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GOING LOCAL: KEYS TO GRASSROOTS MARKETING
Understanding and optimizing local opportunities can be the most powerful type of marketing possible

01. INTRODUCTION: LIVING LOCAL

As a business owner, you’re grappling with a host of new marketing imperatives. You’ve got to grab eyeballs. Drive traffic. Monitor page views and calculate their conversion to sales. If you ran a big company, you’d be increasingly dependent on technology to keep track of customer buying patterns, preferences, and needs. But if you’re running a local small business, you start each day with a significant competitive edge: you actually know your customers.

This allows you to live a level of customer service and personalized attention that larger organizations can only simulate. You don’t need to develop a virtual community, because you have daily contact in real life with the customers who depend not only on your products and services, but on your understanding of the challenges they face and ability to deliver the solutions they need.

02. THE COMMUNITY CONNECTION

That added dimension of customer connection alters the playing field for business owners whose market is local. Your customers know they can shop for your products or services not only locally, but also online. But you can win and retain their loyalty by making your personal relationship so valuable that levels on which you can’t compete, such as price, take a back seat to the importance they place on doing business with you.

“There are things that consumers attach value to beyond just price alone, and one of those things is meeting their needs,” says Nancy Swift, vice president of Hoyt & Company LLC and co-author (with Daniel Flint and Chris Hoyt) of Shopper Marketing: Profiting From the Place Where Suppliers, Brand Manufacturers, and Retailers Connect (FT Press 2014). “And the best way to do that is to be actually talking to the shopper, and that’s what small businesses can do much better. There’s a difference between algorithms and knowledge.”

The importance of in-person communications doesn’t take technology out of your toolkit. Point-of-sale programs and customer relationship management (CRM) systems provide additional support in helping you to deliver the information your customers want, the way they want to receive it. Even local businesses who know all their customers by name can use technology to identify and reward their most loyal customers, segment customer lists based on buying preferences, spot seasonal buying trends, and gain insights into customers’ needs.
03. **LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

When your focus is grassroots marketing, integrating online and offline strategies for customer contact gives you the greatest marketing leverage. Your target audience is online, so it’s essential to claim your online real estate on Yelp, CitySearch, Google Places, Foursquare, and other sites that make it easier for people to connect with your business. As a first step, make sure that your listings are complete and accurate so that customers who seek you on those sites will not have trouble finding you.

But don’t stop there. Each of those sites allows your customers to post reviews of your business, and you want to subscribe to those reviews so you can monitor the public conversation about your company, act on suggestions, and respond productively to negative comments. No one expects your company to do everything right all the time. But if you’re seen as responsive to customer problems and complaints, you’ll build a more positive perception of your business.

And when you receive compliments at the point of sale, consider asking customers to put their praise in writing. You can’t buy good reviews—it’s a violation of most terms of service to offer free or discounted products and services in return for positive posts—but you can let customers know that you’d appreciate seeing their feedback on review sites.

Some businesses will even offer use of a computer or tablet so customers can write their reviews while the experience that inspired them is still fresh in their minds. If they’re not active on those sites and don’t want to register, another option is to ask permission to publish a testimonial on your website. Here, again, you enjoy an advantage as the owner of a local small business. When you have a personal relationship with your customers, that request can emerge as a natural part of your conversation and interaction.

04. **TO BUILD SALES, BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**

The smartest strategies integrate online and offline resources to drive business and build relationships. “Think in terms of how those things work together,” says John Jantsch, founder of Duct Tape Marketing and author of Duct Tape Selling: Think Like a Marketer—Sell Like a Superstar (Portfolio 2014). “You want to make sure that you’re combining those two things.”

For example, your website can include a promotions section with coupons that people can print and bring into the store or a preferred customers section where those who have shared their contact information with you can access advance notice of sales and onsite events.

