

A top-down view of a desk with a light wood grain. In the top left is a laptop keyboard. In the top center is a succulent. In the top right is a notebook with a black and white striped cover. On the left side, there is a pink pen and several paper clips. In the bottom left is another succulent. In the bottom right is a smartphone. The central text is enclosed in a white box with a thin gold border.

7 Marketing Essentials for Small Business Owners

Simple marketing
basics to help
you compete with
the big boys

Covid & Beyond Edition

By Joe D'Eramo

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Introduction

AUTHOR'S NOTE: 7 Marketing Essentials for Small Business Owners was written in 2019, long before the current pandemic. Yet the marketing strategies mentioned in this e-book are even more applicable now. That's why each chapter will contain a COVID and beyond recommendation as to how you should use these strategies during the rest of 2021 and beyond.

If you own a small business, there simply aren't enough hours in the day—particularly if you're a sole proprietor. That's why optimizing your marketing efforts is critical to your success. This e-book covers seven relatively low-cost marketing efforts that, if done consistently, can keep you in front of your current customers and network.

These ideas are presented with the assumption you have a website for your business. In 2019, you should have one. If you do not, even if you have the best word-of-mouth and haven't had to do an ounce of marketing, you should get one. You just never know when the pipeline will dry up.

With a working website in place, the following marketing ideas can and will help you add to your client base over time. It's not a how-to as much as a presentation of how these essentials can grow your business with consistency.

Marketing your business is not a one-time thing. With an active website and these seven essentials, it's 24/7/365. You should never expect you issue a single newsletter or press release or a post to your social media sites now to cover your marketing needs. It's ongoing and should be as routine a part of your business as any other part of your business—e.g. invoicing, customer services, etc.

The one goal of this book is to get you think about your marketing and to create or add on to the foundation you currently have.

About Joe D'Eramo

For more than 20 years, yours truly has written marketing materials for small businesses. Enewsletters, press releases, articles, ads, blogs, white papers, eBooks. You name it, I have probably written it. Since starting my PR/marketing consulting-copywriting practice, I have generated hundreds of newsletters, articles, press releases, blogs and posts for social media. Honestly, it's probably more like in the thousands.

Those works include my first book, *Recipes for the Roommate-Impaired* and my first Kindle book, *25 Ways to go from Stepfather to StepDad*.

With this book, I share my thoughts on the essential marketing tools a small business should have. I call it the drill. Preferably you do all of these things. Yet if this book inspires you to do at least one, you will see how easy it is to start and add more of these essentials to your marketing arsenal.

For complete information on my copywriting and consulting services, visit my website, www.hiroadcommunications.com.

An e-newsletter – Tapping on the window

As a child of the 1970s, I grew up in a neighborhood with a lot of kids. It was not unusual to just pop in on your friends in the neighborhood. Even around dinner time. According to my mother, especially around dinner time.

“Can Joey come out and play?”

Joey was what the neighborhood called me. Never went by anything other than Joe. Yet the point is we never had dinner without the thought crossing our mind that a kid from the neighborhood might knock on the door.

An e-newsletter does the same for your business.

That’s not to say your e-newsletter will be an annoyance. Though to some it might. But it does serve to remind people you are still out here, alive and well, doing business. It’s up to the topics you write about to remind your network of what it is you do and what you offer.

Those closer to you and who know you better—your customers—know that already. Yet a very gentle reminder—NOT A SALES PITCH—will go a long way towards keeping you front-of-mind. Even if they don’t read the newsletter.

That’s right, you might invest time and money in a newsletter and there’s a very good chance some people will not read more than the subject line. That’s okay. If they saw you in their in-box, you got your money’s worth. For people who know you and your business, you are front-of-mind again.

For those who are part of your network who aren’t 100 percent sure of what you do, the newsletter will serve as an educational tool. And you can talk about any and everything that gives them a short glimpse into your area of expertise. That can include:

- New products or service offering
- New hires or the anniversaries of long-time employees
- New clients or vendor relationships (you'd be surprised who knows who)
- Current trends in your area of expertise (e.g. programs that help land 5-star Google reviews are big with my small business customers)
- Current events and the impact on your customers

The list goes on and on. You can find some more ideas in my other book *Why Nobody Reads your eNewsletter and How to Fix It*.

Size does and doesn't matter

Your newsletter doesn't have to be a novel. It doesn't even have to be more than one news item. Though you may find yourself wanting to share other things to keep the content lively.

