



**SHEPHERD  
& GOLDSTEIN**  
Business Consultants and  
Certified Public Accountants

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# Grow your Business

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## Grow Your Business Investment

One of the fundamental pillars of a solid business growth plan is your marketing plan. In short, how you plan to bring in more new customers, and keep the customers you've established delighted so that they return to buy again as well as tell their friends all about buying from you.

The 'what' we need to do is common across industries and regions. The articles which follow are presented to encourage you to think about 'how'. Specifically there are many examples of 'how' to run a business that builds it's customer base which you can borrow and expand upon to encourage your own growth of customers and thereby the growth of your investment in your business.

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Editor

## Time To Let Others Know How Good You Are

Advertising to your target market the products or services you sell is a great way to inform potential clients of what you have to offer. But every claim made in your advertisement is colored by the knowledge that you are promoting products for financial gain. Accordingly, a potential client will keep in the front of their mind that the promised relationship is between a seller and a buyer. As the famous saying goes, caveat emptor - "buyer beware". You can't trust everything that you read in advertising.

However, every company is sitting on a highly valuable asset which, if used properly, has the potential to dramatically increase the number of new clients. That's right - a list of satisfied clients.

### The secret behind star ratings



Potential clients like to read about satisfied clients because it is seen as an independent verification of the claims made in an ad. When you read how much someone has been satisfied by a spending decision, it raises confidence that the de-

cision is a good one for other people too. And instead of a conversation between a seller and a buyer, you now have a buyer talking to a potential buyer about the positive experience they enjoyed with your organization.

*"Our company is in the process of financing a construction project through the SBA and has needed financials and other deliverables on very short notice. Every request has been responded to promptly and it is greatly appreciated!"*

*Please pass along my sincere thanks to your staff!"*

The power of recommendations is evident in the way e-commerce sites place user reviews or star ratings right at the top of the page next to the 'buy' button. Potential clients believe in safety in numbers, and if 40 out of 50 people have given a product five stars they will feel reassured that buying that product is highly likely to be a wise decision.

## Collecting Feedback

Satisfied clients are a fantastic resource because you already know who they are - it's information you freely own. There's nothing stopping you from emailing your best clients tomorrow for their opinions, although you might get a better response if you request feedback personally. Always ask their permission first before you include a testimonial; some clients might not consent to their name being used in a marketing campaign.

The first step is often the hardest. Collecting client satisfaction ratings can be a revealing and not always positive experience. Some clients might love the product but have reservations about the timeliness in delivery, the quality of your website or the attitude of your sales team.

Recommendations consist of two elements - the message itself and the identity of the referrer. Both are important. It's often interesting to look at the 'puffs' on the back of a book

jacket; sometimes the bigger ‘names’ are quoted first, even if their recommendations aren’t as glowing.

Once you have a selection of short, snappy quotes from reputable clients, add them to any location a client might see them. That might mean your website, business card, newsletter, in-store marketing, pamphlets, corporate t-shirts. You can view an example of how Shepherd & Goldstein implemented this advice under the “Our Guarantee” page of our website at [www.sgllp.com/about\\_guarantee.shtml](http://www.sgllp.com/about_guarantee.shtml). Good news deserves to be shared.

## Cost Promotion—A Low Cost Way To Grow Your Business

With marketing budgets under pressure, business owners and managers are looking for ways to do more with less. One of the most effective ways to find new customers with minimal expense is cross promotion.

Cross promotion is simply when two or more businesses combine resources to market their products or services to each other’s customers. The main criteria for success in cross promotion are that the businesses serve the same types of customers but don’t compete with each other.

There are hundreds of ways businesses can work together to achieve this. Here are a few cross-promotion ideas that can help you expand your market on a small budget.

1. Two businesses can agree to display each other’s brochures. An example is a pharmacy that displays brochures for a therapeutic furniture store. In return the furniture store will display brochures promoting the pharmacy. This is a good match because both businesses serve people with health issues.

Businesses can agree to put each other’s promotional materials in shopping bags when customers make purchases. Another option is to print promotional messages, or coupons, on each other’s cash register receipts.

2. On a business to business level, companies serving the same markets can include each other’s brochures when they send out invoices to their customers. For example, a commercial printer includes a brochure from a commercial photography agency that serves the same market. In return, the company providing commercial photography will include the printer’s brochure in its mailings.
3. Professionals can also benefit from cross promotion. For example, a financial planner, lawyer, accountant and insurance broker can produce a joint seminar where they speak about wealth creation and risk minimization. Each participant raises their credibility by speaking at the event, gaining access to new clients.

A key part of cross promotion is credibility. By working with other respected businesses you instantly gain credibility

amongst their clients. You also add value for your clients by letting them know about quality products and services you endorse.

If you haven’t done any cross promotion before, you can start by asking, “Who are my potential customers?” Once you have determined this, write a list of non-competing businesses that sell to the same types of customers as you do. You probably already know people in business who would be ready and willing to start a cross promotion alliance. First, it’s important you ensure that companies you cross promote with are reliable and offer quality products or services. Getting into an alliance with a company that doesn’t meet customer expectations can damage your reputation.

