

CHAPTER TWO



*Getting Your Name
Out There*

“Setting aside a few hours each week to work on marketing can pay dividends.”



You might have a fantastic business with brilliant customer service, a team of skilled people and a price list that undercuts the competition. But if no one knows about it then none of this matters. Having a good business but no customers is a bit like staging the FA Cup final without selling any tickets.

Yet, sadly, the best tradespeople aren't always the best marketers, which means they miss out on top jobs to others who might be less qualified but are better at boasting. If you fit into the former category, it's time to make some changes.

Setting aside a few hours each week to work on marketing can pay dividends, literally. It could lead to a deluge of new jobs, or a refined selection of higher-paid ones which prise open profit margins without lumping on additional cost.

Whatever your goals, marketing is a brilliant way to build a business fast. The good news is that there are plenty of ways to spread the word, so you can pick and choose the mix that suits you best.

"Sign-writing, work shirts with logos and branded communication all help to reinforce the image of our company."



- Chris Fairbairn, Cribbit Installations Ltd

In this chapter we'll look at the good old-fashioned stuff you can do without a computer. Of course, the internet influences everything these days, but a blend of on- and offline channels will deliver the biggest rewards.

The key is to experiment. Don't try and do everything at once. As you know, it's better to do a few jobs well than to try and do too many half-heartedly.

Do a marketing drive, gauge the results, then try something new. By discovering what works best you'll improve efficiency and drive down waste. It's a great way to find out what gives your business the best bang for its buck.

BRANDING

Think of two airlines, easyJet and British Airways. They essentially offer the same service: to fly you from one place to another. The businesses are the same, broadly speaking, but the identities are completely different. BA is premium. It wants you to relax and enjoy the ride in comfort, peace of mind and, some would say, in style. Flights are more expensive in many cases, but you're paying for extra service.

Then there's easyJet: it wants to get you from point A to point B with the minimum amount of cost and fuss. It's not luxurious, but it is cheap and no-nonsense.

The important point is that neither of these airlines is better than the other. They simply target different parts of the same market. Their respective brands tell the customer which is which.



"If you get the chance to correct something that a previous tradesperson has done badly, then grab it. In my case they might have neglected to clean paint off plug sockets or something else that looks sloppy. I cut around the sockets, but I also clean off the old paint so that my job looks extra professional, especially compared to the last one. It adds to my brand as someone who cares about a first-class finish."

- Wayne de Wet, Wayne de Wet Painting and Decorating Services

You can imagine a brand as the foundations that all other types of marketing sit on. It's a description (visual, written and experiential) of who you are and, just as importantly, how you want to come across to prospective customers. A good brand is consistent and influences everything from uniforms to the way you treat people.

2. Getting Your Name Out There

Branding matters because it's the first sign of what your business is. It tells people whether you are premium or low-cost, cutting edge or traditional, customer-centric or focused on efficiency. People make decisions fast and first impressions count, so ensure your branding conveys the message you want it to.

"I love my design on my van. It's 'wicked', to quote a customer. It's clear, different and memorable. I am also very proud that it is a product of my own imagination: my hand holding a paintbrush, showing precision.

"The first seven years of my company I was working from my personal car, a red Mazda RX-8, with no branding. It was a smart car and I got clever at packing, plus I was very careful! But since investing in the van and sign-writing, it has been seen everywhere. 'I saw your van in the garden centre', 'I saw your van while I was shopping', 'Yes I have seen your van around' are some quotes from customers and trade companies in the area."



- Jane Pennock, Us Girls Decorating Ltd

Essentially, a brand consists of a few key elements:

- company name
- logo
- colour scheme

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- consistent designs
- consistent messaging
- tagline
- behaviour
- communications.

To build a new brand, or develop an existing one, you have to ask yourself some questions, mainly about the nature of your business and the type of customer you want to attract. So:

- Who is your ideal customer?
- What characteristics do you want them to see in your business?
- Is your approach low-cost or high-end?
- What aspects could you promote? (For example, customer service or efficiency.)
- What is your ultimate objective: to grow big or stay relatively small?
- Generally, how do you want to be known?

Once you have the answers, you can start to build your brand. Use them to describe your business to a designer, who will create your branded materials, such as business cards, leaflets or a design for your vehicles. Alternatively, you can do this yourself with low-cost web tools.

Type 'logo design' into a search engine and you'll see a list of design businesses offering to create your logo. Many of these can also build a simple website, business cards, letterheads and envelopes as part of a relatively low-cost package – that means sub-£500.

But your brand is more than sharp designs and catchy colour schemes. It is effected by everything you do, including how you and your team approach a job from the moment a customer rings you to invoicing and aftercare.

Remember: to create a brand that people appreciate, you must be consistent in everything you do. It's no good setting up a 'prestige' landscaping business if the veneer of quality is ruined by bad language, tired, dirty clothing and missed appointments.

2. Getting Your Name Out There

“We made sure that we had a name that is relevant to the trade – LSW Decorating instead of LSW Contracting. We also strive to do the best job possible, so that word of mouth can work. We have t-shirts, business cards, paid ads online that appear near the top of Google, and advertisement boards when we work outside.”