If you are pressed for time, an article of about 400-500 words can be effective as long as you get your point across. The important thing is for it to be fairly well written and done consistently. Starting a monthly newsletter and then putting it out at different times of the month, skipping a month here or there, sends a message to your audience.

Message?

You bet. Back to our dinnertime analogy. When the kids next door grew up a little and my parents were a little more vocal about their disapproval, they stopped coming to our door at dinner time as much and then not at all. I'm guessing they found somebody else's door to knock on.

This is not to say if you start a newsletter you have to be on a schedule that's soooo rigid. You may find that you need to be. Having a stated goal/deadline of pushing out a newsletter on the first business day of the month will help you stick to that schedule. And if your workload becomes too much to make that schedule on your own, you can outsource it just to make sure you are meeting that deadline.

Unlike my next door neighbor growing up, you really don't want your audience to visit somebody else's house. Even during dinner time.

How to create an e-newsletter

Some small business owners feel they lack the skills needed to create a professional e-newsletter.

“I’m not a writer.”

“I’m not a graphic designer.”

“I’m not good with computers.”

The resources available to small business owners have never been greater. The e-newsletter platforms available on the market make it very easy for non-techie people to generate a professional newsletter. Constant Contact is one that offers live tech support where they will actually walk you through the process. If you get stuck and call in, they will actually do some of it for you.

In terms of the look of your e-newsletter, a Constant Contact will customize an e-newsletter template that will look like your website. The fee for this is typically around \$100, more or less.

If you are on a fixed budget, you even have zero cost options like MailChimp. That’s right. If you have an e-mail list of less than 2,000 e-mail addresses, you can use MailChimp to publish your e-newsletter. The templates are fairly straightforward to use. Unfortunately, there’s not a number to call for help. Yet if you use one of the templates and navigate the online help guide when needed, you can produce your e-newsletter for nothing more than your time.

Who should you mail it to?

Everyone! Okay, maybe not everyone. The Can-Am act does protect people against unwanted e-mail. That’s why it’s important to include some language about why you are sending your e-newsletter to a particular person. For example:

“You are receiving this e-mail because at some point you connected with Joe D’Eramo of HiRoad Communications. If you no longer wish to receive e-mails from HiRoad Communications, please click on this link to unsubscribe.” Most newsletter templates will offer this kind of language and an unsubscribe link.

enewsletters - A Must for Every Small business

Back to your list. It's better to ask for forgiveness than permission. So, create an enewsletter list of your customers (even ex-customers), LinkedIn connections, even friends and family. As a small business owner, you need to be front-of-mind with everybody in your network. You never know who the people you know know.

After having a great website with fresh, original content, a regular enewsletter is your most valuable commodity as a small business owner. It's a regular touch to your customers and network and a way to sustain relationships over long periods of time.

Covid & Beyond Response:

The current pandemic calls for a different tactic with your newsletter. If you were sending on a monthly basis, you now want to publish every two weeks. If you have the content, you might even consider weekly. Why? During these troubled times (I would like a dollar for every time I've heard that) it's imperative to show that you are still in business, thinking proactively. and looking beyond the current pandemic.

If you're concerned about not having enough material, you can take a little different approach. For one of my clients, we developed a weekly newsletter highlighting the good deeds people were doing during the pandemic. It's called *Feel Good Friday*. Most of the client stories center around doing something different in the pandemic or giving back. It's been a big hit with our mailing list and has even led to some of our subjects getting additional business.

Freesource: [Mailchimp](#); [Constant Contact](#)

Keeping it Social

Social media has become a matter of keeping up with the Joneses. If you are wondering the value of whether or not to have a social media presence, there's not a lot of hard data that says, "you must have a social media presence". Or, more precisely, that having a Facebook or Twitter page will result in a dramatic increase in your revenue without running ads. Mostly, your social media presence provides an additional way for your business to be found and another way to reach out to your network.

For the small business owner, the question remains should you or shouldn't you have a social media presence (you should). What sites should you have (it really depends on the type of business you have and some other variables)? How often should I post? Should I outsource this to a "college kid"?

In terms of the *should's*, in 2021, it's safe to say every business should have a social media presence. The question of what to have really depends on the type of business you have. For example, a law firm could probably do without a Facebook page. Yet having a presence on LinkedIn is key. If you own a restaurant, you will want a Facebook page and probably an Instagram account to show off some of your best dishes—not having a Twitter page probably will not hurt your business.