Once you have found a partner to work with, meet and brainstorm ideas on how you can best work together. Discuss the ways in which you currently make contact with your customers. Are there ways you can work together using these existing methods? If you have a retail business, you can focus on in-store promotions such as posters, displays, brochures and coupons.



If you are in a service or consulting business, you can promote each other in direct mail pieces, newsletters, on your website or in any other ways that you connect with your customers. As mentioned, joint seminars will raise the credibility of the speakers while giving them access to each other’s customers.

You don’t have to limit yourself to one business when cross promoting. For example, separate companies offering home renovation, interior design, painting, flooring, plumbing and electrical services can combine mailing lists and create joint promotions to send to their customers. These companies all provide home improvement services, but don’t directly compete with each other.

If you’re having trouble coming up with relevant cross-promotion ideas, here are a few more.

- Include a coupon offer for new customers to include when mailing bills out to each others customers.
- Mention the benefits of each other’s products or services when speaking at local events, to the media, or to your customers.
- Promote your partner’s products during their slow times and ask them to do the same for you.

- Train your staff to promote your cross-promotion partner's products or services.
- Give your partner's product to your customers when they buy a large quantity of yours and ask your partner to do the same for you.

If you need some help brainstorming ideas, look to your network of support—business partners, spouse, your assigned S&G team member, board members, and other advisors.

### Why Old-Fashioned Networking Still Rules In Electronic Times

Despite the benefits of online contact any time, from anywhere, personal interaction is as good for business now as it was 20 years ago. In the world away from your desktop, your competitors are shaking hands with your potential customers over lunch or a laugh right now. What are you waiting for? Get out of the office and network.

Making personal business connections may take longer, but they are potentially as important as driving web traffic and planning your advertising campaigns. For relatively little expense, seeking industry events and other face-to-face business opportunities should form an equal part of your marketing strategy.

When business is slow, mass marketing or email marketing your existing clients seems the obvious low-cost option to generate sales, but forging personal networks with face-to-face contact brings a unique set of advantages. And there's no 'delete' key.

#### Networking builds trust



The important thing missing from online contact is the real connections that create genuine trust.

The advantage good networkers enjoy is access to more private or useful knowledge only available through personal contact. Filing unmanageable amounts of downloaded documents or exchanging emails is no replacement for conversations that spill over into further mutual contacts and unexpected opportunities.

Meeting with people also brings different skill sets to a business relationship. Online, you tend to stick to one topic or problem. Where a gathering incorporates socializing, common interests outside business tend to crop up too, leading to

wider networks and experiences.

In person, you are also more likely to discover how someone's organization works. The more 'flat' management structure of businesses today means that the 'say' in decision-making is spread widely among managers and employees. You could be chatting with one of the company's key influencers, regardless of their title. The way information flows through a company is an example of the important detail you may learn from a real conversation that is unlikely to come up otherwise.

For potential clients, time spent seeking quotes and meeting new suppliers might be happily avoided by using a personal contact met through networking. If you made a good impression in a semi-social setting, you might simply get the order or at least a chance to quote along with a current supplier.

Consider taking staff along to networking functions or sending them to represent you if you can't attend. This will boost employee engagement, particularly in uncertain times when spending cut-backs are threatening morale and motivation.

#### Types of networking

Depending on your industry and your business' stage of development, there are events of all sizes and costs where you can meet peers, suppliers, potential customers or neighboring companies.

Chambers of commerce, local governments, community and industry groups are in the business of connecting small business operators. They welcome new members and participants for speaking, presenting workshops or sponsorship. There are niche events for women only, for small business and for new businesses. Trade shows often have after-hours events attached designed for networking.

During annual calendar events like, "small business week" or similar, there are often a series of activities designed for education and networking. An internet search should find when these are coming up in your city.

#### Tips for successful networking

Once you've identified the best networking opportunities for your available time, make the most of them:

- Be organized; arrive on time and take lots of business cards. Keep a positive attitude about the event and an open mind about the people you meet.

#### An Important Message

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- If you're nervous, focus on an outcome to suit your comfort level. Simply aim to "approach three strangers for a conversation", or "meet the keynote speaker" or have a similar goal that makes attendance worthwhile.
- Smile, look people in the eyes and give a firm handshake. Give your complete attention, use people's names and note special information on their business card for future reference
- Listen. Switch off your phone and be 'present'. Ask questions. You never know where a conversation will lead or who other people know.
- Have a sentence or two ready, describing your business, tailored with the listener in mind – ideally framed as a problem of theirs that you can solve. Don't just list off your services or latest achievements.
- Make a note of how people prefer to be contacted. Some welcome phone calls over email; for others, only social networking like Twitter will get their attention.
- Don't 'oversell'. Pressing business cards on people before moving on to new 'targets' is a turn-off. Save the sales pitch for a follow-up meeting.
- If you promise to forward information or put a new acquaintance in contact with someone, do it straight away. You'll be remembered for being reliable – priceless.

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### Comments? Changes?

We all want to improve what doesn't work...but we need YOUR help! Share your improvement ideas and topics you would like to read in future issues with:

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