

BUSINESS

Get Outrageously Creative

Creative Tips for Saving Money and Growing Your Business

By Readers of Small Business Trends, 2009

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Table of Contents

A Letter from the Publisher of Small Business Trends	5
Part 1 – Creative Money-Saving Tips	6
Part 2 – Creative Business Growth Tips	12
The Small Business Trends Story	21

Contributors by Name

About Small Business Trends	23
Adam, 41q	17
Adam Toren, Young Entrepreneur	19
Aidan Rogers, Ink Ode	16
Allen, Cloud Contacts	8
Andrea Tobor, A Growing Enterprise	18
Anita Campbell, Small Business Trends	21
Bobby, ZanonMoney	10
Brian Wallace, NowSourcing	8
Chaitanya Sagar, P2W2	8
Craig Sutton, Network Task	18
Daniel Scocco, Online Profits	17
Daniel Silva, Silva Heeren	12
Dan Schawbel, Personal Branding Magazine	13
Debbie Decker, ClickforClients	11
Deborah Carney, Loxly Gallery,	21
Denise O’Berry, Just for Small Business.	13
Derek Halpern, Preential	17
Elizabeth Walker, Marketing Masters	8
Ellen Britt, Marketing Qi	12
Elmer Thomas, Thinking Serious	16
Frederick Townes, W3 Edge	8
Geno Prussakov, AM Navigator.	12
Gregg Peterson, Fast Commerce	15
Heather Pauls, HPConsulting	6
How did Small Business Trends get started?	22
Ian Harris, Ian H. Blog	15

Ivana Taylor, StrategyStew.com	14
Jared Lyda, Fire and Motion	10
Jason Wood, The Money Festo	10
Jeanne Querrell	6
Jim Kukral, The Biz Web Coach	13
John Heaney, Orange Envelopes.	10
John Jantsch, Duct Tape Marketing	6
John Mariotti, The Enterprise	13
Jonathan	8
Jonathan Fields, Career Renegade	13
Jonathan Steele, Speech Mastery	10
Jon McCulloch, Small Business Marketing Tips	7
Jon Ward, ClickforClients	11
Katie Langston, Marketing Wizards Alliance	15
Katja Presnal, Skimbaco Lifestyle	6
Ken Hagler	14
Laura, Embrace Pet Insurance	9
Lisa	19
Marcia Robinson, Bulls Eye Resume	20
Margie Zable Fisher.	14
Marshall R. Isaacs, Attorney at Law NYC	16
Martin Lindeskog, Editor of Ego Blog	15
Matt, Small Biz Bee	14
Maya, Geek Dance.	19
Mike Brown, Brain Zooming.	20
Mike Michalowicz, The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur.	6
Mike Trzaska	9
Moise Levi, GI Charts.	7
More questions?	23
Norbert Mayer-Wittmann	7
Norma Rist, Business Coach	20
Pat, Kansas Small Business Development Center.	9
Paul Singh, Results Junkies.	14
Peggy Duncan, Suite Minute	15
PizzaForADream	11
Rick Whittington, Web Consulting Services.	7
Robert Rogers, Coral Law	10
Ruth King, Profitability Channel	18
Scott Allen, About.com Entrepreneurs Guide	13
Stephen A. Orzel	18
Steve C., My Wife Quit Her Job	17

Susan, Alkamae 11
Tamar Weinberg, Techipedia 16
Tim Grahl, Out Think Group 17
Todd Earewood, Money Path 20
Tracyi, The Original SoupMan 18
Vince Blackham, Primary Affect 16
What does Small Business Trends do? 22
What's the Small Business Trends revenue model? 22
Where is Small Business Trends located? 23
Zak Nicola, Nice Smile 8
Zane Safrit 12

A Letter from the Publisher of Small Business Trends

Welcome to our second compilation of tips and advice learned from savvy readers.

Times like these call for creativity in your business. That's exactly what you will find in this document: creativity ... and then some.

The tips are divided into two sections:

Part 1 - creative money-saving tips

Part 2 - creative business-growth tips

In fact, it is when you have little money and few staff resources that you are most challenged to substitute creativity.

Let your mind go ... come up with new ideas. If you can't think of new ideas, build off of the ideas of those who went before you and who generously share them in this document. It is my hope that at least one idea in this document is something you can use in your own business to be more successful in the coming year.

Here's to your success ... read on!



Anita Campbell

Anita Campbell

Publisher, Small Business Trends

Part 1 – Creative Money-Saving Tips

John Jantsch, Duct Tape Marketing, www.ducttapemarketing.com

“I had a client that we convinced to run a lumpy mail campaign - direct mail with some dimension to it. We created a series of messages with stuff in the boxes to match the message. Two cost savings measures –

1) one mailing had a keys to success theme - we went to a hardware store and got boxes of old miscut keys - they were thrilled to get rid of them.

2) to invite people to a seminar we served great BBQ and used the rib boxes from the well known BBQ place as carriers for the invitations. No cost for the creative boxes and the rib joint was thrilled.”

Mike Michalowicz, The Toilet Paper Entrepreneur, <http://toiletpaperentrepreneur.com>

“To save money on legal and accounting work one creative thing I did was visit local colleges to speak with the professors who taught the appropriate subjects. In return for their legal and accounting help I agreed to be an entire case study for their class, so the students could learn from my experience building my company. When it comes to office furniture I was able to get every piece I have for my current business for FREE! One e-mail to other businesses asking if they were moving and wanted to get rid of their furniture was all it took! I was able to get high quality office furniture in amazing condition for a 10 person office, with some high class office chairs which normally cost over \$500 each!”