At a minimum, the small business owner should have a LinkedIn profile. Adding a company page on LinkedIn would also not hurt. More on LinkedIn in another section.

The 'how often should I post?' question is typically a stumbling block for small business owners. For some businesses, you can get away a few times a week. For others, you will want to be more active—again, depending on the business. That requires content—original and shared. If you are generating a lot of content, this isn't a problem. If you are not, you may have an issue.

If you have a limited amount of content, at least at first, once a week is fine. It's recommended you use a Hootsuite, Buffer or some other free online product where you can draft and schedule your posts in advance. Again, it depends on how much content you have access to as to how far in advance you prepare your social media posts. You can probably get by with a few posts a week.

Do you have a social media presence?

The take here is that if social media isn't at the forefront of your marketing efforts, you probably don't want to put too much of your efforts/dollars into it. You certainly should have a LinkedIn profile and page and probably a Facebook and Twitter page while you're at it. Give it some of your marketing attention and dollars. Just not all of it.

If you're short on material and need some content, the Freesource below offers some suggestions.

Covid & Beyond Response

Much like your e-newsletter, you want to crank up the volume on your social media posting. If you were posting once or twice a week, double that. If you're short on material, you may have to get a little creative. If your business is experiencing a slow down, then you might have some time to dedicate to posting. One great social strategy during the pandemic and beyond is to find inspirational stories in your community. Many people and businesses have done some wonderful things in response to the crisis. Post those things on your social media pages. Better yet, find a way for your business to get involved in these efforts. It's a great thing to do and will also give you more to post about.

Freesource: [Blog with social media fodder](#)

Let's talk: LinkedIn Discussion Groups

LinkedIn's discussion groups should be a mandatory social media strategy for businesses of all sizes. As the name implies, these are groups within LinkedIn where you can join and post conversation topics for fellow members to weigh in on. You can also join in an existing conversation. The groups all have a theme. For example, yours truly is a member of *New England Graphic Designers* and *Framingham State University Alumni*.

As a copywriter, graphic designers are a key part of my network and can be a referral source. Hence the reason for me joining *New England Graphic Designers* group. Framingham State University Alumni is self-explanatory.

So, what would I post in *New England Graphic Designers* seeing how I'm not a designer? Could be any number of questions:

- Where do you find copywriters for your projects?
- What would you say are the biggest delays in finishing website projects?

I'm using these two questions to illustrate why posting in a LinkedIn discussion group is a good idea. The first question, if somebody responds, could shed some insight for me as to where I should try to market my services.

But what if nobody posts a response?

Obviously, you would prefer to engage in a conversation. But some percentage of members from the group will take notice of the question and perhaps check out my profile. They may not need a copywriter at the moment, but just by checking out the question and my profile they are making a mental note.

As for the second question, I know from speaking to many web designers that content delays web projects nine times out of 10. Still, it's nice to hear a designer say that in written form in a public forum since, as a copywriter, you offer a solution to the problem. That doesn't mean you will be hired on the spot, but you might be able to connect with some of the graphic designers who respond and have a conversation about their needs for web projects.

LinkedIn Discussion Groups: Your social secret weapon

Discussion groups are all about the discussion in the group and continuing that discussion offline with people in the group. LinkedIn discussion groups are fairly underutilized by most small business owners.

Now, it's not necessary to join the maximum groups allowed, 50. Pick four or five to follow and post to those on a somewhat regular basis. If you are creating content for a blog or have a press release you recently put out, sharing to your discussion groups can also be a good way to get some attention and start a discussion with members of the group.

Being active in discussion groups can also position you as a thought leader in your area of expertise. So can starting a LinkedIn Discussion Group of your own. It's fairly straightforward to set up. You can determine who can join and you set the rules for posting. You can also post discussion topics of interest to you that showcase your expertise.

For example, let's say I started a Small Business Marketing Group with a focus on LinkedIn. There are any number of topics we could discuss, ranging from what to put in your profile to how often you should post and more. As the group grows and discussions abound, members might turn to me with questions or ask for guidance. This could lead to other discussions about my blog writing services or press release capabilities. You never know. It's all about starting discussions and LinkedIn Discussion groups, for the most part, do that.

