

10 Effective Marketing Strategies For Small Business



There's so much written about digital marketing tactics that it's hard to know where to start. It's especially true if you are a small business owner without a marketing department or a lot of digital experience. It's even more problematic if you run a service business. The old days of sending brochures and cold calling are dying away. Digital has made it easier for customers to find the information they need online, and most are making purchase decisions before they ever make a single phone call or fill out a contact form.

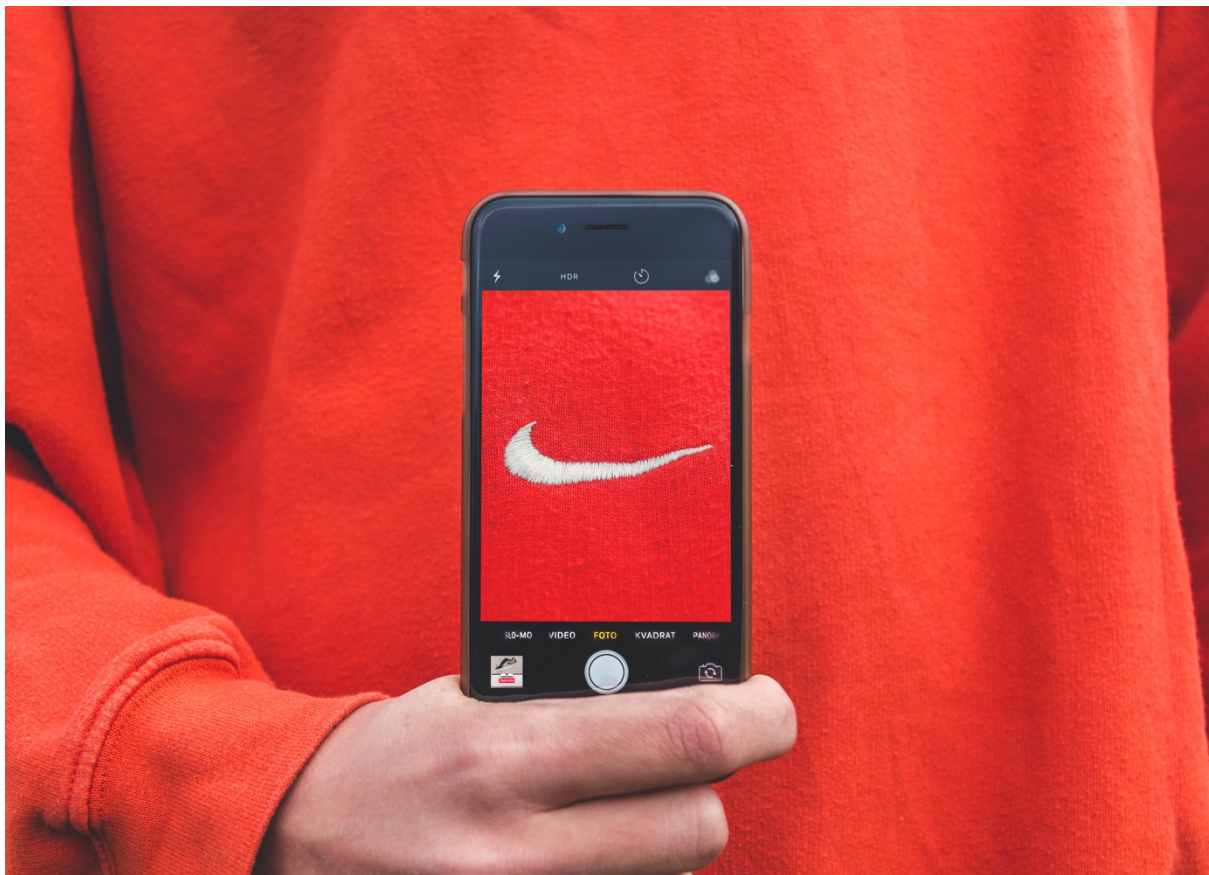
Digital is not only creating the problem, but it's also making it harder for small business owners to find the solution. As customers are increasingly present online, you must reach them where they are. But, it's so easy for anyone and everyone to put information online. As a result, it's also increasingly impossible to find good information about which marketing tactics to leverage first. There's just too much out there, with lots of approaches and varying degrees of success.

What makes sense for your small business? What actually works? And where do you start?

There will always be nuances that are specific to your industry. But having worked across countless categories and businesses, I can tell you with 100% certainty that there are common effective strategies no matter what your small business provides. The following marketing strategies for small business are just that. They're the best and the most important. If you run a small business or provide services to customers, you must have these marketing strategies in place. And, the order of them is important.