That strategy works in both directions. “Direct mail can drive people to your website to download promotions,” says Ramon Ray, technology evangelist at SmallBizTechnology.com and author of The Facebook Guide to Small
Business Marketing (Wiley 2013). Integrating print and online communication in that way helps you to measure your success at customer engagement, he explains: “You can get an exact count of how many people responded to an individual flyer or mailing, how that website activity converted to sales, and how response rates compared month over month.”

But don’t limit your prospects by thinking only in terms of sales. “Move away from just making the sale for the day,” Ray says. “Instead, move toward, how can I educate my customers and get them to know, like, and trust me?” By focusing on building relationships, your company can establish itself not just as a provider of products or services, but as a resource on which customers depend for expertise and information.

You can do this in a variety of ways that can contribute to your penetration of your market and your local community. Consider hosting seminars and workshops, speaking at community events, or offering onsite training that supports your sales. Depending on your business, it might also be a good idea to publish articles in local media, distribute your own customer newsletter, or offer informational flyers and other handouts available at point of sale.

05. FIND THE RIGHT MIX

Here, again, one key to success is knowing which mix of print and online communication will do the best job of reaching and engaging your customers. The proliferation of social media makes that a particular challenge for local small business owners who don’t have time to keep up a presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and Twitter.

The good news is that you don’t have to keep that many social media balls in the air—and because you’re in direct contact with your customers, you can use your conversations with them to determine which options will deliver the greatest return. “Think in terms of where they are, and then pick your places,” Jantsch says. “You can’t do it all. That’s a trap a lot of people fall into, so they waste a lot of time.”

He adds that you need to not only have a presence on the right social media for your company, but also learn to use each site to add value to your customer relationships. Remember to use social media to promote interaction, not just for one-way message broadcasting. The goal should be to build a customer community.

For example, John Loecke and Jason Oliver Nixon, co-owners of interior design firm Madcap Cottage, use social media not only to showcase their designs, but also to “demystify” the process of creating a distinctive look for a home. Their customers are drawn not only to striking visuals, but also to a sense that those visuals are accessible to them in real life. Social media sites offer a strong platform for appealing to both those interests and promoting the business by appealing to customers’ and prospects’ personal interests.

“You can’t do it all. That’s a trap a lot of people fall into, so they waste a lot of time.”
One strategy that Jantsch has found especially productive is creating an online group on Facebook or LinkedIn (depending on the focus of your business). This allows your customers to exchange ideas, brainstorm on challenges, network, and perhaps even do business together. “Find uses that you know would be valuable to your existing customers,” he says. “Make your participation online something that will be useful to them, and social media will pay.”

Those uses don’t always have to relate directly to the products or services you’re selling. One element of the appeal—and the competitive advantage—of local businesses is that they’re active members of the communities they serve. “Sometimes, just making a focused effort to be a part of the community is what so many small businesses do so well,” Swift says.

To build relationships with your customers, use social media outlets to promote not only your business, but your ties to the community. For example, if you’re a personal trainer or you own a sporting goods store, use your social media activity to engage in virtual cheerleading for the local high school sports teams. Then bring that community engagement back around to your business by offering promotions to customers who bring a ticket stub from the weekend’s big game to your studio or shop. If you have a storefront, make your sidewalk space available to a local volunteer organization for its annual bake sale fundraiser, and promote the event online. If you run a dry cleaning business, use a combination of in-store signage and social media activity to promote a winter coat drive, and offer a discount to customers who participate.

Cross-promotion is another strategy for building on the local business advantage. Network with companies in your area whose products and services complement your own, and look for opportunities to market a package of solutions. If you do business with those companies yourself, be the customer you’d like to serve in your own business: refer customers to your strategic partners, offer them social media reviews or website testimonials, and join them in supporting local charities or causes that reflect your shared interests and values. Each of these steps will reinforce the perception of your company as invested not only in its own success, but also in the well-being of the community.
Of course, when you’re marketing at the grassroots level, foot traffic represents another ongoing opportunity for customer engagement, so no matter how sophisticated online communication becomes, you still benefit from strong on-site promotions. Shelf and in-store signage, point-of-sale flyers and informational materials, and other collateral can support communication with customers while they’re in your place of business. Each point of contact represents an opportunity not only to address customers’ and prospects’ needs, but to connect with them at the moment when they’re ready to make the decision to buy. That’s when they’ll be most receptive to receiving information.