Covid & Beyond Response

At the beginning of the crisis, starting a discussion on strategies in response to the pandemic might have evoked a decent response. Now, not so much. "What is working for you" questions typically do well. So, you could start a discussion "What marketing strategies have worked for you during Covid?". Invariably, somebody will offer an answer and then you can provide your own.

You will want to steer clear of potentially negative topics. Feel good topics can work (e.g. What's the best story of a business stepping up during this crisis that you have heard). You might wonder what that does for your business? It puts you front-of-mind as the person who started the discussion. Some may even check out your profile to see what it is you do. From there, you never know.

Freesource: Please join my LinkedIn Discussion Group, [Small Business Resources Foundation](#)

Start the presses! News releases

Talk about an underutilized asset. Small businesses typically do not put out press releases on a regular basis. Many times, it's because they do not feel there's anything newsworthy going with their business.

Wrong!

Before explaining why newsworthy is really in the eye of the beholder/editor, I want to address why putting out a press release, at least every quarter, is important. To illustrate this example, we will go back to my neighborhood and the family of six next door.

Okay, it's probably unfair to pick on them. Every mother in the neighborhood did this, including my own. When it was dinner time and your child was not home and you were unaware of their whereabouts, you did not call. Nay, nay. You went to the backdoor and yelled.

"Sean!"

"Ricky!"

We could go on with the list of neighborhood names, but you get the point. This broadcast let not only the child being mentioned know they were wanted back home, but it let everybody else in the neighborhood know it, too. If that particular child was in our house, we sent them home. If they were not, we took mental note in case we saw the child pass by our house. The press release acts much in the same way.

Huh?

Think about it. You are the parent shouting for your child. Only it has something to do with your business:

SMB hires Joe Smith as CEO...

SMB celebrates its 10th year in business...

Press releases offer third-party credibility for your small business

SMB's Betty Boop earns MBA...

There are plenty of other possibilities that you can shout out to your local newspapers and trade publications. The editors in this example are the other families in the neighborhood.

How's that?

Editors hear your shouts about your business. If the child is in their home—meaning the release strikes a chord or fills an editorial need—they will respond in turn. That means publishing your release or, better yet, returning your shout with their own. That means assigning a reporter and writing a story on your news.

Much like the parent calling for their kid, they will not often hear a response back. Yet don't think for a minute that everybody in the neighborhood didn't hear it. More importantly, they will be listening for the next time that parent yells.

Okay, if you didn't follow that, I can clarify. Putting out a press release always has value, whether it makes the online or hard copy edition or not. One way is by announcing your business to editors of local newspapers and niche publications. This is why pushing out releases on a fairly regular basis is so important.

Editors are looking for good stories. If they are receiving releases from you on a regular basis—say once a quarter—they will give your release its due attention. That doesn't mean the first time they receive a release from a source it gets deleted. But it will not get the same level of scrutiny as a release from a source that regularly sends quality material.

So, while establishing a reputation with editors stands as one reason to push out news releases, you're probably thinking you want a little more bang for your buck than that. How about this:

Guaranteed coverage.

That's right. With all the various free press release sites out there, you are virtually guaranteed coverage every time you issue a release.

Press releases offer third-party credibility for your small business

If you're unfamiliar with free press release distribution sites, it's quite simple. One yours truly uses is www.prlog.org. Essentially, these types of sites act as an aggregator of news. This draws traffic to their site and helps them sell their products and services. For example, PRLog.org also has paid distribution services and it also offers writing services.

Essentially all you have to do is create a free account and post your release. It even lets you choose the category, add keywords or keyword phrases, post a photo and some other bells and whistles. Bottom line, your release will appear online and people doing a search on your company will find it.

So? What does that do?

The value of PR is in third-party credibility. You see an ad online or in a newspaper, the intent is clear: you are being sold something. Yet when an article is in a newspaper, a statement is being made: somebody who has nothing to gain by the sale of this product thinks its worthy of their readers' attention.

Do not underestimate that factor.

When you are out in the world trying to sell your goods or services, prospects will Google you. That search will start on your website. Yet most people expect to be sold once there, usually with some facts laced with a call to action. There's nothing wrong with that. Consumers expect it, which is why they will look at other websites and review sites that mention your company.

A news release you post on prlog.org or any other site offers third-party credibility. Why? Because most publications, even free release sites, will not post release that are advertorials—articles that are more like ads. It's an unwritten code. Actually, editors will quite plainly tell you if your release sounds like an ad and then try to sell you advertising space.