MARKETING STRATEGY

1: IDENTITY AND BRANDING



What it is: It's crucial to have a company name, logo, colors, imagery and other graphic elements that help communicate your strategic positioning to your customers. All of these pieces should work together to evoke a very specific tone and feeling. For example, branding that communicates safety should look and feel different versus branding that evokes a sense of luxury.

Steps you can take: If you are just starting out, then you are in the best position to pick a strategic name now. Think about what you want to communicate, then ideate related words, symbols and metaphors that could be used as a brand name.

If you already have a name, you have a few options for your visual identity (logo, colors, business cards, etc.). You can crowd source on the cheap through sites like [Crowdspring.com](https://www.crowdspring.com), you can hire a trusted freelancer (higher quality, but higher cost), or you can hire an agency (highest cost, not necessarily highest quality). I recommend hiring a good [freelancer](#). It's worth the extra money, but not as costly as hiring an agency. Expect to pay at least £500-1,500 for good work, sometimes more.

Favorite tools: Once you have a brand guide that outlines how your brand should look, you can apply it yourself to your documents using simple tools like Powerpoint/Keynote, Adobe PDF Writer, [Canva.com](https://www.canva.com), and [Pixlr Editor](https://www.pixlr.com).

MARKETING STRATEGY 2: FOUNDATIONAL WEBSITE



What it is: It should be obvious what this is. What's not so obvious to some people is whether or not they need one. Well, I highly recommend that everyone have a

good website. It's the business card of today. And the first thing any potential customer will do is Google you and look for your site. You never have a second chance to make a first impression. Of all the marketing strategies for small business, a website is the most foundational and critical puzzle piece.

A website gives you a place to send customers for more information, grab free traffic via search engines, drive people from social media, write helpful content that paints you as an expert (what I'm doing right now), upload ebooks and digital brochures, capture and collect email addresses... and that's just scratching the surface.

A lot of people who don't have websites usually try to rationalize it in some way. They convince themselves they don't need it, but more often than not they are unsure of how to build one or think it will take too much money or time. So they skip it because it's not worth the perceived headache. I'm here to tell you that you do need one. In fact, most of the marketing tactics that follow in this article are predicated on having a website. And, they are not as hard to build or expensive as you think.

I don't know a single lick of code and I built the entire website all by myself. It cost me very little, and there are plenty of software options that make it easy.

Steps you can take: First, go buy your domain name. There's a monthly/annual fee to own it that usually isn't bad. If the domain name is taken, think of similar ones you can use instead by adding words to the beginning or end of it. Don't pay huge fees or ransoms to get a specific name.

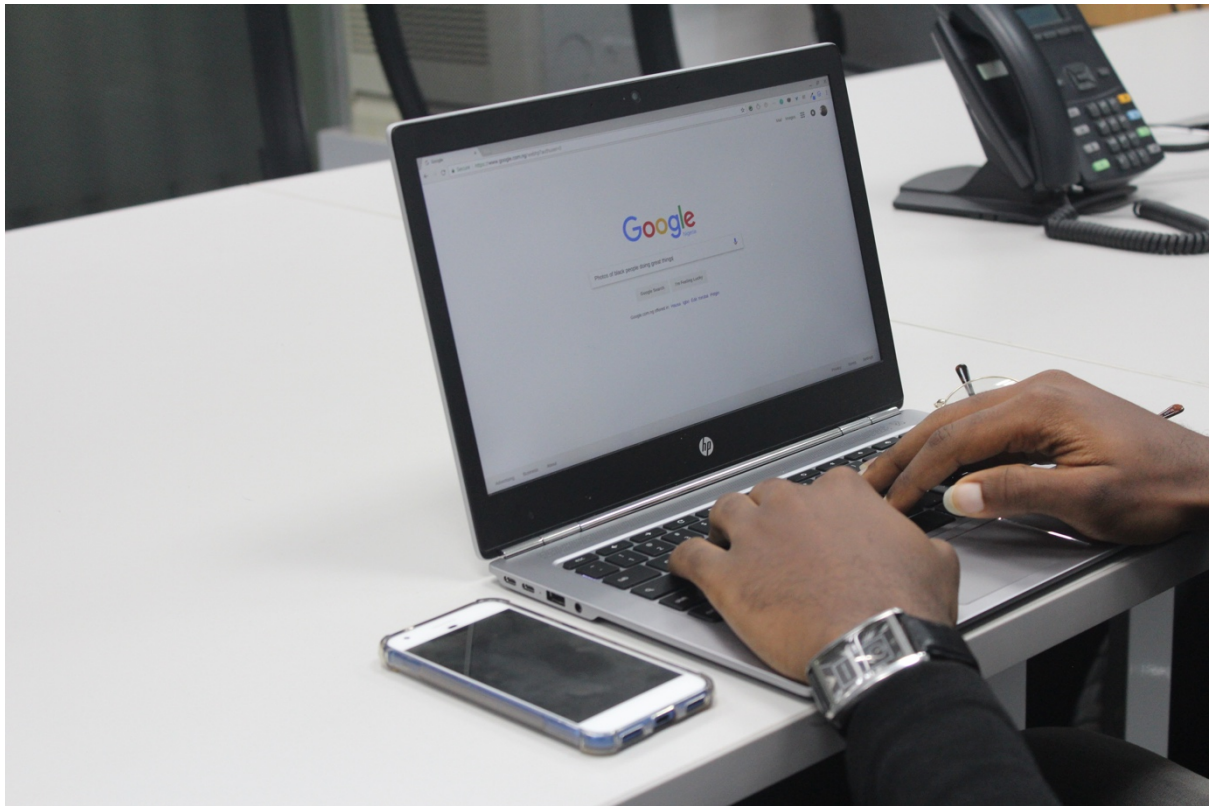
Second, sign up for web hosting. This is where another company hosts your web page on their servers and manages serving it up to customers for you. This is often the same company that you buy the domain name from.