“You want to get as close to the decision points in terms of messaging as possible,” Swift says. “Because that’s the only time they listen.”

You need printed materials in other contexts, too. Some can have more impact than online information or can provide a stronger showcase for your message. That’s especially true when there’s a strong visual component to the material, and you want to ensure that it captures colors accurately and consistently. Print may also be a better delivery platform for marketing certain leisure products or services that people will be more receptive to exploring when they’ve unplugged. And as with all communication platforms, printed materials can incorporate references to online resources that customers can consult if they want additional information.

By finding the right balance between print and electronic marketing, your company can enhance the in-person communications that are your core competitive strength. Think of each component in terms of its ability to support your skill at building relationships at the grassroots level, and let the characteristics of those relationships guide you to the tools you need to achieve sustained success in your local market.

“\You want to get as close to the decision points in terms of messaging as possible.\”
Our business is all fun and games, but The UPS Store takes us seriously.

SMALL BUSINESS: YOU’RE NOT ALONE OUT THERE. Stacey and Gail, co-owners of Toys With Love, Inc., share a passion for making kids happy. So when they need to spread the love, be it shipping a gift nationally or printing event mailers for the whole town, they turn to their neighbors at The UPS Store®. Because while play is their business, The UPS Store experts don’t play around when it comes to providing the right packing, shipping and printing solutions for their unique needs. At The UPS Store, we love small businesses. We love logistics.

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GO LOCAL, THINK GLOBAL

MADCAP COTTAGE IS A SMALL BUSINESS WITH BIG IDEAS. IT’S MAKING THEM HAPPEN WITH THE HELP OF HARD WORK, TALENT, AND AN ARRAY OF TRusted PARTNERS

Starting a business often means learning how to stretch a dollar and make it look like a million bucks. When John Loecke and Jason Oliver Nixon, founders of interior design firm Madcap Cottage, launched their business in New York City in 2005, they were building an upscale image with a bold vision for growth. But, first, they needed to lay the foundation by finding clients and maximizing a limited marketing budget.

Focusing on keeping the personal touch of a local business and using their promotional dollars and talents wisely has catapulted the success of their brand, leading to a relocation to High Point, North Carolina and a rollout of their own products in addition to design services. Throughout, they have partnered with various brands and vendors to accomplish more as a small firm. The UPS Store, for example, acts as both a local fulfillment center and shipping center during the team’s travels, which has helped fuel Madcap’s growth.

01. TAP YOUR STRENGTHS

Both Nixon and Loecke had editorial backgrounds, having worked at magazines in New York City. They had seen how successful media pitches were written and how to make a story newsworthy by capitalizing on trends or focusing on story ideas that would be of interest to the publication’s audience. They learned how to write successful press materials and pitch stories to the media and get high-profile coverage at no cost to their business.

While you might not have big magazine connections, you can learn how to generate publicity for your business. Books like Guerilla Publicity by Jay Conrad Levinson, Rick Frishman, and Jill Lublin and Red Hot Internet Publicity: The Insider’s Guide to Marketing Online by Penny C. Sansevieri are just two of many books that can teach you effective publicity strategies and tactics.

Perhaps you love to talk about your business and can do seminars or speaking engagements. If you have an eye for design, create great trade show exhibits or experiment with merchandising in your store. Take inventory of your best skills, and think about how to apply them to your business.
02. **CREATE A TEAM**

With all they have going on, business owners can get stretched thin pretty quickly. An essential part of Madcap Cottage’s growth has been partnering with other companies, including vendors like The UPS Stores and other brands, to extend their reach and grow their business.