Anyway, the importance of guaranteed coverage is you now have a link. Not only will people checking out your company stumble onto the release, but you now have the proverbial gold in today's information age:

THE LINK

Press releases offer third-party credibility for your small business

Getting the link means you have fodder for your social media sites. You also have a collateral piece should you wish to share the release with your networking group, prospects, LinkedIn contacts, etc.

Besides prlog.org, you have a number of press release distribution sites from which to choose. Many local online newspapers accept online submissions. Patch.com is one of those. As long as your news release reads like news. The beauty of that is your news release can then be part of Patch's social media efforts, which can greatly broaden your audience.

Of course, you also run the possibility of your release getting into publications on their own merits—AKA editor's decision. So, readers of that publication—your target audience—can read about your company.

Does that mean they immediately act and call you up and place an order?

Maybe. But most likely not at first. Much like the neighbors who don't know the whereabouts of the kid whose parents are calling for him/her, readers may not have a need for your product or service right at that moment. Yet a mental note is being made for when they do or hear of somebody who does.

And, oh yeah, YOU GET THE LINK!

What should your release be about?

A sticking point for many small business owners, particularly solopreneurs. You would be surprised at how many topics you could write about:

Press releases offer third-party credibility for your small business

- Milestones – A simple release announcing the __th anniversary of your company could work. Or an employee's __th anniversary with the company.
- New hires – If you have hired staff, even on a part-time basis, it's an opportunity to push out a release.
- New business – Did you just land a new account? This can also be a good opportunity to promote your business and that of your client. Be sure to run any PR efforts related to the account by your client. Also, tread carefully when promoting client wins. Your competition probably checks out your web page and the news and may target your client. It's one price of publicity. Yet it usually only becomes a factor if you do not do a good job for that client.
- New service – Do you have a new offering? Great time to draft a release to share with the general public.
- New associations – Did you recently join your local chamber of commerce? Would they mind if you put out a release announcing your membership? Have you joined any other networking groups? Perhaps you could put something out about that membership?
- Charitable endeavors – Do you regularly donate to a cause? Do you volunteer for anything? These two can be an opportunity to put out a release. Yours truly annually participates in the Movember fundraiser. When I participate on a Movember team, we have put out a release and received coverage in local newspapers. These types of releases have to be written with some finesse. You want to promote the cause first, your business second. When you get coverage, everybody wins.

Release distribution

We talked about this before. But prior to pushing out your release, you want to take care of a few last important details:

- Have somebody's whose proofing/editing opinion you trust to proof the release.
- Have a digital photo of you available to go out with the release. Preferably, the photo should show you and your company logo somewhere in the shot and be high resolution (300 dpi or more). It can be on your shirt or the signage at your place of business.

Once you have your release edited and a photo ready to go, where do you send the release. The most obvious answer is your local newspapers.

Your releases should be sent to the business editor of your local daily newspaper as well as the managing editor of the local community newspaper. If there is a local business journal, they should also receive the release.

Press releases offer third-party credibility for your small business

Hopefully, you are familiar with your local dailies and community newspapers. If not, then you can do a few searches that will help. Simply Google:

“daily news, your town, your state”

That should turn up at least one publication if not more.

Similarly, do a search on:

“community newspapers for your town, your state”

Again, this will turn up several links. Just click on those links and look for contact information for the editorial department. These websites should also have a phone number for general information, so you can call and ask where you can send your release and photo.

Again, there are a number of online publications where you can post your press release. You may want to tread lightly on this option. The Google search engine spiders tend to frown on duplicate content. So, you may only want to place your release in one or two places.

Tracking coverage:

The parent in your neighborhood yelling for their kid to come home had an idea but did not know exactly how far his/her voice carried. Today, we have Google alerts.

Whether you send out releases or not, you should set up a Google alert to keep track of mentions of your company online. It's free and easy to set up. Simply go to [Google Alerts](#). You will want to set up an alert on the specific name of your company and do so in quotations so you are only receiving alerts on the exact mention of your company. For example:

“HiRoad Communications”

You should also create an alert on your name:

“Joe D’Eramo”, “HiRoad Communications”

Press releases offer third-party credibility for your small business

Again, you only want to know what's being mentioned about you.