Third, you need content management software (CMS). This is what you'll use to both create and update the website over time. Different CMSs have different advantages and there are numerous comparisons around the web. Do a little reading and pick one. Most CMS packages come with a certain number of free templates you can pick from and fill in with all of your content. But if you want something a little more unique or customized, you can pay £50-100 for a premium theme.

That's it. With those three things in place you can open up your software and begin typing/uploading content. It should cost you less than £500 upfront for everything you need, and then annually less than £200.

Favorite tools: [GoDaddy](#) for a domain name and website hosting, [WordPress CMS](#) (which GoDaddy can actually install for you), [Themeforest](#), [X Theme](#)

MARKETING STRATEGY 3: SEO/LOCAL SEARCH



What it is: Search engine optimization (SEO) involves optimizing your website and content so that it reaches your audience through the search engines. The benefit is free traffic to your site. There are many factors that influence your search engine ranking including, but not limited to, keywords, content quality, links to/from your site, mobile-friendliness, security and user experience.

Local search optimization is an added layer for those targeting smaller geographic areas (e.g., Cincinnati plumbers). You still need to do all the SEO activities that national companies do, but with the added steps of claiming and optimizing your listings (e.g., [Google My Business](#), [Yelp](#), [Angie's List](#), etc.). Local optimization also means paying attention to online reviews.

Steps you can take: Claim your free [Google Analytics](#) and [Search Console](#) accounts so you can see the amount of traffic you are getting, where it's coming from, and which keywords you are ranking for. Using [Google Keyword Planner](#) or a similar tool, research keywords that are relevant to your audience but that have lower competition. Then tweak your content to target these keywords. This means editing your website and/or producing posts/articles that answer questions your audience is searching for.

Other more advanced steps like link-building appear in the remaining strategies below.

Favorite tools: [Google Keyword Planner](#), [Google Analytics](#), [Google Search Console](#), [Google My Business](#), [SEMrush](#)

MARKETING STRATEGY 4: BUILD EXPERTISE



What it is: Once you have your brand identity and website in place, it's time to start generating content that paints you as an expert, solves problems for your target customers, and builds trust with your audience. Great content means credibility for you and added value for potential customers. It can also be leveraged on social networks and in advertising (strategies that appear later on this list).

Steps you can take: The one thing you must do before you begin writing is to research customer problems and questions. One way to do this was mentioned in #3—keyword research. Use a keyword planning tool to develop a priority list of keywords that your audience is using in their searches. Then generate ideas for articles, ebooks, white papers and digital brochures based on the priority keywords on your list.

For example, if you sell dog-walking services you might find that there are a lot of searches for best large dog leash. Then you could write a post about why a certain type of dog leash is the best and mention your 5 recommended leashes that owners of larger dogs should consider. Another way to learn about customer problems and questions is to read online forums. Sites like [Reddit](#) and [Quora](#) are great for this kind of research. Start reading what your audience reads. Sign up for the same blogs and news sites that they do.

Then start writing.

Use a format that is easiest for you. If you are using [WordPress](#), it's surprisingly easy to add a blog to your site and put your articles and posts up. Or if you are best writing in Microsoft Word, consider creating an e-book or white paper. If you are comfortable in PowerPoint, consider doing something graphic or make a slideshow. Or, pull out your iPhone and make a video.

It's up to you. As long as you add value for your audience and answer their questions.