Katja Presnal, Skimbaco Lifestyle, www.skimbacolifestyle.com

“It was all viral, organic & social media marketing. I put together a gift basket for Tom Cruise - he endorsed a product from it on the Oprah show. I used less than \$100 and close to 100 blogs wrote about it the first time. It’s airing again today and we’ve got 30 more blogs who have written about it!”

Heather Pauls, HPConsulting, www.hpconsulting.ca

“I cannot stress enough the power of just asking. Call all of the companies you do regular business with. Ask them to lower their rates for services and products. I think you’ll be amazed at the response. I have developed my whole business around the strategy that “If you don’t ask, you don’t get”. I save my clients thousands of dollars every year in their telecommunications expenses. Knowing what to ask for and actually asking for it, on average has reduced my client’s yearly telecom expenses by about 35%. I’m so confident in my ability to reduce their expenses, that I will only bill my clients if I am able to realize savings for them.

What do you have to lose?”

Jeanne Querrell

“A very large German car manufacturer had tried for 5 years internally to build a certain software product, but it was a long way from being complete ... it was over-engineered. We had a serviceable alternative product, but ours was only 65% complete — really little more than a prototype. My husband managed to snag a one-hour meeting with a key executive. It was our last-ditch effort, as we had triple mortgaged our home and asked employees to skip a pay check.

On Monday night he got on a plane and flew to Germany. Tuesday he got right off the plane and met with the executive for one hour (all the time the executive would give him). My husband was his most persuasive, and managed to convince him that we had a product ready for delivery. The German executive said yes, we want it. My husband called and said “we got the contract ... now we’d better finish the product!” and jumped on the first plane home.

With the contract in hand, our team finished the product in record time, in about 6 weeks. Our business was launched. With that contract in hand we soon got others. It took some stretching of the truth to get that first contract, but if my husband had not stretched the truth our business would be gone now.”

Moise Levi, GI Charts, www.gicharts.blogspot.com

“Besides being a financial/trading coach, I am also a painter. I used to be a private banker. Invited potential clients to an art gallery with my paintings; the gallery was sponsored by the bank I was working for; asked my friends at the bank to show up and give out business cards.”

Norbert Mayer-Wittmann, <http://online-marketing-internet-advertising.com>

“For online marketing / internet advertising: Use the “Wisdom of the Language” approach — it is far more effective (and also far more efficient [aka “cheap”]) than traditional / pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.”

Rick Whittington, Web Consulting Services, www.rickwhittington.com/consulting

“We co-work or share an office with another company. We’re all able to have our private offices and can even collaborate with work. I have a large private office with a huge window overlooking “Main Street” for less than \$200 per month.”

Jon McCulloch, Small Business Marketing Tips, www.small-business-marketing-tips.com

“Without doubt it was telling a carpet-cleaning client of mine just to go out and buy up all the defunct telephone numbers his ex-competitors had been using (one had died, one was ill, and one was just plain out of business).

For an investment of about £140 a quarter, he’s making an EXTRA £240 a day or so from business he’s not had to lift a finger to get (never mind he’s got his ex-competitors’ new business from the Yellow Pages ads they ran, but he’s also secured most of their old repeat clients).”

Chaitanya Sagar, P2W2, www.p2w2.com

“When we launched p2w2, I asked all my fellow alumni (~2000) of my school to do one thing that takes just 10 seconds - put my URL in their Google Talk, Skype, Yahoo, Twitter, Facebook, or AOL status messages. A LOT of them did it. And when they did, all their friends were curious what p2w2 was. It was free advertising! And we got many visitors to our site.”

Frederick Townes, W3 Edge, www.w3-edge.com/weblog

“I found a niche market that was becoming heavily saturated and did something that no one else could. I called, met and built relationships with clients, helped them understand the value of the product and what impact it could have on their businesses and in a nutshell “went traditional” in a largely “pure web” (competitive) space.”

Zak Nicola, Nice Smile, <http://zaknicola.wordpress.com>

“I sent the workers home. Telecommuting has put more money back in my pocket than when we doubled the sales force. Minimal overhead and all employees were willing to take a small pay cut to work from home as well!”

Allen, Cloud Contacts, www.cloudcontacts.com

“I use fatwallet.com to find deals - I refuse to buy anything online without a deal.”

Brian Wallace, NowSourcing, <http://nowsourcing.com/blog>

“I moved from a high cost area of metro NY to the Midwest. Not that I could have said that the economy would have turned out the way it did, but I just wanted to continue to grow my business without being in a rate race.

That said, my 15-year mortgage plus real estate escrow is LESS than what some of my friends back home pay in real estate taxes every month.

Outrageous? Maybe it isn't for everyone, but I like where I live and work and can always hop a plane back to NY if I'm really that homesick.”

Jonathan

“Bargain hunting on eBay and Craigslist is a great place to start, but to really get the lowest possible prices you need to find items that other people overlook. The site <http://www.typobuddy.com> lets you search eBay and Craigslist for misspelled items.”

