

# Ten Low-Cost Ways to Promote Your Business

Part 1: Business Promotion Starts with Your Contact Information

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Business promotion is to running a successful business as practicing scales is to playing the piano well; it may not be a thrilling activity in itself, but you just have to do it! You should spend at least an hour a day on business promotion or planning how to promote your business (and more is better, if you can fit the time in)!

You promote your business by getting the word out. The first axiom of business promotion is that you have to do this consciously. You can't rely on other people to do it for you, no matter how great your product or service is.

The second axiom of business promotion is that like every other aspect of your business, it's a budgeted activity. But business promotion doesn't have to be expensive. Here are ten inexpensive ways to promote your business; all most of these will cost you is some time.

## **1) Use every outgoing piece of paper, and every electronic document as business promotion.**

You have business cards, but you also put out a lot of other documents in the course of doing business. Check these to make sure you're using their promotional possibilities to full advantage.

For instance, business stationery is an ideal business promotion tool. Is your business name, logo, contact information (including URL if you have one), and slogan on your envelopes as well as on your letterhead? Or are your envelopes only printed with your business name and return address? What a waste! Your phone and fax numbers, your URL, and even a memorable slogan should be there, too. It's not just an envelope; it's a business promotion tool! You're sending it out anyway, so why not make it work for you?

The same goes for outgoing faxes, bill payments, receipts; whatever paper you send out should carry your full company message. And don't forget to make sure that your email has a complete signature that provides all your business information and a promotional tagline.

Electronic documents, such as email, are also easy to update with your latest business promotion information, whether it be a special price on your product or service, or letting people know that your company has won an award. If you need information about using signature files with particular mail programs, visit About Email Guide Heinz Tschabitscher's [Signature links](#).

Articles and press releases are also excellent business promotion tools that you can use to promote your business inexpensively.

## **2) Writing articles on topics related to your business expertise is an excellent business promotion technique.**

Well-written articles can provide free advertising and build positive word-of-mouth. If you're a realtor, for instance, you could write a piece on preparing your home to be shown. If you're a Web site designer, you might write a piece about assessing Web site usability. The more specific your topic, the better. Write a short biographical note, or "blurb" about you and your business to go with the article. Then send it out!

Where? As the goal is to promote your business, ideally you'd like it to appear in a publication that your target audience will be reading. Realistically, you may have to send it to a publication that accepts unsolicited work from unknown authors. Magazines generally have a long lead time, so I would focus my first efforts on the 'Net. There are an astronomical number of e-zines and sites with newsletters that are hungry for content.

One place to look for e-zines to send articles to is [E-Zines Net Top 20 Directories](#). E-zines also provide excellent advertising value; the trick is to find the right e-zine for your target audience. Freelance writing sites also provide a great deal of information on all kinds of publications that might publish your efforts. Make your research easier by starting with a great site that provides all kinds of lists and information on markets such as [About Freelance Writers](#), or [FreelanceWriting.com](#).

Newspapers are also excellent places to place your business promotion article, as they too have a much shorter lead-time than magazines, and are always looking for material. Try contacting the Business editor of your local paper and pitching your article. If this approach fails, you might be able to get your piece into the paper by sending it in as a letter to the Editorial section.

### **3) Sending out press releases is another great way to get some free business promotion.**

The caveat to using press releases as a business promotion tool is that your press release has to actually contain information that is newsworthy, and be engaging enough to get people's interest. Has your business recently expanded? Do you have a new product? Have you been involved in some promotional activity such as sponsoring a charity event? Have you or your company recently won an award? All of these are examples of "news" that you can capitalize on to get some free promotion for your business.

While many business people send press releases to newspapers as a matter of course, don't forget about the Internet. Web sites like mine, for example, that specialize in providing business-related information, are interested in you and your accomplishments. You're always welcome to post your press release or information about your event on the [Small Business: Canada forum](#), for instance.

What else can you do to get some free business promotion? What about using Internet forums and freebies as business promotion tools or doing some buddy marketing to promote your business?

### **4) If you're an Internet user, spend some of your online time on business promotion.**

Posting messages in forums (a.k.a. bulletin boards) is a great way to make your business known to people you would otherwise be unable to contact. You can't blatantly advertise your business on most forums, but you can show others that you're a knowledgeable, personable individual and promote your business through your signature file.

Getting people interested in your business and perhaps attracting new customers works best if you choose forums that are business-related (such as my [Small Business: Canada forum](#)) or directly related to your business's product or service.

The other caveat with choosing forums to post in is to check their level of activity; posting in a forum that doesn't have much traffic or regular activity isn't going to do much to promote your business.

### **5) Use buddy marketing to promote your business.**

For example, if you send out brochures, you could include a leaflet and/or business card of another business, which had agreed to do the same for you. This gives you the chance to reach a whole new pool of potential customers.

