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## WEB ADVERTISING FOR THE SMALL BUSINESS

If you run a small business, advertising costs must be figured in as part of your overall expenses. If you have received quotes for phone directory ads, business association block ads, and mostly any other print media, these costs are quite high. So, what if your budget is small, perhaps negligible? Will you be left outside of the advertising arena or are there other avenues to help you get the word out? The answer in one word is: yes. Let's explore ways you can "get the word out" through online means...yes, via the internet!

The rise of the internet has spawned an entire industry with it. You may remember in the late 1990s stories of dot.com companies who made a fortune and then went bust. The "irrational exuberance" of that era has, thankfully, passed by and in its place is a much more rational, but very lively market.

Today's biggest players online are search engine providers led by Google, Yahoo!, and MSN. Between them, these three search engines dominate the market. Mostly everyone today searches the internet for products sold by small businesses to large corporations and these are the people you want to target. Indeed, while Christmas season sales typically increase around 4% year over year for "brick and mortar" retailers, the internet has been seeing year over year increases of 30% and higher! No small business operator should exclude the internet when crafting a marketing plan.

Speaking of the search engines, both Google and Yahoo! have their own advertising networks. Google has its AdWords program while the Yahoo! Publisher Network is a comparable, though newer program. This is where you, as a small business owner, can do some of your advertising. By selecting the advertising plan that works for you, you can have your ads appear on web sites in your local area or across the world and be charged a small amount per click. In other words, you don't pay for advertising unless someone clicks on your ad and goes through to your site. To keep clicks from getting out of control you determine the price per click and the amount per day, week, or month you are willing to pay. No busting of your small business budget!

Banner or text ads on select sites can also be helpful for your small business. If there is a web site you like and you suspect that a lot of your customers would frequent that site, contact the webmaster to learn what his advertising charges would be. Perhaps in exchange for submitting a few helpful articles, the webmaster would waive your advertising fee altogether. Or, at the very least, accept any other help you could provide [moderating a forum, answering questions, etc.].

Another way of getting the word out is through your own web site. No, you don't need a web professional to establish your site, but it does help to have someone who can guide you through the set up process. At the very least a few pages is what you will need, so set up costs shouldn't be terribly expensive. In addition, figure on paying monthly hosting and domain name fees but these expenses should be no more than \$100-\$125 per year. Pay a little extra for a web professional who can help you optimize your site [make it search engine friendly] and you'll get your money back much quicker. Finally, check with your accountant for small business tax deductions.

You can also generate plenty of attention by writing articles, just like the one you are reading now. No, you don't need to be a professional writer, but if you can clearly convey your thoughts and present a plan of action for your readers [such as: buy my product] you can get what amounts to be free advertising. How so? By submitting what you write to article submission sites for wider dissemination. By including helpful links in the author resource box you can cause search engines to make your web site much more visible as your article gets reprinted on other web sites. Furthermore, readers will perceive that you are an "expert" and will likely inquire to find out just what you are all about. You can call this, "small business advertising on the cheap!"

No, as a small business owner you don't have to be strapped by high advertising costs -- who has the cash to spare? Instead, the internet offers to you several cost effective ways of informing people about who you are, what you do, and where they can find you.

Select the marketing plan that works best for your small business. A mixture of all four points is a great plan of attack for many small business owners...just like you!

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