

## Get Noticed

Shine a spotlight on your business with our 21 low-cost marketing moves.

By Gwen Moran | [Entrepreneur Magazine - October 2008](#)

With 100-some employees and \$10 million in annual revenue, Washington, DC-based software development firm Cynergy Systems doesn't exactly need to watch every promotional penny. But founder and president Carson Hager emphasizes the company's use of creative, low-cost [marketing](#) techniques. "Traditional advertising does not really work for us," says Hager, 36. "We don't have millions of dollars sitting around to spend on it."

There's a lesson there: Before you shell out big bucks for your next promotional push, check out these 21 low-cost ways to get more attention for your business.

### 1. Blog all about it

Set up a [free](#) blog on Wordpress.com or Blogger.com, and begin writing interesting commentary that relates to your business, says Hager. To drive traffic, comment on other topic-related blogs and include links back to your own blog. No time to keep a solo blog? Wendy Kobler, founder of marketing and public relations firm Kobler Communications, suggests contacting bloggers in your field who might welcome guest bloggers. You get the benefits of reaching an interested audience without the time commitment of building a blog on your own.

### 2. Cultivate loyalty

Loyalty programs encourage customers to come back frequently, says [PR expert Denise Dorman, founder of WriteBrain Media](#). When they join, they should "immediately receive an exclusive and amazingly cool product," she says. Then, arrange for communications about members-only shopping previews, sales, inside scoops on important industry information, or even products or services exclusive to the company's best customers. Reward repeat purchases with discounts, gifts or other incentives. Track the success of the program internally through a point-of-sale or database program rather than relying on the customer to tell you when some loyalty payback is due. By creating an emotional attachment between your product or service and your customers, you will officially become a brand to them, says Dorman.

### 3. Distribute content

Free and low-cost news release and content distribution sources like [PRWeb.com](#) can help you spread the word about your business online. Other free news services include [Mininova.org](#), [TheFreeLibrary.com](#) and [i-Newswire.com](#).

### 4. Mine your data

To make their Durham, North Carolina-based salad restaurant, Green Tango Fresh Chopped Salads, more efficient, Billy, 37, and Alissa Maupin, 36, began using online ordering and ordering via text message. In addition to making customers happy, these convenient features yielded a side benefit: Electronic capture of these online and text orders gives the company a data-based peek into the buying habits of the nearly 4,000 customers who have registered and make purchases from the \$1.5 million trio of restaurants. Using the system, the Maupins can track ordering habits and the volume and kinds of products ordered by each user as well as project their inventory needs and the effectiveness of various promotions.

### 5. Speak up

Kobler recommends delivering informative speeches where your customers are: at local business association meetings, at national trade events, or at a local college or university as a guest lecturer. You can even host a speaking event at your business location. "Invite your customers and prospects," suggests Kobler. "Purchase some refreshments. Host them at your business to get them in the door. And then tap your vendors to support you by either paying for the event or offering the latest products to showcase during your presentation."

## 6. E-mail about it

Once you've gathered information about your customers to look for purchase patterns, seasonal needs, product preferences and the like within your internal database, put it to good use, suggests marketing consultant Scott Cooper. From this information, you can create targeted e-mail, direct mail and in-store promotions that will have a higher likelihood of success because they're based on historical data, says Cooper, co-author of *Tips and Traps for Marketing Your Business*. The Maupins, for example, review their online customers' ordering patterns and tailor their e-mail marketing to customers' preferences.

## 7. Make employees a sales tool

Green Tango employees wear T-shirts, hats, aprons and buttons with different branding messages on them. "When we're offering a new product, we use the employee uniforms to promote it," says Billy Maupin. To beef up sales, employees are trained to promote certain menu items.

## 8. Start Surveying

Create news hooks for publicity by conducting your own surveys. **Dorman** likes SurveyMonkey.com, which has a free version and a more expansive version for \$19.95 per month. Poll your audience on issues important to them and release the results as a timely news story that relates to what you do.

## 9. Reward referrals

When customers send business to Choice Translating Inc., a \$2 million translation firm in Charlotte, North Carolina, they get a gift: either a high-quality gyroscope (pictured on the company's logo) or a piece of handmade art from the company's new office in Lima, Peru. Customers get excited about the gift, says Michelle Menard, 37, who co-owns the company with her husband, Vernon, 43. Each gift costs no more than \$5, but "people go really crazy over them," she says, adding that the goodwill encourages people to keep her company in mind for referrals.

