business). Even if your industry doesn't traditionally offer loyalty schemes, why not be the ones to buck the trend and do something new?

How could you use a loyalty scheme to encourage repeat custom and referrals? Think about what you could offer, how you could incentivise it, how to make it top of your customer's mind.

People love being rewarded and they are usually very happy to keep coming back and refer you, IF THEY REMEMBER.

Your job is to stay top of mind, remind them about the scheme, mention it in your e-newsletter, have a sign up in your office or shop.

Your loyalty scheme could end up creating an army of free salespeople and that's got to be a good thing!

15. COMPETITIONS

Competitions are an excellent way to market your local business.

You can run them on social media using carefully targeted ads or you can do a real-life in-person competition.

A client of mine was a maternity reflexologist and instead of running a competition alone, we decided she should approach other businesses targeting mums-to-be and new mums and create a bigger competition. She got together with a photographer, a babywear shop, a beauty salon and a couple of other baby-related businesses in the same town. They each donated a prize, so it was a SUPER prize. They each promoted out to their own email lists and via social media and competition entrants were made aware that they would join the mailing lists of each prize donor, but could unsubscribe at any time. They approached their local paper and got coverage as a fab example of businesses working together.

With competitions, be very clear about who you want to attract to enter. Come up with a prize that will attract the right people, rather than freebie hunters. Finally, make sure you gather email addresses and put a message on the entry form that you will be adding entrants to your mailing list and will announce the winner by email.

Why not try a couple of these and see how they work for you?

My last top tip is to LOOK OUTSIDE YOUR INDUSTRY for inspiration.

All the time you're using the SAME marketing ideas as other similar businesses in your town, potential customers will struggle to see the difference (which usually means the decision comes down to price – yuk). Instead, see how OTHER industries market themselves and see how YOU can learn from them. Standing out and being different is a GREAT marketing strategy – you just need to be brave to do it and that should be no problem for you!



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ABOUT US

Claire Mitchell is a marketing and business coach, an Amazon best-selling author and mum.

She works from home in a little village by the river in the North East of England with husband Mitch, daughter Chloe and dog Meggie. She's been featured in Marie-Claire, The Guardian, Closer, Essentials and the Huffington Post. She's been featured on TV-AM, Radio One and The Apprentice.

ABOUT THE GIRLS MEAN BUSINESS

Created by Claire Mitchell, The Girls Mean Business is an online business school for women. She runs a number of courses and classes including:

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love, Claire xx



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