Typically, you need a Google account to take advantage of these free services. It's well worth setting up one so you are aware of what's being said about your business and if you get coverage.

Of course, if you do get coverage, you should share to all your social media.

Repurpose, repurpose, repurpose

As you can tell, drafting and distributing a release takes a lot of work. So, you want to get the most bang for your buck out of the release by using the content in other places—e.g. your newsletter, your blog, in your lead magnet or expand upon it and make an article.

How do you do that?

It takes a little finesse to alter the copy to suit the audience. The format and tone of the copy for your newsletter should sound a little different than a press release. You should talk to your audience in a newsletter while a release is more of a presentation of the who, what, when, where, why and how. It may sound like a lot more work but it's not.

The point is that if you push out a press release every quarter it can get you some coverage and just as importantly provide you content in other areas.

Covid & Beyond Response

You may think now is not the time to be pushing out news releases. There may be more of an appetite for local business news as people and editors want to read about how small businesses come out of the pandemic. A local business that has some news—e.g. __th anniversary—is a welcome change to news about businesses going under. If you were involved in a community effort to help out during Covid, it's worth pushing out a release to take a bow and let people know these types of activities were going on. It serves that purpose and the added bonus of keeping your business relevant.

Freesource:

- [PRLog.org](https://prlog.org)
- [50 Free Sites to Post Your Company's Press Release](#)

Your blog – the press release’s kid brother/sister

Do you currently have a blog on your website? If you are one of the 75 million people who used WordPress for your website, you should know the answer: YES! If you do not or do not know, check with your web designer. Most website formats have a blog component.

Now, the question is “do you need a blog?”.

That really depends on who you ask. My answer is yes.

You want to blog because you will need fresh content for your website. A stagnant site where you have had little or no updates or new content—sticks out like sore thumb, and not in a good way.

A blog provides great fodder for your social media sites. While it’s nice that you post interesting articles to your Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts, you don’t get a whole lot of benefit out of it if readers click and go to somebody else’s website. By sharing your blog posts, you will get more visitors to your website.

Another area where a blog comes in handy is with search engine optimization (SEO). Using targeted keywords in your blogs can help draw additional traffic to your website, which is always a good thing.

Now, SEO is a specialty. It’s something you can learn or outsource. If you’re a small business owner running your own website and strapped for time already, you may want to hire somebody to do this. For the newbie, writing the blog and optimizing will take an investment of your time that you may not have.

One caveat to writing blogs for SEO, you will need to write your blog posts of a certain length. Google keeps changing the rules on that one. But you better be prepared to draft blogs in the neighborhood of 600-1,600 words with targeted keywords if you want to draw traffic.

Do not underestimate the power of a blog

What to write about

It's really your call. Write about things relevant to your business that position you as a subject matter expert. Talk about a success you have had with a recent client. Many of the things you wrote about for your newsletter or press release are also good material for your blog. It literally can be about anything you want as long as it ties into your business. Some suggested topics:

- Case study – Write about work with a recent client and how you being good at what you do created a favorable result
- Current events – There may be something happening in the country that has an impact on the general public and people in your profession. For example, the government shutdown. If you're a CPA or own an accounting firm, you could write a blog post on the impacts the shutdown could have on tax returns.
- Employee news – Do you have any type of incentive programs for your staff? Maybe a blog post on that program. Perhaps a profile on the most recent winner.
- Services – Provide some insight into the training and skill it takes to do what you do. That can be a blog on what you had to learn in school or what special training it takes for your profession.

As you can see, there aren't too many things you can't cover in your blog. The difficulty for the small business owner is making the time. Weekly is ideal. If you can make time for two a month, you can work with that. The important thing is once you start, do not let a month go by without adding new content.

Just a side note, many small business owners are now using video in their blog posts as a way of coming up with new content that doesn't require a lot of time at the keyboard.

Now, you might be saying wouldn't that be a bit more difficult to do than drafting a blog? For some. For others, not so much. Most small business owners can talk about their businesses. Pretty much all can answer a question about their business—especially if you are the one asking the question.

Where I'm going with this is you could create a short video—30 seconds to a minute—just answering one of the questions you get frequently asked about your business. You can record a video with most, if not all laptops and smart phones. If you can record your answer to a question, you can have a video ready to post in fairly short order.