– Chris Jones, LSW Decorating Ltd

PRINTED MARKETING

Once you have your brand – including a logo, colour scheme and agreed business principles – you can start putting it to work. A tried-and-tested method of doing this is distributing printed materials, such as leaflets, billboards and signs, or advertising in magazines and newspapers.

Spending on print has been challenged by digital advertising in the last decade or so – more on this later – but many people, particularly those not born into the internet era, appreciate the tangible feel of paper over online alternatives.



Leaflet dropping

The number of leaflets and brochures that plop onto your doormat every morning illustrates that this method of reaching out is still as popular as ever. It also tells you that printed adverts are in competition with each other – so yours has to stand out from the pile.

As with business cards and letterheads, designing a leaflet can be cheap or pricey, depending on which route you take. This time, search for 'leaflet design printing UK' to see a list of services.



"When I first set up, my wife and my then three-year-old son leafleted hundreds of properties with homemade flyers, which we created ourselves to save money. As we started to get calls, I had some posters made for local convenience stores and supermarkets. I left business cards at fish-and-chip shops and hairdressers."

– Jordan Williams, JR Williams Plumbing Services Ltd

Vistaprint, at the time of writing, lets you design your own message (incorporating your new brand designs, of course) and print 5,000 leaflets for under £45. A more luxury look and feel will set you back around £75. Hundreds of other services give you cheaper (or dearer) options.

So getting leaflets printed is relatively straightforward, but this still leaves the job of trudging round 5,000 addresses and hand-delivering your offers to residents, not all of whom will be happy to receive them.

It's important to weigh up the time this will take – you could employ a firm to do the deliveries for you or have them inserted into a local newspaper – and the negative side effects of irritating homeowners.



"I started my business in 2007, advertised in local parish magazines, Spirit FM (local radio) and delivered 2,000 flyers around Chichester. I got my van sign written and in 2014 I joined Checkatrade – I have not looked back since."

– Simon Pitham, SEP Tiling Ltd

SUCCESS STORIES



Name: Simon Pitham

Business name: SEP Tiling

Type of business: Floor and wall tiling

Number of employees: 1 (apprentice)

How did you get started in your trade?

“Eleven years ago, I was working as a produce shift manager and decided I needed a new challenge in life. I wanted a new career and to run my own business, so I booked myself onto a tiling course.”

Has the business changed since you started?

“The business has changed massively for me in a few ways, particularly with growth in the number of customers and repeat customers. This has helped me to take on an apprentice, which is very exciting.”

Describe your typical customer and project.

“My typical customers are private households in the domestic sector. We do bathrooms, conservatories, kitchens and so on. But to grow the business I now work in the commercial sector, tiling shops and showrooms, for example.”

What do you enjoy about your career?

“I enjoy meeting customers new and old, as well as the satisfaction of our work once it’s finished.”

(RIGHT) *Simon Pitham, pictured with his apprentice Harrison.*



What's the hardest thing about it, or the biggest challenge you face?

“The hardest thing about the work, I suppose, is how physical it can be at times, and the biggest challenge is to keep up with the amount of work coming in. There never seems to be enough hours in the day.”

What are your plans for the future?

“My plans for the future are to keep up with the demand and grow the business even further, by taking on another apprentice once Harrison, my current apprentice, is fully trained.”

What's your best tip for other tradespeople in your sector?

“Keep grafting and be happy!”

Local press

If the above isn't for you, consider newspaper or magazine advertising. For this, you'll still need to design an advert, but you don't have to worry about distributing it as the publication itself takes care of the legwork.

Like in the case of leaflet-dropping, it's a scatter-gun approach: you hit a lot of potential customers and hope a small proportion will notice your ad and pick up the phone. Whether your campaign is a success or not comes down to the value of your new customers and whether it represents an increase on what you had before, after time and costs are factored in.

Advertising in the printed press, even a small local publication, will add some costs – how much depends on the size, prestige and circulation of the publication you want to be included in. A parish journal or local guide might only be £50–£100. But a regional

newspaper could be ten times that figure or more. Ask to see proof of success before you spend that sort of money.

What you are paying for is an audience that you couldn't hope to reach on your own. Plus, there's the 'prestige' of being associated with a respected professional publication – this can add weight to your business.

OUTDOOR DISPLAY

Not everyone loves being targeted by advertisers in their own home. Most leaflets go straight in the bin and only a handful are acted on immediately or tucked away behind the fruit bowl for future reference.

Also, you might not relish the thought of tiptoeing up garden paths to drop a marketing message on an unsuspecting stranger. So you might want to consider something called 'outdoor media' – i.e. posters, billboards and signs.

Years ago, advertising had its time and place. When the architect Albert Moore rebuilt what we now know as London's OXO Tower in the late 1920s, he managed to wrong-foot regulators by incorporating the brand name in the building's giant windows. This was despite a city-wide ban on skyline advertising – and it still stands today, proudly defying the law.