Favorite tools: [Reddit](#), [Quora](#), [WordPress](#), [iStock](#)

MARKETING STRATEGY 5: BUILD A LIST



What it is: Building a contact list is a crucial component of modern digital marketing. The people who opt into email lists are expressing their interest in you. Of all the visitors coming to your site, they are the most likely to actually purchase products or services. Once you have a list, you have people waiting to hear from you. They want you to keep them up to date with what you're working on. They want you to answer their questions. And, when the time is right, you can reach out to them with special offers or promotions.

You can build a list of potential customers who are raising their hands at you... for free. So, why wouldn't you?

Steps you can take: There are two key things to think about here. One is how you'll collect the list. The other is what you'll do with it to keep your audience engaged. You could simply buy a list to get started. This is an old school approach that is still an option. However, it's typically unproductive, lower in quality, and presents ethical challenges. Plus, when a bunch of people unsubscribe or hit the junk button on you, you can get penalized or banned (yes, services like Gmail and Yahoo Mail can blacklist you). Not good.

It's better to leverage your website traffic and add a couple of simple and free tools. You can sign up for an email service provider that will manage both the list and your email campaigns for you. Examples include [Mailchimp](#), [Aweber](#) and [Constant Contact](#). They typically have free plans to get you started.

Then you just need a simple tool on your website that collects information from visitors (e.g., through a subscription form) and then automatically sends it over to your email service provider. Examples of these tools include [Mailchimp](#), [MailMunch](#), [OptinMonster](#) and [ConvertPlug](#). There are numerous others.

So, create a list, create a collection form, and watch your list grow. Once you have a list, you can keep them engaged by simply sending them a regular update. This could be a monthly or bi-weekly newsletter that you write. Or it could be as simple as having your email provider automatically send an update to your list whenever you upload a new blog post ([Mailchimp](#) can easily do this). Then, the simple act of writing blog posts also automatically updates your subscribers and keeps them engaged and coming back to your site.

What you don't want to do is collect subscribers and then do nothing. If they don't hear from you for a while and then you hit them up out of the blue, the results aren't good and it seems really spammy.

Favorite tools: [Mailchimp](#), [Convertplug](#), [WordPress](#)

MARKETING STRATEGY 6: CREATE LEAD MAGNETS



What it is: In order for your list collection efforts to be successful, it greatly helps to offer something of value to potential subscribers. Give it to them for free in exchange for their information (e.g., email address). A simple digital piece is enough, and you may have already created something you can repurpose here (e.g., one of the ebooks or white papers you wrote for #4 above). You can also use your lead magnet in advertising. By advertising a free guide on Google or Facebook, you can generate a large number of clicks and build your contact list all at the same time.

Steps you can take: Start simple and make a downloadable PDF. It can be a helpful checklist, a PDF print of one of your articles, slides or even a video. Think of something that would complement your article topics (see the checklist at the bottom of this article as an example). You can also include a web link or your own contact information at the bottom/end of your lead magnet to help drive potential customers back to your website for more information.

Here's an example of an article I wrote that I then converted into a nice ebook lead magnet for download.

Favorite tools: Microsoft Word, Microsoft PowerPoint, Adobe Acrobat (or your computer's built-in PDF writer)

MARKETING STRATEGY 7: USE SOCIAL



What it is: I'm confident you've heard of **social media**. Sites and apps like **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram** and **LinkedIn** are well-known, with relative newcomers like **Snapchat** complicating the mix. Social can be a good source of traffic and exposure for your business and/or website. Especially once you've completed the previous 6 strategies. Now, when someone visits your site from social media, they'll see a great brand, with great expert content, and gladly give you their information to learn more. And you can generally consider it free, although there are also paid options to increase your reach on these social channels.

Steps you can take: The vast majority of small business owners I talk to know they should be using social. But the approach you should use is where it gets a little bit murky. Most small business owners try to create social profiles and feeds on every social network. Then they aren't sure what to post and have trouble posting regularly.

I recommend a few major steps that you need to work through:

- Where's your customer?—If you are honest with yourself, your customer is not on every social channel. Therefore, you shouldn't be either. If you are a B2B company, then chances are your customers are on LinkedIn, Facebook,

or both. If you are a consumer business then you are probably going to do pretty well with Facebook or Instagram. Do a quick survey of your customers and ask them what they use.