Do not underestimate the power of a blog

Not a gifted public speaker? You really don't have to be. Just be natural and answer the question as if somebody was sitting right in front of you. Maybe you stumble here or there. But that's natural, that's authentic. People like that.

With a combination of video and written blogs as options, you should be able to keep blog current with posts a few times a month or more.

Covid & Beyond Response

Similar tip as other sections. However many times per week or month you were blogging, double it. Doing this coming out of the pandemic will be important as well.

Freesource: Stuck for ideas on what to write about for your blog? This article offers 101 ideas that might help you out, <https://startbloggingonline.com/blog-post-ideas/>

Article writing

Do you have a topic you feel strongly about and want to find an audience larger than your blog? Drafting an article to submit to your local newspaper is an option. Particularly in a day and age where newspapers are so understaffed and looking for original content.

The question here becomes one of time. Can you write the article with minimal assistance—e.g. editing/proofreading? Is it worth investing the time and effort if you're unsure your article will run?

Maybe.

Much like press releases, there are article submission websites where you can post an article. Unless your article sounds too self-promotional, these submission sites will allow the post and you will have a link to use for your social media and website newsroom.

Patch.com loves content like this. If your town has a Patch or if you are near a Patch town, you can post there. Again, you get the link and that always has value.

Where articles have the most value is in your marketing and networking activities. If you are part of a networking group, having an article that positions you as a subject matter expert is a nice leave-behind. Similarly, if you are talking to a prospect, a printout of an article can be a nice thing to include with your company brochure.

One caveat: don't make the mistake of thinking an article is just a blog with fewer words. Depending on the publication, your article could be targeting a slightly different audience. Some of the casual language you might use in a blog may not play so well in an article. Particularly in a trade publication.

Whether you are a writer or not, always have a second set of eyes look over your work before posting or submitting. When you have somebody look at it, if it's a peer or somebody in the industry, ask his/her opinion if the article is appropriate or in a tone right for the publication. In medicine and in writing, it never hurts to have a second opinion—even if you don't agree with it.

Articles establish you as a subject matter expert

Covid & Beyond Response

It's not rocket science, folks. We're coming out of a pandemic and you're trying to stay front of mind. Creating content and pushing it out to get links for your social media sites and website newsroom is how you're going to achieve that objective. Increase the volume of articles you produce as much as you can. Double it. Quadruple it. The more the merrier.

Freesource- www.ezinearticles.com

Google My Business

That's not a command but one of the more overlooked opportunities for small business owners to be found.

Google My Business is essentially a way to list your business on Google Maps. It requires you to provide some information about your business, the most important being a physical address. Even if you do not conduct business at your home office—by that I mean entertain clients/customers there—you should claim your business on Google My Business.

Why?

When people do searches for specific types of businesses, it will often be by town or region. Within the search you typically see three listings with a map nearby. The map shows the nearest results of the search on Google Maps—those are noted with red pins. This three business listing—otherwise known as the three-pack—is shown below paid ads and above the first free search listing. So, getting in that three-pack has tremendous value to your business.

How do you get there?

You get to the three-pack with five-star Google reviews. While there are some additional variables that Google doesn't like to share, the business with more reviews and more five-star reviews is more likely to be shown in the three-pack.

How do you get five-star reviews?

Besides being awesome at what you do you need to conduct some type of campaign to generate reviews. In other words, find a way to ask your customers and your peers to review your business on Google.

The best way to do this is via e-mail with a link to your Google My Business page. It's pretty straightforward on how to review a business. Just click on the review link. Yet you would be amazed how difficult it can be for people to actually go ahead and leave a review—even when they said they want to provide a testimonial and commit to doing it. That's why you have to make it incredibly easy for your customers and peers to leave a review.

The secret for first page search results

And how do you do that?

There are a number of review-generating programs out there. Yours truly prefers one that has a number of elements that make it beyond easy for your network to leave a review. Those elements include:

- A three-e-mail funnel that sends out e-mails on the first, third and seventh days reminding people on your list to leave a review. Those that do on the first round will not receive a second e-mail. Those that don't leave a review will receive a second e-mail. Those who don't leave reviews will receive one final e-mail.
- Widgets for an e-mail signature. This makes leaving a review as simple as asking people for the review and telling them to click on the thumbs up in your signature.
- Widgets on your home page – Not only do the widgets show the reviews you have received to date, but it provides a button for visitors and others to click on and leave a review.

