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## **Best Marketing Practices for Rural Areas**

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### **Non-Traditional Marketing Efforts**

Small businesses and towns in rural areas many times believe their businesses live and die by interstate traffic. However, many of them fail to take advantage of the best source of traffic available, the information superhighway known as the World Wide Web. This article discusses several “Best Marketing Practices” for rural areas that involve Ecommerce as well as traditional marketing efforts such as word-of-mouth marketing, advertising with local newspapers and radio stations and joining organizations such as chambers of commerce, convention and visitor’s bureaus and business alliances Effective marketing no longer means spending thousands on ad campaigns; it means efficiently utilizing all available media to reach your potential customers and clients.

### **Google Maps**

Chances are that you have used Google Maps to locate an address or obtain driving directions to and from a destination. But more importantly, can your potential customers locate your business using Google Maps? Take the time to list your business on Google Maps so that customers can easily obtain your address and the driving directions. It is completely free to add your business to Google maps, you can event include a photo and link for your business or organization’s website. Add your business to Google Maps by visiting

<http://maps.google.com/>.

### ***How To:***

Click on the link for “Put your business on Google Maps.” From this site you will be able to enter your address and see if there is already a business listed at that location. The form that appears next will ask you to enter your business information. After entering your information click “Next”. The map on the right will focus in on the address that was entered.

Please pay close attention to the red map marker; sometimes Google places it incorrectly. If this happens, click on the link “Fix Incorrect Marker” located underneath the map. Now, drag and drop the marker to its correct location. Google Maps will then search its database to determine if there is another business at the same location. If there is you can “claim” the listing and update the data to correspond with your business. Now, when someone searches for your business online it will appear on Google Maps. If your business is not listed on Google Maps you may be missing out on business because potential customers simply cannot find your location online.

### **NAVTEQ.com**

NAVTEQ.com is a company that provides highly accurate digital maps. Current clients include Sirius Satellite Radio, Yahoo, Mapquest, Microsoft, Garmin, Nokia, Motorola, BMW, Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep and MiniCooper. NAVTEQ provides maps that are utilized in these devices’ global positioning systems (GPS). Anyone who owns and uses these technologies is viewing maps that have been created by NAVTEQ. NAVTEQ shows customers where to find you, at the time when they are on the move and ready to make a purchase. You can have your business or organization added to NAVTEQ’s map, absolutely free, simply access their site and provide information about the location of your business. For example, if you own a pizzeria in Victoria, TX, and add the restaurant to NAVTEQ.com a person unfamiliar with

the area using their Garmin GPS to find a restaurant in Victoria, TX, would now be able to see your pizzeria's location on screen. Adding a business or organization to NAVTEQ's database not only increases the chance that out-of-towners will be able to find the location, but also ensures locals know where to find the business as well. Potential customers cannot patronize a business if they cannot find it or are not aware of its existence.

### ***How To:***

Access the site at <http://www.navteq.com/> and choose the link for "Map Reporter" located near the top of the page. In the address blank, type in the complete address for your business. If your business is not listed choose the "Point of Interest" (POI) section and select "POI is missing." If the address for your business has another business or organization's details choose "POI has incorrect details." Scroll down and enter the correct information for your business. You can even upload comments and a photo of your business that will be displayed when potential customers access the map. Enter your e-mail address and submit the information to NAVTEQ.com and soon your information will appear on their digital maps, further maximizing your advertising efforts.

### **Google AdWords**

By now, most people have used the internet search engine Google to look for information on a variety of topics. These searches are performed using key words or phrases that relate to the information being sought. When you search for something using Google, Google's search engine combs the entire internet looking for topics that relate to the keywords you have entered. Google then displays a listing of all of the sites remotely related to your search terms. Did you know that when you search a keyword on Google there are people vying for top billing on the search results that appear? You have the opportunity to create an ad for your

business and structure it so that it appears when keywords relating to your business are searched using a tool Google has created called Google AdWords. Google AdWords allows you to reach customers who are actively searching for your product or service. Visit <https://www.google.com/accounts/ServiceLogin?service=adwords> today to learn more about Google AdWords and to start maximizing your online exposure.

### ***How To:***

For new users, Google AdWords Starter Edition is a great tool. The startup fee is \$5.00, after that, you pay only when your ad is seen and clicked on by a potential customer, who will then be sent to the website you specify. Using this tool you will decide how much your ads will cost, based on the cost you assign for each time a potential customer clicks on your ad. The lowest price you can set for an ad is usually one cent. You have total control over your budget, because you set your monthly allowance at any amount you want. Many businesses begin at \$10 or less for one month. When your budget is reached your ad will no longer show for that month. Google ads gives you the opportunity to change your cost per click and your budget at any time during the month.