Elizabeth Walker, Marketing Masters, www.marketingmasters.ca

“Our agency was hired to reposition and re-launch a well-known ERP software solution. We knew we needed to have outrageous creative because we did not have an outrageous budget! So our creative director created a campaign featuring businesses as beehives - we tested it with senior executives and the results were fantastic. We created a giant model of a honey bee for photography, wrote long-copy ads telling all about honey bees and how they communicate in large complex environments, and build 6 landing pages with unique URLs. Then we ran national business press

and trade ads featuring the URLs. And, on the morning of the launch, we hired teams of artists to do chalk art of the ads on the sidewalks outside commuter train stations, key clients and the offices of the competition.

Further to my post - we told leading media outlets what we were up to and got great free PR coverage of the launch. And, we selected one B to B media partner based on what added value we could create together, rather than investing in a number of publications - the leading publisher loved our idea and we were able to save our client tons of money and create great impact over a longer time period than we would normally have been able to afford.”

Mike Trzaska

“There are some great innovative ideas on this blog; my actions to save on costs were much more simple. I currently run a very small (5 employee) online sales company, selling outdoor products and apparel for hiking, backpacking, camping, etc. Although I do have a home store most of our business is done online. Last month we processed over 900 internet orders. Because we do the majority of our transactions through the internet most payments come from credit cards. Six months ago I began researching new online processing services, and switched from my current provider to a relatively new service. This has increased my net profits by 5% and the cost to change to the new services was minimal. The company I used was Swipe Physics (www.swipephysics.com), but I suggest to an internet dominated business to reevaluate their card processing services and consider an upgrade.”

Laura, Embrace Pet Insurance, www.embracepetinsurance.com

“I don’t think this idea is very outrageous but when I tell people, they always say Duh - why didn’t I think of that.

In our business, we pay out a lot of checks for pet insurance claims. Instead of setting up a special check printer, stuffing envelopes and paying for stamps, I use our bank’s bill pay feature. It’s absolutely free, the checks are guaranteed to arrive by a certain date, and they’ll even do all the work to investigate lost checks. We save a great deal of money doing that and even better, there’s no fuss for me.

We also do everything electronically so only email PDF docs for our policies and our claims explanations - that saves a lot of money and trees too.”

Pat, Kansas Small Business Development Center, <http://swksbdc.com>

“I’m a consultant and worked with an Automotive Supply business that was terribly strapped for cash flow. We reviewed their store and layout and discovered they had a huge inventory that was tying up most of their cash. They talked with their suppliers and discovered that nearly all of them would take back part of the inventory that was not selling and credit their accounts. This lowered their accounts payable within days and greatly relieved the stress on their cash flow. ASK! Not every business will be able to do this, but it will work for some of them.”

John Heaney, Orange Envelopes, <http://orangeenvelopes.typepad.com/blog>

“Create a distinct and memorable experience. To attract well-heeled prospects to an exhibit sponsored by a contemporary gallery and a financial services firm, we took one of the featured artist’s paintings, cut it into 50 squares, wrote the invitation on the back of the painted squares, packaged the square in an elegant box and delivered the boxes to targeted prospects. Response was outstanding and is still talked about.”

Jared Lyda, Fire and Motion, www.fireandmotionblog.com

“Take one for the team.

Do personal spending freezes. Are you an owner drawing a salary? If so, cut back your personal spending and salary for a set period of time. Use that money instead to fund new supplies, employee performance rewards, pay bills, etc.

We often think that we need new, flashy things because they temporarily make us feel better. In reality we don’t need these things at all.

You can set trends in your organization by being the first to step out. If you are asking people to watch budgets closely or take pay-cuts, do it first. If you are a manager trying to influence your boss to spend less, give yourself a pay-cut for the company. They will follow and you will be noticed.

Take one for the team and the team will follow suit.”

Robert Rogers, Coral Law, www.corallaw.com

“I had the opportunity to visit with a successful businessman in Mexico and we were discussing the things he had done to create wealth. As we were sharing dinner, I noticed that he tore all of the napkins they had in half. He said that they only needed to use half a napkin and cutting that cost in half was a major factor in his wealth. I recognized that was not the only factor, but there are many things that business owners can do to cut costs by changing habits related to consumption (Print using EconoMode to save ink, print less documents, etc.).”

Jonathan Steele, Speech Mastery, www.speechmastery.com

“I mail hand written notes to prospects. Included is some information that I would have presented if we were meeting in person. A few days later another. Each note is different, maybe an apology for not meeting sooner. After several mailings, I call for an appointment.

Instead of 16 hour days of driving, gasoline expense and 2% conversions, its 4 hour work days and (so far) about 10% conversions and 1/4 the gasoline bill.”

Bobby, ZanonMoney, <http://zanonmoney.blogspot.com>

“Some people think it is crazy to revamp advertising in a recession, I learned businesses which invest more into advertising, whether monetary or sweat equity, they come out better at the end of the slump.

During this great recession we’re in, we’ve invested so much more into advertising and poking into social networking and media to get our product more familiar.”

Jason Wood, The Money Festo, <http://themoneyfest.com>

“I got sick of being treated in my bank like they are doing me a favor. In fact, I have learned from a rockstar accountant that opening an off-shore bank account is incredibly profitable in both better interest rate as well as potential law suits for my business. However, that was one out of many successful strategies.

