

10 Low or No Cost Marketing Tips (plus an extra three free ones!)
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In the last issue, I boldly encouraged you all to do more marketing, despite the recession. It's only fair that I now provide you with some really inexpensive, and in some cases completely free, options for marketing your work. I've based the ideas that follow on some of the questions I'm regularly asked.

Is there a way I can co-promote with other crafts people?

Contact some other crafts people whose work you admire, who sell to customers in the same marketplace as you – but who don't directly compete with you. For example, if you make pottery, you could team up with a textile artist. Offer to publicise their products or services to your customers in exchange for their publicising your services to their customers. Could be as simple as a reciprocal feature and links on your respective websites.

How can I use this to build my customer database?

If you are struggling to build your customer database, find someone who has the same type of customer as you, and set up a deal whereby you write an article with a link to your newsletter sign-up box in their newsletter, and they do the same in yours -that way you can each grow your databases - and your customers benefit from getting more choice.

I've noticed some people have a link to their website at the bottom of their emails – what's this called?

One of the easiest ways to share a link to your site is with an **email signature**. It's fairly easy to set this up in your email programme. Include a link to your website along with a tagline and any other pertinent info you want to share. It's standard practice and it's a *must do*. You can also include a link to your blog, Flickr site, or anywhere you wouldn't mind people checking out. Some people also include a signup box for their email newsletter.

What's Twitter all about? Is it any good?

More and more people are using Twitter as a marketing tool - simply by following other users who are in their target groups - galleries, crafts outlets, online retailers, and sending regular (once or twice a week) messages with a link to an item, page, or offer of interest. From the feedback I'm getting, it's taking over from Facebook as the social network of choice when it comes to raising your profile. It's quick, it's easy, and people do actively forward links of interest to each other -in that sense it is 'viral marketing' in it's purest sense. I get more consistent visits to my website from Twitter than any other social networking source.

How can I get more referrals?

If your suppliers and clients are happy to give you work, why not formally thank them for it. There's nothing better than getting a voucher, wine or chocolates as a

thank you for referring a new client.

How do I keep customer relations sweet?

Your customers already know and trust you. It's easier to get more business from them than to get new business from somebody who never bought from you. Take advantage of this by creating some special deals just for your existing customers ...and announce new products and services to them before you announce them to the general market.

It costs much, much less to retain a client than it does to acquire a new one.

Reward the Rainmakers...

Think about and list all the people who have been instrumental in passing work your way. Craft a really sincere thank you letter and send a personalised version to them all. Not only will they be thrilled, but they will remember the fact that you took the time to do this. It will virtually guarantee that your name comes to mind first when they are thinking of someone to recommend.

Underpromise and over-deliver – thrill your customers by adding something extra. It needn't be anything complex - deliver the goods in person now and again, throw in something new for them to look at, offer them a direct link from your website if appropriate, deliver ahead of deadline - only you will know exactly how you can add value to your customer relations.

Is it fair to promote myself via friends and family?

This is a no-brainer, really, but you'd be amazed how many small businesses don't keep their friends and family up to date with what they are doing. You don't sell to them as such; simply tell them what you're up to. The truth is, people would much rather buy from someone they know and trust. Every now and again, email family and friends a link to your website along with a little 'how's it going' personal message. Make the message informative, but without any heavy sales pitch.

Is there any benefit to selling gift tokens?

Everyone loves picking their own gift; if you sell products to consumers make sure you also offer this option too. Some people don't trust themselves to pick exactly the right gift, but love your stuff - a token solves a **big** problem for customers like this.

Is it OK wear my own stuff?

If you make clothing, accessories, jewellery or anything else you can carry with you on your body, you should wear it - and wear it often. Then, when you get a compliment and a "Wow, where did you get that?" next time you're out, hand them a business card! Don't forget that you are your own best sales tool and you can effectively be a walking advertisement for your own work.

Would people be interested in me talking about how my work is made?

A good way to get in front of your target audience is to do talks and demonstrations. It's accepted practice that you sell stuff at the end of the talk, recruit people to workshops or classes, and hand out marketing material. Some hosts are even willing to pay travel costs or a small fee for you to do this.

Offering to do demos and workshops in schools - especially in conjunction with the PTA - provides an instant audience - kids, parents, extended families and friends.

And if you want to try something slightly different...

Use the personal ads

People often browse the personal ads in the newspapers out of curiosity - I've known people get results from using this space to run a small inexpensive text ad with a link to their website - people take notice because it's not what they expect to see there!

Increase prices

Increasing prices will help your customers perceive you as a premium provider. Yes you may lose a little business, but you will make more profit from a slightly smaller customer base. And many businesses find that it is the lower value clients that are the most hassle.

Try out some guerrilla retailing!

You may have seen the recent Mary Portas 'Queen of Charity Shops' series recently - she featured an idea where craftspeople offer to sell their goods in the main retailing space of a charity shop - with a little bit of the profit being shared with the charity. If you are keen to experiment with offering your goods direct to the customer, this might be an ideal way to get space to try it out. It really helps the charity shop boost their profile, and people like companies that display a bit of social conscience.