When you sign up for the Starter edition, Google's Budget Optimizer will set your cost-per-click when you enter a budget amount. You will never be charged more than your budgeted amount. As you can imagine, ads with a low cost per click will not be shown as much as ads with a high cost per click. Google AdWords is similar to an auction in this sense. Very popular topics and keywords (such as real estate or hotels) can cost more because many others want to advertise on them. However, do not let this discourage you from advertising with popular terms, because even expensive key words can return dollars for pennies invested.

### **Google Sites**

If you want to establish an online presence but are not the most tech-savvy individual Google sites is the perfect tool. You can access an overview of Google Sites at <http://www.google.com/sites/help/intl/en/overview.html>. Using Google Sites is completely free. All you have to do is create an account. After you have created an account you can log into Google and begin designing a web page for your business or organization. No web-programming or design skills are necessary. An example of a site constructed using Google Sites can be found at <http://sites.google.com/site/newsletterexample/Home>. To find out more about Google Sites and the opportunities waiting for your business on the internet click on the first link. With a little creativity you can create a web site that allows customers to access your business from anywhere in the world!

## **Twitter**

Twitter is a service that allows people to keep in close contact by sharing updates about the activities they are engaged in.

Twitter was designed so that people could notify others about what they are currently doing. After you create a Twitter account you can invite people to follow you. You can restrict your followers to people you know or allow anyone with a Twitter account to see your status.

Updating your status is commonly referred to as "tweeting." A status update is referred to as a "tweet." Users can comment on other peoples "tweets" as well. There is a free download for Twitter called TweetDeck that allows you to update Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites all at once, as well as view others' posts. TweetDeck has a function that allows you to create groups, or organize searches based on key words. For instance, if you own a clothing store in Dallas, Texas you can set up your TweetDeck to notify you when someone "tweets" that they are shopping in Dallas, Texas. You can then comment on that person's "tweet" and provide them information about your business. You can "tweet" when new products arrive at your business, or "tweet" about a new service that you offer. Consider using "tweets" that

offer discounts or coupons, or to notify customers of current sales and specials. You can visit <http://twitter.com/> to get started today.

## **Skype**

Skype allows you to talk to anyone in the world at no cost. The program offers 28 languages and all you need to talk to others is a simple internet connection. Using Skype you can make video calls, calls using traditional landlines and mobile telephones for free. Skype is a great networking tool. Consider the possibilities of “Skyping” with clients anywhere, at any time. If a customer contacts you using Skype, you could demonstrate product uses live using the video chat feature. Now that Skype has been released for the iPhone we anticipate it becoming a more common platform for mobile communication especially for visiting international tourists. Visit <http://www.skype.com/> today to learn more about this great technology.

## **Traditional Marketing Efforts**

The first section focused on social media and eCommerce marketing efforts. In the following section the focus will shift returning to “the basics,” concentrating on what can be done locally to promote businesses, products, services and organizations. It is easy to get caught up in the fast-paced world of technology and let traditional marketing efforts slide. While small business owners should be doing everything they can to take advantage of marketing opportunities available online, these efforts should be made in conjunction with the traditional marketing efforts discussed below. The following section will focus on word-of-mouth marketing, advertising with local newspapers, radio stations and joining organizations such as chambers of commerce, convention and visitor’s bureaus and business alliances.

## **Word-of-Mouth Marketing**

Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing is the most important form of marketing that your business or organization can have. Traditionally, WOM meant the passing of information from person to person verbally. Now, WOM marketing includes all types of media from the spoken to the written word. One person with a You Tube video or blog can reach millions of people with information about your business or organization and you have no control over how they portray your business. The best way to combat negative WOM and help ensure positive WOM is to make sure that every customer who comes in contact with your business experiences superior customer service. Great customer service involves treating customers with respect, valuing their time, and making sure your employees, services and products are top-notch. It is extremely important that you communicate your commitment to excellence in customer service quality to your employees, as they interact directly with customers.

Working hard at providing your customers with high levels of quality customer service will help make certain your business's WOM is positive, rather than negative.

## **Local Newspapers & Radio Stations**

Most local businesses still rely on advertising with local newspapers and radio stations. Despite reports of decreasing audiences due to the increased availability of news sources online, newspapers still reach significant audiences daily. Traditional radio stations also enjoy a regular following despite satellite radios and the increasing use of MP3 devices in vehicles. However, if the local newspaper appears online, or your radio station has a website, ask your sales representative what it would take to have your ad featured on the website, as well as in print or on air. You may choose to let the advertising representative or an advertising agency design your ad, or run one you designed. Many radio stations will record your ad for you

once you have written the copy, or you can go to the studio and record the ad yourself. Also, do not be afraid to negotiate for the best deals with sales representatives.

Most advertising experts agree that there is no need to make sure your newspaper ad runs every day of the week, instead they recommend running ads three times a week for maximum return. For radio ads make sure your ads run at peak listening times, such as early morning, lunch time and after work, when people are most likely to be in their vehicles listening. Many people simply skim newspapers; when you are flipping through the paper how many times does it take you to find and locate your ad? Make sure your ad stands out and is eye catching, so that even the most cursory readers can spot it easily. Often newspapers will place your ad directly next to that of a competitor (usually accidentally), so ask the sales representative to make sure there are no competing ads directly next to yours. Consider using a coupon and a radio teaser, such as "look for our coupon in the Sunday paper," as this combination can generate more business than just a coupon in the newspaper.