Since his tips and advices turned into a money saving snowball, I’ve decided to write with a business partner a hands-on ebook about the tricks and tips that could save you BIG money.”

PizzaForADream, www.PizzaForADream.com

“Hire your kids, teach them a new skill, and save money. I’ve spent \$1000’s in graphic design costs over the last year in starting my new company. Due to the nature of my business, these design costs will never go away. A year ago we purchased an iMac and the Adobe Suite and hooked my 12 year old son up with a designer friend who was willing to trade my son’s help in his yard for teaching on Photo Shop, Illustrator, etc. A year later and my son is now doing over 25% of our design work at a cheaper hourly rate and he’s saving for his own car and college in the process! Save on business expenses and save on college costs!”

Jon Ward, ClickforClients, www.clickforclients.com

“A technology client was launching a product that replaced an old paper ticket system. I had them send out a box stuffed with torn-up tickets. On the outside we put one line: “To get the message in this box, throw away the contents.” The product promo was printed inside the box, on the bottom. Huge success.”

Susan, Alkamae, <http://alkamae.com>

“This one thing kept me out of the red and steadily in the black last year: don’t spend money based on the balance in the checkbook.”

Debbie Decker, ClickforClients, www.clickforclients.com

“A client developed the world’s first pet ID tag global recovery service system. There are so many pet tags out there, that we knew we had to get samples into the hands of some famous pet owners. Landing a tag into the right person’s hands can gain you more publicity than running ads or other expensive campaigns. We watched for events that were pet related, and heard of a black tie affair in California that needed items for their goodie bags. For 200 tags it cost \$80 in product and \$10 in postage. Not only did we get the tags into the hands of our target audience (pet owners/lovers) but we know that several people - including a few actors - registered their tag and even ordered more tags for their other pets.

If you have a product you need to promote and can afford to donate 100 or more at a low cost, watch for events hosted by or attended by your target audience that need free items for their goodie bags.”

Zane Safrit, <http://zanesafrit.typepad.com>

“Seems mundane now, but in 2004 I replaced traditional advertising with blogging. We invested in our company, customers and employees, rather than Google and ad agencies. Cash-flow percentages tripled, conversion rates increased 10%, and revenues grew 5-6% during the time when retail prices in our industry dropped by over 30%.”

Ellen Britt, Marketing Qi, <http://marketingqi.com/blog>

“Leverage the power of teleseminars ...we used a series of free teleseminars with notable people in our industry to attract new subscribers, then offered people who signed up a paid upgrade to a digital download of the teleseminar content. High conversion for very little upfront cost and we were able to generate cash flow immediately.”

Geno Prussakov, AM Navigator, www.amnavigator.com

“If you are an online business: seriously consider outsourcing all of your online marketing (paid search, blogging, coupon distribution, social media marketing, etc) to affiliates. Start an affiliate program in 2009! Affiliate programs are by definition performance-based marketing campaigns, where you pay your partners (affiliates) only when a sale or any other desired action (such as subscription, for example) occurs.

You will acquire thousands of loyal partners, reach more prominent online presence, and save your marketing dollars.”

Daniel Silva, Silva Heeren, www.silvaheeren.com

“This is what we did: we improved our “look and feel”. Even though the economy last year started going down and our phone started ringing less, we moved to a better and bigger building here in Miami. How, you may ask? We got together with colleagues (we do web design, they do hosting, and graphic design), leased a bigger office, shared the costs (rent, electricity, telephone etc.). Now I pay less than a year ago, and look like we are a very powerful, bigger ad agency. We re-designed our website(feedback welcome) and gave it a look to compete with the other bigger local agencies, and because we have the same overhead (or even less) than a year ago, we can charge less than the bigger firms do for a website or e-commerce. It has been working out ok for us, we are now looking for an assistant to give us a hand.”

Part 2 – Creative Business Growth Tips

Jonathan Fields, Career Renegade, www.careerrenegade.com

“A year into owning a yoga studio in 2002, I wanted to create national buzz, so I approached the head of a university athletic department and convinced them to run a study that measured how many calories yoga burned. I then offered an exclusive on the study to a top women’s fitness magazine editor, who not only wanted to write about it, but be in it. The results were great and when she asked if I had a video she could write about in the magazine, I said yes...then went out and made one before the issue hit the street.”

Jim Kukral, The Biz Web Coach, www.TheBizWebCoach.com

“One of the smartest things I’ve done in the past is to waive my consulting fee and tell the customer to ‘pay me what you think it was worth, or nothing at all.’ 99% of time they pay me as much or more than I would have charged. The key is delivering your best work so they are blown away. If you can’t do that it’s probably not a good idea.”

John Mariotti, The Enterprise, www.shape-shifters.com

“When negotiating deals with customers to be their supplier, I often ask ‘What will you do if you drive us out of business?’ Sure, there is excess capacity somewhere for almost everything, but it is not all created equal. At the least, a customer who pressures a supplier so hard that it ruins the supplier is also ruining its own business’ potential. Remind them of that fact when the negotiations get tough.”

Scott Allen, About.com Entrepreneurs Guide, <http://entrepreneurs.about.com>

“For the past few years, I’ve committed at least 4-5 hours a week to building passive income streams outside my core business such as: royalties on books and other info-products, affiliate sales, and so on. So many entrepreneurs have to shut down their business and go back to a j-o-b because of cash flow issues, and very often they’re temporary - just a month or two. With a baseline of passive income, I’m much more confident about the survival of my business, regardless of circumstances, and am able to make better financial and strategic decisions because I’m not constantly in a cash flow bind.”