There are several other review programs out there. Do your research and see if there's one that fits your budget. Or, you can try and get your best customers to go to your Google My Business page. However you decide to do it, you should make a point to ask your best customers for testimonials year round. These are an invaluable part of marketing, make for great content for your website and social media pages, and, if you use Google My Business, can get you on the first page of relevant searches for your business.

Covid & Beyond Response:

In the beginning of the pandemic, many networking groups and organizations advocated giving five-star reviews for people they know. Google wised up a little and slowed down on the time it took to post those reviews. But reviews were eventually posted.

If you're business has experienced a slowdown, it can be a great time to circle back to customers who have in the past have offered to provide a testimonial. Ask them if they would be willing to provide a Google review as well. Offer to return the favor by writing one for them. Making one request per week can lead to a decent amount of reviews.

Bonus: Get the lead (magnet) out

Okay, that was bad. But having a lead magnet or e-book is one of the best things you can do for your website and in developing a mailing list for your enewsletter.

First, what is a lead magnet or e-book and why is it such a great thing for my website? Great question, glad you asked.

Lead magnets are used as a free offer to visitors to your website in exchange for some basic contact information: name and e-mail in most cases. In exchange for that information, visitors can then download your lead magnet or e-book.

And what is that?

It can be whatever you want it to be. What it should be is essentially a PDF containing content that demonstrates your expertise in a certain area. Actually, you are reading an oversized lead magnet/e-book right now.

So, why do you need one for your website?

Think about it. If you are going to invest in an e-newsletter, you're going to need to develop a list. Yes, you can create one from your existing contacts and networks. But what about new business and prospects? It's not often that people visit a website and then decide to retain your services. They need to feel comfortable enough to take that next step to reach out and start a conversation. Often times, an e-book can be that bridge.

The beauty of the e-book nowadays is that you don't have to be an author to write one. In fact, you don't even have to create new content. The first e-book I wrote contained 15 blogs I had already written. Putting the e-book together was simply a matter of find the right software. I used Designrr and it could not have been easier. It was just a matter of plugging the URLs of blogs I had already written and then doing a little editing.

Building your list with a lead magnet benefits you largely because those folks have some level of interest in you or what you do. That means you have a decent shot at converting them into part of your network or, even better, customers.

Build your e-mail list with a lead magnet

A lead magnet serves you in many other ways. It provides you fodder for your social media—e.g. “Hey, download your free copy of our new e-book!”. Your e-book is probably loaded with potential topics for LinkedIn discussion groups. You could even put out a press release announcing your new e-book.

A lead magnet is also a nice “leave behind” for one-on-ones and meetings with prospects.

There are plenty of other uses, but that’s fodder for another e-book.

Covid & Beyond Response:

If you had the time during the slowdown during the pandemic, it was a great time to create a lead magnet/ebook. Besides giving you a great way to capture contact info on your home page, you added some invaluable fodder for all your social media channels. If you haven't created one, it's worth doing now. Beyond your social media pages, you can even put out a short news release announcing your ebook. Will it make the front page of your local newspaper? Probably not. But the name of the game is to keep your business out there in the public eye and in the eyes of relevant media. Producing a new or even updated ebook gives you the legs to start a campaign and stay front-of-mind.

Free-source: More about [Designrr](#).

Conclusion

This book started out comparing marketing to an annoying child interrupting dinner time. In some ways, it is. You can go on with your business and not pay attention to the basics of an active marketing plan and maybe you will keep your current customers and they will tell others about your product or services and your business will grow enough that way. That's putting an awful lot of your own destiny in other people's hands. During the current pandemic, its business suicide.

What marketing does is give the people who like your product or service the tools to go out to their individual worlds and tell the about your business with YOUR message.

Back to our example. Let's say you invited the neighborhood kid in to sit with you for dinner. She learns a little more about your family. Maybe he/she invites your child over to his/her house for dinner. The two become the best of friends. That could last through grade school. Perhaps even the rest of their lives. You just never know. But an awful lot can begin with a simple tap on the glass.

Do you need help getting your basic marketing plan together? Take the HiRoad. [HiRoad Communications](#). Call (617) 848-0848 today for a complimentary, cursory evaluation of your current marketing plan.

7 Marketing Essentials for Small Business Owners

Where does your marketing plan stand?

Thank you for downloading my ebook. It would be greatly appreciated if you could take this short survey. [Just click here.](#)

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