### **Chambers of Commerce**

Another "Best Practice" includes joining your local Chamber of Commerce. Visit <http://www.chamberofcommerce.com> to find information about your local Chamber of Commerce. The website has contact information and includes links to chamber websites. Chambers of Commerce are dedicated to providing support for local businesses and they accomplish this through membership fees. They provide services such as working towards creating a strong local economy, providing networking opportunities for small business owners, serving as a liaison between business and local governing bodies and assisting pro-business candidates with elections. Chambers of Commerce are often engaged in economic development activities as well. Contact your local Chamber today to find out what opportunities await you.

## **Convention and Visitor's Bureaus**

Convention and Visitor's Bureaus (otherwise know as CVB's) are directly responsible for promoting travel and tourism in an area. They are responsible for bringing meetings and conventions to your area, as well as conducting familiarization, or "fam" tours. A "fam" tour is a tour for travel agents designed to familiarize them with the offerings of a location. Does your business boast the best chicken fried steak in a 100 mile radius? Perhaps you should contact the CVB about making your business the lunch stop on the next "fam" tour. The CVB also serves as a centralized location for tourists to stop at to pick up maps, brochures and gather information about the activities in an area while they are visiting. Consider asking the CVB to display a brochure, flyer or special coupon for your business. You can keep track of how many coupons are used to get a general idea of how much traffic the display is generating for your business.

## **Business Alliances**

Are there any local small business alliances that you can join? Is there a partnership you could create with a business that complements yours? Alliances often offer a wealth of expertise on a variety of topics including financial management and marketing. Business alliances help smaller businesses capitalize on the combined buying power of several businesses. Business alliances can work together to create packages for tourists. For instance, a museum and a hotel could partner together, advertising for each other on location, as well as offering reduced rates of admission to the museum with one night's stay at the hotel.

Individually each business may not be able to afford large ads in the newspaper, but splitting the cost and sharing the ad can result in increased exposure for both. It is a win-win situation. The agreements will vary from business to business but the possibilities are limitless. If your area does not have a business alliance, consider creating one.

## **Sponsorship**

Consider sponsoring local events or sports teams. Often youth sports leagues need sponsors and in exchange the business name is featured in the team's name or on uniforms. This type of sponsorship creates positive word-of-mouth marketing for your organization and helps people make positive associations with your business. Often youth organizations, such as dance teams, sell sponsorships for their teams. In exchange your name appears on various marketing materials and you receive a team photo to display at your place of business identifying you as a sponsor. These types of sponsorships may serve to inspire loyalty with customers who have close affiliations to these youth organizations. You may choose to sponsor or donate in-kind materials in exchange for a booth at a local event. Use this booth space to promote or demonstrate your products and services to potential clients or to distribute samples or coupons. Large events have the potential to increase regional marketing efforts, as people from surrounding towns and communities, who might not otherwise hear about your business, will attend the event. Remember; only affiliate yourself with events and causes that align closely with the values of your organization in order to protect the reputation of your business.

### **IDEA CENTRAL:**

#### **Sponsor a Contest:**

Challenge locals to create a video or montage of the best the community has to offer. The winning videos will be uploaded onto YouTube. Have youth, adult and even business divisions to get the entire community involved. Talk to the journalism department at your local high school or college to get teachers involved in the contest. This project would make a great assignment for their students. Talk to the local movie theater about donating theater space for a night and create an event that showcases the best video submissions. Chances are the movie theater would love to be involved with the event and might profit substantially from concessions. Consider charging a small (\$2) admission or having everyone bring a canned good for the local food bank in lieu of admissions. Let the community or a panel of judges chose the winner from each division. Get local businesses involved with sponsoring prizes for the winners – who knows maybe they would even be interested in sponsoring individual moviemaking efforts. The possibilities are endless – and result in positive online exposure for your community.

### **Conduct Market Research**

This idea is designed to help you discover what types of marketing methods work best for your business. Consider running a promotion that lasts exactly one month. Place coupons at the CVB, on your business' website, in the local paper and run an ad on the radio offering, for example, a free appetizer when you “mention this ad” (or “present this coupon”, for print sources). Each coupon should be for the exact same offering (whether it is a free tire rotation, 10% off an oil change, free nail polish, etc...), but make sure that it is easy for you to identify the source of each physical coupon; newspaper, printed off from the website, or picked up at the CVB. Have your employees keep track of how many people mention the radio ad and count how many of each type of coupon is redeemed. At the end of the month you should

have a pretty good idea of which advertising method is giving you the highest return on your investment and be able to narrow your focus to those methods that generate the most business.

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