Dan Schawbel, Personal Branding Magazine, <http://personalbrandingmag.com>

“After a few months writing for magazines, trying to build a profile and get my brand name out there, I decided to break free and start my own magazine. I really had no idea what I was doing, so I emailed Guy Kawasaki and he sent me his interview with Donald Trump, which, not surprisingly, became a big hit and launch platform for my first issue. The day the issue came out, Fast Company covered it, and it took my business to the next level.”

Denise O’Berry, Just for Small Business, <http://justforsmallbusiness.com>

“I created a skit that was presented at a local business association meeting which demonstrated the power of strategic alliances in servicing customers. I partnered with a computer / technology

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consulting firm and a customer retention firm and we told a story of a client who had a need for business improvement, but didn't know where to turn. We showed how one connection could benefit both the client and our businesses. All three of our businesses realized a 50% plus increase in sales as a result."

Paul Singh, Results Junkies, www.resultsjunkies.com

"Here's how I got more referrals than I could handle. I made a list of the top 10 companies that I really wanted to work with. Then, I documented a few high-level strategic ways I'd grow their business, and some tactical tips they could improve immediately. When I sent the document (which was usually anywhere from 5-7 pages long) via email and snail mail to the founder, I always made sure that they understood that I was giving them this advice free. More importantly, I made it really clear that I'd be happy to give them as much advice as they'd like for free. The only catch is that I'd want to send them a proposal if they wanted me to actually do the work myself."

Ivana Taylor, StrategyStew.com, www.strategystew.com

"At a dreadfully boring rubber industry trade show, I started asking passers-by if we could run their "Gummy Bears" through our automated rubber testing equipment. It was a great way to show how the robotics worked, and it created a huge buzz throughout the show. Soon customers were stopping by and handing us all kinds of food to test. While we were watching several of us came up with a line dance that mimicked the instrument - for the first time customers became physically engaged with the equipment and still talked about it months later."

Matt, Small Biz Bee, <http://smallbizbee.com>

"Start with a great product or service your customers can't live without, and then give it away for FREE!! If your customers really can't live without it, they'll still be lining up at your door when you DO start charging for it."

Ken Hagler, www.kenhagler.com

"Show Link Love everywhere. We've done two movie nights in neighborhoods. Both times we've invited businesses who are community oriented to participate. This made a big event bigger and allowed for greater community appeal and tons of networking. In return, others have invited Crossroads United Methodist Church to participate in their events. By linking online to local businesses I frequent and appreciate, I've been able to encourage new people to become customers."

"It's all about connections."

Margie Zable Fisher, www.ZFPR.Com

"I had never had any contact with Guy Kawasaki but loved his books and blog. On a lark I sent a very contrarian top 10 list to him on P.R. - and he posted it on his How to Change the World blog on May, 24, 2007 with the title The Top 10 Reasons Why P.R. Doesn't Work. That led to more conversations

with him, making amazing contacts, getting new newsletter subscribers, prospects and clients, and getting testimonials from Guy for my products and services, which dramatically increased my business growth.”

Peggy Duncan, Suite Minute, <http://suiteminute.com>

“I’m a professional speaker and wanted to present at more conventions. I needed to get in front of meeting planners. I bought an email list which was a directory of associations in DC, Maryland, and Virginia. I leased a training room for a day and held a free, one-woman speaker showcase on my most popular topic that people can’t resist, “Conquer Email Overload with Outlook.” Yep, they came, and I’ve been presenting at conferences for meeting planners ever since.”

Ian Harris, Ian H. Blog, <http://ianhblog.blogspot.com>

“Using Tony Buzan’s Mindmapping technique you should retire to the quietness of your study and ponder how your world has changed.

You should identify all the negatives and how they will affect your business.

You should then identify the positives and how they will affect your business.

Then you should brainstorm all the things that need to be done to cover your backside and exploit the hell out of the current situation. Become an opportunity spotter!”

Katie Langston, Marketing Wizards Alliance, <http://marketingwizardsalliance.com>

“I had a chiropractor client who was trying to network with Medical Doctors, but was having difficulty getting through the front desk staff to meet with them. So we created a dimensional bonding campaign where we sent the doctor a beautiful pie from a local bakery with just one piece missing. The accompanying letter said, “When you’ve referred to other chiropractic offices, you may have found ‘missing pieces’ that left you feeling a little empty. But at our clinic, we’re all about the ‘AND’!” My client then followed it up with a personal phone call. You better believe he got a great response and a lot of happy thank you!”

Martin Lindeskog, Editor of Ego Blog, <http://martin.lindeskog.name>

“In the last year as a purchaser of raw materials for the production of welding electrodes, I invited one of our major suppliers to an open discussion on how to increase our business together. Our supplier opened the books and told us how much margin they needed on their product and we gave detailed prognosis on our consumption. About 10 years later, I am sitting on the other side of the table, and am trying to sell a renewable energy solution to this company that could use for his business and to sell to external parties.”

Gregg Peterson, Fast Commerce, www.fastcommerce.com

“We give our e-commerce platform away for free. And we offer it without ads and with hosted domain for 19.95 a year. Or we offer a 2,000 product capable website for \$30 a month with no set up and no contract.