- Start with one and commit—Pick one. Don't spread yourself thin. You need to spend some time initially to build your following and engage with people. Using one channel effectively is much better than using multiple channels ineffectively. And you have to commit to posting regularly or it's pointless for people to follow you.
- Automate—Initially you'll create a lot of content to fill your feed. You can mix your own original content with curated content that you think will be useful to your audience. But, don't waste your time individually scheduling every single post. Use a tool that does it for you automatically (e.g., [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#)). It will save you tons of time.
- Continue to engage—Once your social account is humming along and you are seeing some initial traffic, don't disappear. You still need to personally engage with your audience and respond to comments. Your feed should not just talk at your audience, but instead, have an ongoing conversation.

Favorite tools: [Facebook](#) (consumer and small business B2B), [LinkedIn](#) (B2B), [Buffer](#) (easy to use automation)

MARKETING STRATEGY 8: COMPLEMENT WITH PAID



What it is: To this point, we've given you marketing strategies for small business that don't cost much if anything. But once you have an established website and

social account, it's time to take it up a notch and add a paid advertising layer. Paid media is exactly what it sounds like. You are no longer in the free traffic realm. You pay money, and someone else serves your information/ad up to their audience for you.

You'll often discover that certain sources of traffic already work better than others, and then you'll invest your additional budget in those specific channels. For example, you are still relying on free traffic, but you notice that the bulk of your traffic and conversions (using Google Analytics, mentioned earlier) are coming from Facebook. Well, that's a clear indication that you should consider a paid campaign on Facebook (you'll likely get a good return on your investment).

Steps you can take: What are your strongest sources of organic traffic? Start there. Set up an ad account, tie it to your credit card, and set a budget. You can sometimes set a monthly or even daily maximum. For example, on Bing you can set up your account to only spend \$2 or \$5 per day. Bing will pace out the spending for you.

Next, you need to decide what ad to run. This should be based on your goal. Do you want to simply drive clicks to your site? Do you want more followers (not recommended after your initial startup)? Do you want email addresses? The answers to those questions will determine the creative copywriting and image you'll use. Leverage existing content, ebooks and posts where possible.

Favorite tools: [Google Adwords](#), [Bing Ads](#), [Facebook Business](#), [LinkedIn Ads](#)

MARKETING STRATEGY 9: BUILD LINKS



What it is: Link-building includes activities designed to generate backlinks to your site. A backlink simply means that somewhere else out there on the internet, another website has a link that points to your site.

Backlinks are very important for two reasons:

- Backlinks send traffic to your site.
- Google uses backlinks (both the number and quality) as a signal for how high to rank your website in its search results.

Steps you can take: There are a number of ways to generate backlinks. Perhaps the easiest is to use social networks like LinkedIn and Pinterest. Not only can you post pictures and links back to your site, but some of these channels are also picked up by Google's bots when scanning for links. While social linking is easy, other methods below are even more effective.

Another approach is to engage on community sites like Quora, Reddit and Medium. However, you need to be careful that you do not spam these forums and sites. Be a member that adds value first, and then if a link or two is helpful to the community,

please share. Guest posting is one of the most effective marketing strategies for small business but is also a more time-consuming approach. If you land a post on an already popular site (e.g., a guest article on Inc.com), you are not only guaranteed strong traffic, but Google will weigh those links much more heavily and move you up the rankings.

Start smaller if you are new to this. What niche sites or blogs might your audience read? Can you write a guest article there?

Lastly, an indirect method is to get your content shared more broadly with the hopes that those who are interested in it will link to it. [Quuu](#) is a good example. For a small fee (£30-50) they will distribute your content through a very broad network of social media feeds. You can quickly get other people to share your content this way.

Favorite tools: [Quuu](#), [Quora](#), [Growth Hackers](#), [Reddit](#), [Medium](#), guest posting in smaller targeted communities

MARKETING STRATEGY 10: PARTNERSHIPS AND REFERRALS



What it is: This last marketing strategy varies widely in how it's executed. It can also be more time intensive than the others. But it can be very rewarding. Essentially, you identify other businesses and organizations that are somehow related to or complement your own offerings. You then come up with mutually beneficial ways to partner up and help each other.

Steps you can take: You could offer referral fees or incentives to potential business partners or even your own customers. For example, if you are a dermatologist, you can partner up with a family physician and refer customers to each other. You can sign up for an affiliate network and offer a commission on referred sales. [Clickbank](#), [Rakuten](#), and [CJ Affiliates](#) are good examples. Or you can partner with a trade or industry organization to sponsor, speak or present. Many times you'll also get access to attendee lists (bonus!).

Some of these marketing ideas are digital, but many aren't. That's why they are more time-consuming, and also why I've listed this as #10 on the list. It's good to invest more time in these once you've gotten the other digital elements in place.

Favorite tools: [CJ Affiliates](#), trade organizations/conferences where you can connect with potential partners and solicit speaking engagements