In this day and age, display advertising is not only allowed but expected just about everywhere, from roundabouts to fuel pumps to crop circles. If there's a square metre of blank space, you know that sooner or later someone will try to fill it.

'Outdoor' is a passive form of advertising that allows people to look if they are interested. It doesn't jump on you when you get in the door or appear unannounced in your inbox. This means it doesn't have any of the 'spam' feel associated with other, more direct forms of advertising.

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Another plus is its flexibility – giving gardeners, for example, the option to advertise on tended roundabout flower beds or on park benches. It's local, flexible and in many cases gives your brand a lot of room to breathe.

But this laid-back approach has drawbacks – it is one of the easiest forms of advertising to ignore. It's possible to drive past a roadside board and, even if you're interested in the ad, miss the main message or the contact details.

Outdoor advertising is often run by specialist media agencies on behalf of local councils. Profits from the fees you pay will be split between the agency and the local authority. You can put your logo on just about anything from construction hoardings to lamppost banners, so just search for your target area and look up the solutions they offer.

Prices will vary depending on where you want to advertise, the size of your ad, how many people will see it and competition for the placement with other advertisers.



TV AND RADIO

TV and radio are the big guns of the offline advertising world and it's unlikely that your budget will stretch this far, at least at first. If it does, congratulations – you have built a substantial business.

Costs will include:

- money spent on production
- studio hire
- the creative process (usually a 'story' dreamed up by a specialist agency)
- actors and voice actors (more for celebs)
- airtime.

Needless to say, it gets expensive. To give you a rough indication, the airtime alone for a week-long campaign on local radio could set you back £500 – that's before all other costs are factored in. For a regional station the same service could be £2,500 and a national might be £10,000-plus.

There is a potentially cheaper way to get on the TV or radio, however, and it's called PR.

"Irrespective of your uniform or what van you drive, the first and most important thing in business is the quality of your work and your service. You can have all the tinsel, be on time and tidy up after yourself, but it counts for nothing if you do a bad job and the customer isn't happy.

"You can break that down to relate to whatever business you are in. For us it starts with the call centre, the plumber does the job and then we do a follow-up to ensure everything went well and they're happy. From start to finish, this is the most important thing."



– Charlie Mullins, Pimlico Plumbers

PR

Public relations, also known as PR, aims to get you a lot of positive coverage in the media at a price point below that of running a widespread advertising campaign. The media – TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and online resources – are all looking for good stories that their audiences will want to read. PR is the act of developing these stories and feeding them to media sources to create exposure for clients.

The idea is that by being seen on TV, radio or in newspapers, you will become well-known and recognisable, even trusted, in your market. Businesses can use this exposure to develop new business and make additional sales.

PR takes many forms. You could set yourself up as a spokesperson for your industry, commenting in the local press on issues that impact businesses like yours. You could do something imaginative or even outlandish to attract attention – that might mean a hedge-pruning stunt, record-breaking Christmas lights or building an unusual garden room for a customer.

An agency will come up with a range of creative ideas much better than mine to put your business in the spotlight. They might suggest conducting a survey and publishing the results in a press release; the theme could be serious or funny and you would be the quoted spokesperson providing commentary or a quote to beef up the findings.

Like almost everything in this section, when it comes to PR you can spend as much or as little as you feel necessary. It's quite possible to get into the press without spending a penny (celebrities, MPs and sportspeople do it all the time).



But to ensure a methodical approach to public relations and to speed up your rise to fame, employing a PR agency will help enormously. Again, PR companies range from freelancers (cheap) to large-scale firms (expensive). A simple search online will reveal hundreds of options for you to investigate.

It's a good idea to approach a handful of firms to get an idea of cost and, importantly, what each business will do for their fees. Some charge a retainer, plus extras for specific work like a press release or a stunt. Work out your budget, stick to it and be clear about what you expect in return.

WORD OF MOUTH

Research suggests that people are more likely to act on word-of-mouth recommendations than any advert or media coverage a company can muster. People trust their peers, or the majority view of the crowd, more than anything else – so it's important to encourage happy customers to spread the word about your good work.

Apart from being a compelling method for attracting new customers, the best thing about recommendations is that you don't need a marketing budget to get them. Just do a good job and ask that people remember you when asked to recommend a first-class plumber, electrician, landscape gardener etc.

It's amazing how quickly reputations can spread via workplaces, clubs, groups or parents at the school gate. You should never underestimate the power of recommendations. Leaving business cards or leaflets with happy customers might help prompt them to tell their friends.

Equally, word of mouth can work against you. So it's a good idea to ensure customers are happy. If you offer to put right anything they don't like – within reason – then you can avoid dents to your reputation.

Accelerate!

Word-of-mouth recommendations come into their own online. The internet lets people communicate much faster than they can in the real world, so in the next chapter we'll cover the various ways you can take advantage of the fast-paced technological revolution happening all around us.



"A lot of our lead generation comes from door-to-door canvassers and referrals from happy customers. We use the excellent Checkatrade and other accreditations for maximum benefits. We are certified by Certass, the CPA, FCA, Furniture Ombudsman, and Supalite."

– Alan Gough, Warmglow Home Improvements Ltd