The reason is that small business needs the chance to run a business online with a capable

e-commerce engine but at a low cost. With this economy, great e-commerce tools at a LOW cost let the small business entrepreneur continue to sell and expand market reach without having to spend hardly at all.”

Aidan Rogers, Ink Ode, www.inkode.co.nz

“Make your clients feel valued. Can be as simple as a quick email just to say hi. You can never communicate enough, but listen more than you talk. Treat each client as an individual.

Not the most original tips, but been invaluable for gaining repeat business.”

Marshall R. Isaacs, Attorney at Law NYC

“Unlike most lawyers, I struck out on my own without so much as a single client. I walked from the top to bottom of every accessible skyscraper in downtown Manhattan and would stop in every law office to ask if they had cases that had become too insignificant or troublesome to be worthwhile. Within a couple of months, I had 50 files which were mostly other lawyers’ junk; but I earned enough legal fees from those cases to carry me until I had brought in bigger and better clients of my own.”

Vince Blackham, Primary Affect, www.primaryaffect.com

“I’ve given several lessons at local colleges (in the commons) or at business network meetings (similar to The Chamber of Commerce) and have spoken about simple strategies to build a presence online with a website. I have networked with some amazing people who enjoyed the lessons and have received several referrals from the people I’ve met there.”

Tamar Weinberg, Techipedia, www.techipedia.com

“I’m a visible figure online, but I realize that having a visible presence offline is also of utmost importance. Whether that means going to those networking parties with my industry colleagues for a few hours or attending a trade show in several different parts of the country (or even engaging in an interview where I was able to talk about your expertise), I’ve found that it’s really important to put a face to my name online (and obviously to be consistent in my messaging both in text and verbally). Obviously, that means taking the initiative to network all the time — or at least often enough. (I’m introverted in “real life,” though. Really!)

Of course, it helps to actually upload a photo of yourself online so that those individuals looking for you offline may be able to come up to you and say, “hey, you’re Tamar, right? I recognized your avatar.” It helps kick-start the conversation. 😊 ”

Elmer Thomas, Thinking Serious, www.thinkingserious.com

“If I’m working on a high value client with several other vendors, I’ll team up with the other vendors and get big gifts for our key contacts using eDivvy.com to spread out the cost. This strengthens the relationship with the other vendors (sometimes leading to new business) and allows us to give the client a gift that is something they would want, like an iPod Touch (rather than a bunch of smaller, less cool gifts such as See’s Candies).”

Tim Grahl, Out Think Group, <http://outthinkgroup.com>

“If you want something, ask for it.

Here are a few things I’ve gotten over the past few years, simply by asking for what I want:

- Thousands of dollars in free products to try out in exchange for writing a blog post.
- Free office space plus utilities. Currently I’m in a corner office on the tenth floor of a downtown office building and I don’t pay a cent for me or my employee to be here.
- I’ve met, interviewed and spent one-on-one time with some high profile people in my industry merely by sending out an email or making a phone call. (However, I did chase one of them down in a mall in Las Vegas one time to introduce myself. It ended in us hanging out over coffee for an hour.)
- I recently landed my company’s biggest contract because I asked another client to refer us to that person.

So many times I see people hold themselves back because they won’t just ask for what they want.

If you want something, stifle your pride and fear and just ask!”

Daniel Scocco, Online Profits, www.onlineprofits.com

“Between sales figures, marketing campaigns, spreadsheets and business plans, we often forget what this is all about: humans. Markets and businesses are nothing more than people that get together. The Cluetrain Manifesto stated that markets are conversations. Well, I would go even one step further. Markets are people. Period. Keep that in mind and all your business decisions will become lighter.”

Derek Halpern, Prevential, <http://prevential.com>

“I am going to have to build off what Daniel Scocco said. Business is about human interaction. You need to build strong relationships to be successful and the craziest thing I did was to take the idea of “never eat alone” and apply it to my life. Now, when I eat lunch, I am always meeting with someone new. Clients, friends or just plain people. It is the single most important thing I have ever done.”

Adam, 41q, www.41q.com

“We walked through almost every neighborhood in this town and left flyers at the doorstep telling people about our computer repair business. That got us through our first 4 months of business, a little personal elbow and knee grease!”

Steve C., My Wife Quit Her Job, <http://mywifequitherjob.com>

“We go out of our way to help customers out even if we don’t sell the exact product they are looking for. One time, we spent a couple hours trying to locate a particular item for a customer (that we didn’t carry at the time - wedding parasols) and we were able to help her track them down just in time for her wedding. We didn’t make a single cent but that one simple act of kindness brought in dozens of referrals from this one customer alone. Word of mouth is a major component of any business. All acts of kindness will eventually be reciprocated.”

Tracyi, The Original SoupMan, www.originalsoupman.com

“Everyone has such wonderful ideas. I’m going to try and implement all of them in some way or another over the next few months.

One thing we’ve done in our restaurant business that has consistently helped our bottom line is DELIVERY! Although our delivery area is limited, we always tell our customers who are outside of our area, that we will deliver to them if they place an order big enough, (generally \$40).

Customers remember this when they’re in a bind and want our great food, but don’t have the time to come and pick it up. They place a big order and others who haven’t had or heard of SoupMan in their office/building in a roundabout way become customers. They also tell others about having been served the ‘Best Soup in Town!’”