“We work with different organizations for their capabilities. I might need somebody who is a crackerjack on Web design or social media consulting or somebody who can help me do research for project. I find reliable people and providers who can help,” Nixon relates.

Nixon says his partnership with The UPS Store has been invaluable both locally and when he’s on the road, for everything from printing labels and promotional postcards to shipping orders and materials to various sites. When he’s on the road, he’ll look for a local UPS Store to ship furniture pieces back to the office for refurbishing. He knows that, wherever he goes, he’ll get reliable and excellent service at a UPS Store, and being able to outsource these things allows him to focus on what he does best: Serving his clients.

03. **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA**

Building a community is important to any business. Loecke and Nixon have been able to do so by using free social media resources that showcase their beautiful designs and allow them to “demystify” the process. They have active Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Google+ accounts and are constantly experimenting with content that works. These tools also let them interact directly with their clients and prospects, forging relationships built over a love of design.

**Make the most of “touch points”**

Whenever the Madcap Cottage team has an opportunity to interact with a customer, prospect, or referral source, they try to make it a personal experience. Nixon says they love doing trunk shows, personal appearances, and lecturing so they get to speak face-to-face with audience members and learn about people’s interests and concerns. Each holiday season, he sends out roughly 300 branded gifts to customers, prospects, and contacts, using his local UPS Store for packaging and fulfillment. He estimates this saves him about six hours’ time, and he knows the items will get to their destinations after being packed by certified experts who have been trained to pack a wide variety of items for shipping, including large or fragile merchandise.

Nixon says businesses need to look at the opportunities they have to interact with customers, whether it’s in person, on the telephone, through social media, or in other ways, and find ways to make the experience more personal, effortless, and memorable. That could mean showing them something new that would be of interest to them or helping them find a way to meet a challenge they’re facing.
04. TAILOR YOUR BUSINESS MODEL FOR BROADER REACH

Interior design services can be pricey and redecorating with period antiques beyond the pocketbooks of many. Nixon says tailoring service levels to customer needs has been an effective way to grow a broader audience. Madcap Cottage has service tiers from which to choose: First Class, Business Class, and Premium Economy. As the rates drop, the level of customer involvement increases, but gives more people access to their services.

Finally, don’t be afraid to reinvest. As they’ve grown, Nixon and Loecke have been careful to look at what is driving business to their company and reinvest in those efforts. The personal touch is always a big part of that, whether it’s sending their holiday gifts or spending time with people who come to events. Nixon says that keeping that bespoke feel to every interaction is a priority as Madcap Cottage rolls out new ventures like a new line of bedding in 2014. Their relationship with The UPS Store is a good example. Nixon frequently uses UPS Store locations each year on printing postcards and shipping. But having a reliable partner who can give them a professional look, save the team time, and help them do what they say they’re going to do is worth every penny, Nixon says.

“For us, it’s about having a team that I can go to and trust implicitly,” he says. “My business couldn’t function without the wonderful constellation of UPS stores around the country.”

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LiveChime.
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Kabbage.
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**HUMAN RESOURCES**

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**HUMAN RESOURCES CONTINUED**

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**DotComGuy.**
DotComGuy provides peace of mind when it comes to your business technology (computers, tablets, wireless routers, email, smartphones, printers, etc.). They fix your current computer problems plus provide the tools to prevent future problems such as virus attacks and other security threats. Their U.S.-based tech experts are available 24/7, 365. The UPS Store customers enjoy 50 percent off on-demand IT support.

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**Constant Contact.**
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**Vionic.**
Vionic® provides a social media deals platform for small business owners to market their products and services on Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Give your small business the tools for success by creating eye-catching deals within minutes. Other features include the ability to receive payments inside of Facebook, collect revenue instantly via PayPal, attract new and loyal customers, and drive foot traffic to your store. Plans start at just $39.95/month, and you can save up to 52 percent.

**Wise Business Designs.**
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