

Promoting your business

Shop Small Saturday is a national campaign and one of the most influential in encouraging consumers to spend their dollars locally or to support small businesses.

A crucial element of these campaigns is for small business owners to join in to provide their unique voice to the marketing.

If you own a small business, you should be performing all of the following 10 small business marketing basics — some of which take less than five minutes.

1. Plan your marketing investment. Your first step should be your local newspaper, where you're guaranteed to get your name in front of a built-in audience of local shoppers. Most successful businesses utilize a strategy of placing paid advertisements that put their message repeatedly in front of the right audience. In advertising like everything else in life, you typically get what you pay for.

2. Closely related, you should plan the messaging you'll present to customers during the holidays. This is true all year but especially critical during the holiday shopping season when your communications will need to cut through the clutter of many competing messages reaching shoppers. Do you want to promote your personalized service? Your high-quality products? Your bargain prices? The best businesses have a way of clearly promoting their value beyond cut-rate pricing.

3. Make sure you take advantage of online opportunities, some of which cost nothing but time. Like the Small Business Saturday page on Facebook. Check to be sure your business is listed accurately on Google.

4. Be an example. You should also be supporting local businesses and be seen doing so.

5. Join forces with other businesses. There is power in numbers, so use this to your benefit. Perhaps you could create a discount system where, if a customer shops at one local business, they earn a small discount at another.

6. Be creative with promotions. Often a small giveaway will get people in the door, and once they are there, they won't be able to resist looking around.

7. Make customers feel special. Don't bombard them as soon as they walk through the door, but find a way to show you notice them and appreciate them stopping by.

8. Connect with customers. If a particular item a customer is holding has a story, be sure to let them know.



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In an effort to support local shops that make our communities strong, in 2010 American Express launched Small Business Saturday on the Saturday after Thanksgiving to encourage people to Shop Small and bring more holiday shopping to small businesses.

9. Participate in local events. This includes ribbon cuttings and town festivals. When people start associating your face with your business, you become a walking, breathing advertisement.

10. Give back. This could even mean sponsoring a summer league team. You may be hesitant to provide 30 uniforms, but with your name on the back, people will be seeing your business at every game all season long.

WE'RE ALL EARS

Questions? Comments? Story Ideas? Let us know how we're doing.

Your opinion is something we always want to hear. Call or contact us online via our "feedback" tab.

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