Craig Sutton, Network Task, www.networktask.com

“When I first started our business, we had VERY little capital and an office to support. Clearly no money for advertising. But we had a small inkjet printer and some Photoshop talent. With that we created a flyer using 8.5×11 paper, 2 fliers per page, and cut them in half. We walked through almost every neighborhood in this town and left flyers at the doorstep telling people about our computer repair business. That got us through our first 4 months of business, a little personal elbow and knee grease! Within 3 years we were a Small Business Award winner for our region, 1 of only 4 awarded in 2008! I think this ingenuity had something to do with our success.”

Stephen A. Orzel

“I have created a “Business COOP Assistance Program” (the BCAP). The BCAP is a “Grass Roots Concept”, and will bring the business and local communities closer together than ever before. BCAP is directed to all of the current operating and potential start-up small and mid-size business entrepreneurs out there who are struggling close to failure and/or having other financial or operational problems. This idea or vision involves “Giving back to our Business Community” a version of “Pay it Forward”. This “Grass Root Concept” will create our “New Industrial Revolution”. In order to begin the “New Industrial Revolution”, we must bring back the manufacturing and other needed service industries. Before doing that, we must begin re-training or teaching a new workforce.”

Ruth King, Profitability Channel, www.profitabilitychannel.com

“Giving away free gas or free groceries whenever someone signs up for a membership...they get their membership free and remember us every month when they get their gas or groceries gift card in the mail.”

Andrea Tobor, A Growing Enterprise, <http://agrowingenterprise.com>

“Okay so we’re all in this “economy” together - yes? So the Best most outrageous TIP I can share is we ALL need to learn how to play well with others and guess what, it doesn’t cost a red penny.

Example: 10 entrepreneurial women business owners - each accomplished but struggling form “Peer Power” a group to share specialty knowledge with each other. Cost of putting group together ****FREE****, Cost of knowledge sharing ****FREE**** - outcome PRICELESS –

The author, the branding maven, the marketer, the internet guru, the psychotherapist, the realtor, the Virtual Assistant and the facial recognition expert all benefited from learning from one another and their business REVENUES shot through the roof - Amazing, all from learning to play well with others.”

Lisa

“I run a dog sitting business. When I first started out I went around to all the local vets offices and brought cookies and a green plant to each. This was very hard for me because I am shy. I didn’t think I had the guts to do it, but I knew that I had to find customers somehow. I had lost my job a year earlier and had not been able to find another job. Luckily the first office manager was very sweet. Her smile gave me confidence. After that it was easier to visit each office. Now I check in every few months and bring cookies or flowers. Doing the visits has helped spread word of mouth and grow a clientele through referrals.”

Maya, Geek Dance, <http://geekdance.com>

“From the day I have started my company, I have been OPEN about it. In fact, I started blogging about the company from day 1 - the idea and the details.

I was a little concerned before I started but being open has been the best thing I could have done - people help so much more when they KNOW what I am doing. @guykawasaki connected me to people. @savvyantie helped me with answers and contacts. The questions people are asking (even competition!) only helps me think harder and make better decisions. Being open about my startup has also kick started my marketing! Most of all, it helps my passion shine through when I do not have to worry about being secretive!

Unless you have an idea that someone can run away with and do something about it tomorrow, it is always smart to just talk about what you are doing. It is all about the execution and not being secretive highly enables execution!”

Adam Toren, Young Entrepreneur, <http://youngentrepreneur.com>

“Years ago we took over a struggling bar/restaurant/billiards venue. We put quite a bit of time into overhauling the interior and the branding and now we needed to think about how to create some local buzz! We contacted all the radio stations in the area and invited them to have their Xmas holiday staff parties at our venue (Free Booze for all staff!) in exchange for some on-air plugs promoting our venue. We were now being promoted frequently on 3 of the 4 top radio stations in the area. It took less than 3 weeks for us to be lined up every Friday and Saturday and less than 11 months to receive an impressive offer to sell. SOLD, and we moved on to our next biz venture!”

Todd Earewood, Money Path, www.moneypath.com

“The best thing I’ve done for business growth is to help others grow revenue. Specifically, we partnered with IT companies selling hardware and support and helped them capture additional revenue from their customer base by selling our services.

It may sound cliché to find a win-win, but if you want to see your business grow... help your partners and customers make money.

P.S. - I’ve created a company that focuses on lowering costs and another on driving revenue for its customers. I found revenue to be an easier selling point. Lowering costs can at times threaten the manager/owner for either waste or not being a good financial steward. Pitching how to help grow a business (for me) found greater success.”

Mike Brown, Brain Zooming, <http://brainzooming.blogspot.com>

“Consider what customers have requested that no one has delivered; look for ways other industries handle similar issues and adapt them.

Our shipping customers had asked for pre-notification when shipments were experiencing problems; no competitor had addressed the need. And even though total satisfaction guarantees were common in other industries, guarantees were only available for on-time service in ours.

We introduced a transportation service providing pre-notification and problem resolution in the less than 1% of instances where issues arose, added a total satisfaction guarantee for any reason a shipper wasn’t happy, and even let them choose the specific delivery time desired – another first!

This premium-priced offering became our fastest growing service upon introduction, generating great margins and growing to account for a truly meaningful share of revenue.”

