

10 Marketing Resolutions for the New Year



It's that time of year again when we all make our New Years resolutions both personal and business: exercise more, go green, achieve better work/life balance, stick to your budget, or read more industry publications. We all make them. Sometimes they seem too hard to keep, even though we know we should do them. Here is a list of 10 achievable resolutions all businesses should focus on in the New Year, if you're not already ahead of the game. If you are, consider yourself a pro and resolve to do everything on this list better!

10 Get Organized

Start your New Year off right with a plan. Set aside some time to sit down and make a plan for your company's marketing. It doesn't have to be too formal, just think about what your goals are for the upcoming year and what you can do to achieve them. Once you've thought your plan through, put some dates on a calendar so you can then also figure out the work-back dates to remind you to write copy and send communications. Google has a great calendar in addition to other docs. You can share it with others so that they know exactly when you're planning to launch a campaign.

9 Start a Blog

Yes, in addition to your website you should also host a blog. This is probably something you have heard before, but maybe not done or done well. You should make it a priority this year! Why? It's another way the search engines can pick you up. You establish yourself as an expert in your industry and you give a "voice" to your business. You can also get your readers' insight into how they feel about you or your company through comments they make.

It's not going to be an overnight success. Don't worry though, if you put in the effort, and you write honestly, people will eventually find their way to your blog. When it starts to take off it can be incredibly beneficial. A few ways you can ensure your blog success are to make sure you flag categories on your posts or tag them for search engines; and backlink to your own site from your most popular keywords in your posts. A side benefit of blogging is that it can be a source of enrichment and clarity for you. Putting your thoughts and feelings down in writing helps you understand them better. Check out TypePad or WordPress, two great blogging platforms that are very cost-effective and easy to set up.

8 Create Buzz

Create a Facebook (www.facebook.com) page and a Twitter (www.twitter.com) account. Right now the buzz online is all about Social Media. Is your business on Facebook? How about Twitter? Are you participating in any online communities that make sense for your business? If not, why not? Get out there. They're easy to join, free and a great way to build your name brand and your list.

While online is hot, don't forget about offline. Word of mouth from in-person experiences can go a long way as well. Have a "wow" factor. Offer free samples, throw a free gift into the customer shipment, call your customers to see how they liked their service or send a birthday greeting. Whatever it is, get your word of mouth campaign going! A few great examples that have found success:

- Restaurants offer free appetizer with your meal
- Health professionals calling the night after a visit or procedure to see how things are going
- Consultants offer the first hour free.
- Retailers sending out special birthday offers

7 Put Your Customers to Work For You

Get your best customers to give you quotes and get their permission to use them everywhere. Include them on any outbound communications, in your email newsletters, on your site and in your store. They are one of the most powerful forms of marketing you have. We have a customer that is a custom jewelry designer and they feature select customers and their story in a section of their site called Celebrations Shared. What's the benefit? The customers tell all their friends to go check out their picture and in the process recommend the business. Offline, this can be done in a store window too. Put up pictures of your customers with a short story. These people are your influencers, put them to good use!

6 Advertise

Make yourself known in 2009! Draft a list of your top 5 competitors or 5 other local businesses in your area and look at where they advertise. Then reach out to appropriate ad sales folks; they will love to hear from you! Choose somewhere you've never advertised before and just go for it! You need to give it time...don't just do it once and expect instant results. If it's in your budget, give it a chance! Do it at least 5 times before you decide to discontinue advertising.

Also, if you haven't tried Search Engine Marketing, resolve to give it a try this year. It's a great way to generate leads and get new customers and you can cap your daily spending limit. If you need help with navigating through the Search Engine Marketing arena, tap into a company like MerchEngines, who will guarantee traffic flowing for you throughout the New Year!

5 Collect Email Addresses

Build your list in multiple ways! Put an opt-in form on every page of your site and/or blog, or link to it on every page with "Newsletter Sign Up" or "Email Offers Sign Up". Put an exit pop-up window with the opt-in form when someone leaves your domain. Offline, ask for your customer's email address and permission at your counter or have a guest book they can sign or put out a fish bowl and collect cards; input the names and emails daily into a spreadsheet or better yet a contact management system. However you collect email addresses, send a welcome email to them with a thank-you offer. Use VerticalResponse to collect email addresses for free and then send your email campaigns affordably.

4 Start a Referral Program

Get your customers to refer you. It probably sounds daunting to start a 'program' but the simple act of asking a customer for referrals is a great way to get referrals. And if you can sweeten the pot a bit by providing some kind of discount or bonus to the referrer or the referred (or both) then all the better! You can do something similar for online reviews, ask your customers to write and post them to popular review sites like Yelp.com and provide them an incentive to so do. Give them a percentage off their next purchase or simply thank them, we have one customer who sends a small container of custom M&M's to every customer who writes an online review or refers a friend with a note: "Thanks for the sweet reviews". Another easy way is to include a Forward to a Friend link in your outgoing email messages.

3 Take Control of Your Data

Resolve to take control of all of your lists. It could be the thing that makes your year! Plus, you might miss out on sending email campaigns to certain recipients just because you forgot about them, which means less revenue to you in the long run.

If your business requires you to keep separate lists, that's ok, keep them there. It's not optimal, but if it works for your business fine. BUT, once a week, or more often if you choose, make a copy of all of your lists and choose the place that's easiest to access, upload and download your data. If it's ACT or Salesforce, make sure you don't add duplicate records. It could get messy. If it happens to be a spreadsheet, you might consider having customers in one sheet and non-customers in another. Any way you choose, make sure you consolidate your lists so you always have one data source to market to.

One more thing, if you've got your lists offline, spend a couple hours or so a week getting those lists in digital format. Then welcome these new list members with an email. You'll be surprised at how important managing your lists can be to your bottom line.

2 Do a Customer Survey

Send an email with a survey asking 10 questions (it's good to keep it short) about your customers' experience with you. You can give a 5-point rating: Excellent, Good, Neutral, Poor, and Very Bad and ask an open ended question too to get some qualitative feedback. Be ready for the good and bad. You'll learn what your customers like and what they don't. This is great to do post product or service delivery, while the experience is still fresh in their mind. Surveys are also great for learning more about your target audience and customers, like demographics, what other products they like, where else they shop, and what kind of advertising they respond to.

Make sure you send to a statistically valid sample and get a good sampling back. You don't want to make changes based on just 1-2 remarks. If you make changes, be sure you communicate your changes to all of your customers in an email campaign. Everyone wins!!

1 Analyze

Use Google Analytics to track your website visits. Get to know where your traffic is coming from and how good it is. Then make changes to your site, or your marketing materials. Beyond your website, be sure you analyze your marketing campaigns. Look at your open and click rates. How are your subject lines? You can always test subject lines by splitting a small segment of your list and sending a different subject line one to each. See which one performs better and then send the 'winner' to the remainder of your list.

Hopefully this isn't the first you've heard of some of these things and you're doing some already. It's tough to run a business and stay on top of new marketing ideas... so we hope this list inspires you this year.

Happy New Year!