

10 High-Impact, Low-Budget Ideas for Marketing In a Down Economy
Part One: Tips 1 - 5
By Jonathan Kranz

When the going gets tough, the tough get...cheap. Today, a good marketing idea has to be as inexpensive as it is clever. In Part One of a two part series, I offer five inexpensive suggestions that can lead to productive results.

1. Use all of the buffalo

The buffalo was more than a source of meat. Hides became clothing and shelter; bones became tools; sinews became bow strings. Think like a Plains Indian and get the most use out of every marketing effort possible. One case study, for example, can serve as:

- Spider-food on your website that boosts SEO and provides meaningful content
- A direct mail insert in lieu of the traditional product brochure
- A trade-show handout to jump start conversations
- A leave-behind for sales calls

Bonus:

Exploit the public relations potential of a big project such as a white paper or ebook. If the content is genuinely valuable (not merely promotional swill), you may be able to pick up good press on the cheap. One of my clients got a half-page article in the leading trade magazine for its industry -- and scored a seat at the executive leadership table in the industry's dominant professional association as a result of the great press. Target appropriate editors/bloggers/reporters with your content and a quick note explaining its relevance to their audiences.

2. Choose your social media weapons carefully

What's that background hum? Oh, it's the swarm of expert wannabes chattering endlessly about Web 2.0, social media, the death of print, etc. No matter what the technology or medium -- be it blogs or mobile devices, Facebook or Twitter -- the message is always the same: you gotta' be there. Or you're a dumb-dumb or worse, a dodo.

Look, no doubt some of these may have real value for your business. But the hard truth is that you can't do ALL of them well. Nor should you. Concentrate your resources on the ones that:

- Are likely to be used or welcomed by your target market(s)
- You can excel in
- You can sustain on a regular basis
- Don't impose unrealistic burdens on your resources and/or budgets

Bonus:

A client of mine leveraged social media to help a branch of the armed services meet its recruiting targets. But instead of chasing the latest social media fads, they focused their efforts by doing two key things: 1) *listening* to the online conversations already in progress and 2); creating *open*

content their target audiences could freely share. Result? They've consistently hit their recruiting numbers every month.

3. Go organic

Place greater emphasis on your organic SEO rather than simply dumping money into Google Ad Words. It's not only cheaper, it can be more productive; I've read various analyses on the Web suggesting that natural listings attract 60% or 70% of clicks as opposed to 40% or 30% for paid listings.

Successful organic SEO requires:

- Aggressive identification of keywords that should be optimized for each significant page on your site
- Development of deep content that feeds search engine spiders and attracts incoming links
- Constant monitoring of your site statistics to track trends and progress

Bonus:

Don't neglect your titles and meta descriptions. "Titles" are the words that appear at the top of the visitor's Web browser. Search engine spiders take titles seriously, so be sure yours include keywords. The "meta description" in your HTML is what the search engines use to describe your site when it appears as a response to search query; write yours to appeal to potential customers. For more on titles and meta descriptions, see [A Tale of SEO Success from a Sole Practitioner](#).

4. Play to your strengths

Many years ago as I was starting my copywriting career, I met a businesswoman who shared what she described as the best advice she ever got at a motivational seminar: don't try to improve your weaknesses; just concentrate on developing your strengths.

I think that's wise. For us, it means focusing our business operations on our most productive, profitable areas AND focusing our marketing efforts on those strategies or tactics at which we most excel.

It's not a matter of what works, but what works *for you*. If, for example, cold-calling simply isn't effective, drop it. If you're good at networking, plan on investing more of your time and money on networking opportunities this year.

Bonus:

So many of my clients get hung up on this so-called "elevator speech" thing, that 30-second pitchoid each of us supposed to have at the ready. The problem with these things is that they sound every bit as contrived and unnatural as they really are. So forget about them. Instead, think about *questions*, things you can ask new prospects that can jump start conversations and lead to a *natural* introduction of your products or services.

5. Profile your best customers

Consider this reverse engineering for marketing. Think of your best customers. What do they have in common? Is it an industry or role? A similar problem or challenge? A quality of

temperament, habit or attitude? The answers form a profile of the kind of prospects you should pursue.

Then think about *how* you attracted your top customers. Did they come to your website, first? Or respond to a direct mail campaign? Or meet you at a conference? Again, whatever worked, do more of. And consider trimming back the rest.

Bonus:

Be prepared for surprises. You may have started your business with the intent of serving one kind of customer with one kind of need, but in retrospect you may find that your best business comes from an entirely different kind of client with a different need. I work with a company, for example, that started out in the business of providing inexpensive security for PDF documents. But over time, they found that the real interest lay in offering PDF analytics -- and they've shifted their efforts accordingly.

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