Norma Rist, Business Coach, www.normarist.com

“Wanting to help a local Staples store during a period of a lost anchor-tenant next door, I noticed the CEO of Staples would offer a town meeting in Cleveland. I attended and approached him about a series of small business seminars to build traffic. Soon the regional manager called to confirm the 13 week series I suggested: one hour each Tuesday evening covering a different small business topic. He approved my flyer and the use of the Staples logo. I took the original flyer to the store for the free copies offered - and they decided to pass out the flyer in every purchase bag for the entire 13 weeks. The flyer was labeled Norma Rist & Staples Offer Small Business Workshops. This opportunity led to press releases posted free on line for each of 13 weeks - some of which still show up in the Google search today. It definitely took my on-line PR to the next level.”

Marcia Robinson, Bulls Eye Resume, www.bullseyeresumes.com

“I think building an online community is great, but do not forget to build your local community as well. I find it pays back in spades.”

Deborah Carney, Loxly Gallery, <http://loxlygallery.com>

“To take my business to a new level I knew I had to do something creative to show marketers that my business was different from existing ones. Even though we are an online gallery that sells prints from our own artists and photographers, I went to other people’s flickr accounts and found outstanding photos of theirs and used our equipment to make them prints. I asked people for their favorite quotes and created posters out of them, printed them and sent them out or brought the prints to them at a recent conference. People need to see and feel art and photography prints to see the quality and then be able to recommend them to their friends and site visitors and to market them properly.

Whatever your product, take it to your consumer and like Jim Kukral said, give it away so people can see that you want them to judge your product on its own merits. If you have an outstanding product, people will then hop on board.”

Anita Campbell, Small Business Trends, <http://smallbiztrends.com>

“I quit caring about doing a “perfect” job for a particular report. I got incredibly busy and knew the only way I could finish this particular project was by writing quickly and not editing it 16 times like I normally do. The downside of being a perfectionist is the missed opportunity cost (the business opportunities you miss out on while you’re re-working something to death). In this case, I sat down and just started dictating. The report was vibrant and let my personality and humor show through. The client loved it and wanted more, more, and more — just like that!”

The Small Business Trends Story

Small Business Trends is a multi-author Web publication serving up robust, relevant and timely articles covering marketing, technology and business. The site touches more than 250,000 small business owners and entrepreneurs each month, all of whom share a passion for small business and trends affecting their businesses.

How did Small Business Trends get started?

Anita Campbell, the publisher and CEO of Small Business Trends, had been a corporate executive, with a career that culminated as the CEO of a technology subsidiary of Bell & Howell Company. She left the corporate world and started a management consulting business.

She started the Small Business Trends site as an early business blog back in 2003, at a time when business blogs were new and unusual.

The idea, like so many startup business ideas, grew from the seed of a modest need. Anita wanted to find an easier and faster way to publish a monthly newsletter.

Soon, the blog was more popular than the newsletter it was intended to feed. Eventually, the blog became a business.

Over time, the site also evolved from a one-person publication to a platform for a range of voices on issues affecting small businesses and entrepreneurial enterprises. Over 65 authors have contributed articles to date, on topics such as franchising, global business, entrepreneurship, technology, business books, software and industry trends.

What does Small Business Trends do?

Our mission is to help you run your business better and more profitably. Small Business Trends provides quality content on the Web, in email newsletters and in RSS feeds. The content highlights (1) other small businesses, and (2) resources, products and services of interest to small businesses.

Small Business Trends is also a community where you can feel part of what's going on in the broader small business landscape across the world.

A companion Internet radio show / podcast provides opportunities each week for a small business owner, entrepreneur or other person with useful information to be interviewed. The show is broadcast each Tuesday at 1:30 pm EST over the BlogTalkRadio.com network. Guests have included two administrators of the U.S. Small Business Administration, the great-great granddaughter of Emily Post on business etiquette, as well as industry leaders, professors and people in the trenches like you. The radio show is on the Web at: www.smbtrendwire.com.

What's the Small Business Trends revenue model?

Small Business Trends is an advertising-supported publication. That way, you can get valuable content at no cost.

Where is Small Business Trends located?

The business is headquartered outside Cleveland, Ohio, on the North Coast of the United States (on the Great Lakes just across the border from Canada). Business—especially small business—happens everywhere. With the internet, could just as easily be located almost anywhere in the world.

Northeast Ohio was once the Silicon Valley of its day and retains the benefits of having been home to an earlier generation's leading business leaders. Their generosity resulted in acclaimed universities and renowned medical facilities like the Cleveland Clinic. The Rock 'n Roll and Pro Football Halls of Fame are here, too.

Besides, the cost of living and running a business in Ohio is affordable. This allows us to plow more money back into the business instead of blowing it on rent and expenses.

Like many small businesses today, our business depends on an ecosystem of service providers. We put our money where our mouth is, and contract with other small businesses for products and services at every opportunity.

More questions?

We love hearing from you! Your input inspires us, and your feedback influences what we write about.

Your support is what keeps us going! You rock, and we love it!

Thanks to all who contributed to this compilation. Your advice and pointers are an inspiration to thousands of your peers.

About Small Business Trends

The Small Business Trends Web site, e-mails and RSS feeds touch over 250,000 entrepreneurs and business people each month. How about you?

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