## 10. Get a group going

Beyond posting a profile about your business on social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and MySpace, you also have the option to start your own group, says **Dorman**. It's free, and it allows you to communicate offers and messages to an online fan base. Plus, each time someone joins, your group's name will be displayed on the individual's profile page or via update streams to other members. "Twittering and sending out bulletins through social media groups is a great way to disseminate your message," says Dorman. If you'd rather go it alone, sites like Ning.com make it easy to start your own social network.

## 11. Become a specialist

The Maupins designed the Green Tango menu to be salad-specific because "as the old saying goes, 'Pick one thing and do it well,'" says Billy. "We wanted to be known for being the best in a particular area." And you can, too. Kobler says that business owners can look into earning a certification in a particular area from a college or university's noncredit program or from a trade organization to improve their specialist credentials.

## 12. Use what you've got

Use your regular correspondence as a marketing opportunity, says Kobler. Make letters, invoice mailings and other correspondence more marketable by including product or promotion offers in them. Stamps.com's customized PhotoStamps lets you put your logo on the outside of an envelope or postcard. Make sure your e-mail signature lines include your logo, contact information and possibly even links to [website](#) landing pages with special offers or information.

## 13. Do the Q4 boogie

In the last months of the year, gather and review the 2009 editorial calendars of your target media. "They are normally easily found on the websites of every magazine, either in the 'Media Kit' or 'Advertise With Us' sections," **Dorman says**. "Look at the topics each plans to cover, then create an Excel spreadsheet of deadlines to pitch your company for relevant stories."

## 14. Compete, then repeat

When Green Tango was a finalist for a local newspaper's "Best Salad" designation, the Maupins didn't waste any time spreading the word. They immediately sent out an e-mail blast to their customers. Dorman says it's a good **idea** to enter contests sponsored by media, industry associations, and other organizations. A win gives you something to publicize to the community or industry and something new to communicate to your customer base.

## 15. Write an op-ed or letter to the editor

If a story that relates to your business breaks and you're not part of it, you can always comment on it in the form of an editorial, says **Dorman**. Your commentary may be picked up by the outlet that originally ran the story, and such submissions put you on the editor or producer's radar as a future source.

## 16. Post a video

A simple digital video recorder or webcam is all you need to create information-packed videos, which can be uploaded for free to YouTube, Google Video and other video sites, says Hager. Cynergy Systems shot a simple video in-house to promote its Cynergy Labs program, which gives funding and support for employees to develop their ideas on the company's behalf. When Cynergy posted the video, one of its employees e-mailed the video to a friend. Within 10 minutes, it had been downloaded hundreds of times--214,000 times to date.

## 17. Exploit the web

**Dorman** advises clients to get their companies on free sites like [del.icio.us.com](http://del.icio.us.com), [Digg.com](http://Digg.com), [Squidoo.com](http://Squidoo.com), and [Yelp.com](http://Yelp.com), "and, more important, have the fans of your product or service touting you on there as well." In addition, local newspapers and websites like [Craigslist.org](http://Craigslist.org) and [Metromix.com](http://Metromix.com) often have free online calendars where you can list upcoming seminars, celebrations and so on.

## 18. Hit the streets

Face time with customers, especially in the B2B world, can make or break relationships. When Michelle Menard wanted to drum up more business, she and her employees made customer visits around Valentine's Day, delivering chocolates and building goodwill. Accompanied by a fun, holiday-related card requesting referrals and later supplemented by a mailing to customers who the company couldn't reach face to face, the effort bumped up revenue by \$22,000 within a month.

## 19. Use your space

If you've got a high-profile location, use signage or banners on your property to promote your business (after you check the municipality's signage rules, of course). Billy Maupin uses small foam-core signs on mounts that can be stuck into the ground. Available for \$20 to \$30 each from his local print shop, they highlight seasonal promotions and point people toward his restaurants.

## 20. Create a customer advisory Board

Cooper suggests inviting customers to be part of a panel that can give you feedback on everything from your store design to your latest ad campaign. They can also help brainstorm new ways to reach new and existing customers. Reward such valuable insight with a small gift or a special discount.

## 21. Team up

Most businesses can find a way to team up with another noncompeting company that targets similar customers. Restaurateur Billy Maupin teamed up with a local personal training facility to promote his green fare to the trainers' health-conscious clientele. People arriving for personal training sessions place and pay for an order at the beginning of the session. The training facility passes the orders to Green Tango's staff members, who deliver the salad so that it's waiting for the client at the end of the session.

Aside from the amount of time they take to coordinate, these tactics range in cost from a few pennies to the cost of a few discounts. However, those small investments can pay off in a big way through increased awareness and outreach to prospective customers.

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