

5 Ways to Make the Most of Your Marketing Budget

by Chad Brooks, BusinessNewsDaily Senior Writer | April 23, 2014 09:02am ET

A critical element to any successful small business is developing an effective marketing plan.

While larger businesses have the ability to invest massive amounts of resources into their marketing efforts, most small businesses don't have that luxury. The key for smaller businesses is to figure out how to get the most bang for their marketing buck, which is what Linda and Mike Boyd of the Denver-area Instant Imprints franchise have done. [Instant Imprints](#) is a nationwide franchise that combines screen printing, embroidery, signage and promotional products all under one business umbrella.

Owner Linda, and her husband, Mike, who is in charge of business development, have been perfecting their marketing plan for the past four years. Mike Boyd said the key in coming up with a good strategy is not being intimidated by the [marketing process](#).

"For many years we let what we didn't know about that discipline stop us from doing anything," Mike Boyd told Business News Daily. "Once we stopped trying to figure out 'marketing' and instead did things that would make us more visible to the people who wanted to be our customers, stuff started to happen."

Here are the points Boyd said he and his wife focus on when creating a cost-effective marketing plan.

- **Don't waste time doing the things you aren't good at.** Boyd said the first step in creating a successful marketing strategy is to implement only those things you feel comfortable doing. For example, he said he and Linda are not sales people. So while outside sales is a favored action in their industry, it isn't something they're good at, so they don't include in their marketing plan. "We instead do more of what we can do well and consistently," Boyd said of where they devote their resources. For them, that includes weekly emails, direct mailings and pay-per-click campaigns.
- **Use promotions to make customers feel special.** One way the Boyds let customers know they are valued is with their "steal a card" program. Every time they get a business card from someone they meet — whether it is a customer or at a networking event — they go back to their store, take down all of the information and then turn it into a luggage tag and send it back to the person. He said they also include a note about how they can provide suggestions for useful promotional items — like the luggage tag — for them to give to their own customers. "It is a little self-serving, but at the same time it gives them a gift," Boyd said.
- **Be a business leader.** The Boyds have also worked at acquiring new customers by becoming active in the local networking organizations, such as BNI and the chamber of commerce. "We knew that sitting within the four walls of our shop and waiting for the next customer to find us wasn't a good plan," Boyd said. "You need to become a [business leader](#) in your community."

- **Say thank you.** One way the Boyds focus on gaining repeat customers is by always saying thank you. Since the business's inception in 2004, the couple has sent [thank-you notes](#) to every single customer after each purchase. Not only does it leave customers with a good impression, but Boyd said it also serves as a reminder to them that there may be something else they want to order.
- **Change what doesn't work.** Besides focusing on what they do best, Boyd said small business owners can't be afraid to alter their plan when some aspects aren't working. "All of our tactics haven't survived the four years [the plan has been in place]," Boyd said. For example, he said they originally participated in a business Welcome Wagon program that introduced them to all the new businesses in their community. While it helped them meet a lot of new people, Boyd said it never turned into actual sales. So instead of spending the money on that, they repurposed those funds to a Google Adwords pay-per-click program. "We have had that kind of evolution," Boyd said.

In the end, Boyd said their efforts are paying off. The couple has increased their per-order sales by more than \$150 since 2012 and has already set sales records each month of 2014.

"We are on a wicked pace this year," Boyd said.

What small business owners need to remember about creating a marketing plan is that it needs to revolve around making themselves more visible to those they don't already know and keeping customers in the fold after a sale is made, according to Boyd. He said that's why their weekly emails and thank-you note program are so successful.

"That really makes an impression on customers," Boyd said. "They don't expect you to carry on the dialogue after the transaction."

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