You might also plan and carry out business promotions with complementary businesses. A pet store and a pet grooming business, for example, might use shared advertising, or run a contest together. This can considerably cut down the cost of business promotion, and allow each business to use promotion techniques that would be too expensive to implement alone.

#### **6) Give out freebies as business promotion.**

We're all familiar with hearing or reading advertisements that promise that the first 50 people to visit a particular store will receive a free (\_\_\_\_). You fill in the blank. It could be anything from a red rose through an ice-cream cone! We're all familiar with this kind of spot promotion because it works. People love to receive things that are free.

Besides using freebies as business promotions, you can also use them regularly as customer "rewards". For example, I recently had a picture framed; the framer had attached a free picture hanger to the painting's wire, with a small card thanking me for my patronage. It's only a small thing, which certainly didn't cost him much, but as the customer, I appreciate not having to rummage through my home looking for a suitable hanger, and can't help thinking positively about the service he provides. What small, inexpensive things could you give out with your product or service that will get your customer thinking good thoughts about you? Combining business promotion with customer rewards is definitely a win-win situation.

#### **7) Promote your business on a talk show.**

Your local radio station or cable TV station may have programs that are looking for guests - a great low-cost way to promote your business! Business-related programs are ideal. Find out who the host is, and approach him or her as willing to share your expertise on a particular topic.

Call in programs are popular; you may be able to appear as a guest expert. If you're a mechanic, you might offer to take call-in questions on car maintenance; if you operate a health store, you might market yourself as an expert in herbal remedies. Have your proposal clearly worked out before you contact the program host, and make sure the parameters of your appearance, such as details about plugs, are clear beforehand.

#### **8) Promote your business by giving a seminar or presentation.**

You have expertise that other people are interested in! (You couldn't be in business if you didn't.) Why not share that expertise and promote your business at the same time?

For example, a local carpet company advertises a free seminar on installation techniques for a type of laminate flooring. Participants not only learn how to install this type of flooring themselves, but are offered special discount prices if they wish to purchase laminate flooring. Another local retailer who sells goods made of stained glass offers courses on working with stained glass on-site.

If there's no direct tie-in to your product or service, you can still give a presentation on a related topic. Nursery people or horticulturalists, for instance, often give demonstrations on topics such as tree-pruning, or slide shows of famous gardens they've visited. Although most of my business involves providing specific writing or training services to businesses, I give presentations on general topics such as "Promoting Your Business On A Shoestring".

If it's not feasible to present the seminar at your site, because you're a home-based business or just don't have the facilities you would need, arrange to give the seminar elsewhere. Many government-sponsored organizations, such as [Business Service Centres](#) and Economic Development Centres, and

non-profit programs are always looking for experienced business people who are willing to give presentations. You may also be able to arrange to present your topic through the Continuing Education branch of your local college or university.

Scared? Start small and start building a name by making a presentation to one of your local groups such as your Home-Based Business Association or Business Women's network. If public speaking terrifies you, I can't recommend [Toastmasters](#) highly enough; this organization has helped a great many people get over this fear and be able to address groups of people. The link I've given here will lead you to Toastmasters' groups throughout Canada.

### **9) Use your vehicle to promote your business.**

Mobile business promotion isn't just for white delivery vans. Where I live, one in every four vehicles has the name and phone number of a business decorating one of the windows or doors. Think of all the people who see your vehicle when you're driving around - especially if you live in a place where people often get stuck in traffic!

You should be able to get a pair of magnetic signs from your local source for less than a hundred dollars. Or, for an elegant promotional look, you could order [Promo Plates](#), which are quite inexpensive at \$29.95 USD plus shipping and handling.

### **10) Promote your business through your leisure activities.**

One savvy businessman I know relaxes by being part of a rock band. Guess what? Every time his band's gigs are mentioned in the newspaper, the piece also mentions the name of his business!

You may not be part of a band yourself, but everyone does something for "fun". Whether your chosen leisure activity is working on a Spitfire Restoration project, rock-climbing, or shopping, there are all kinds of ways to promote your business while you do what you love to do.

Where's the harm in shopping or rock-climbing wearing a T-shirt that has the name of your business prominently displayed? Or in taking your business cards everywhere you go and clipping your card to the slip when you pay for a purchase by card or cheque? Get in the habit of doing business promotion wherever you go and you'll be surprised how word-of-mouth builds.

If your leisure activity involves a group, you might ask if you can include your business information on all of their out-going paper, or ask if you can at least give everyone a brochure.

And with any kind of group activity, there's always the opportunity to promote your business by letting other people know what you do and how it could benefit them. This doesn't mean that you talk about nothing else, but there are bound to be chances to talk about your business that crop up during normal conversation.

These ten business promotion ideas are just some of the ways you can promote your small business without spending a small fortune. With a little experimentation and time, you'll find out which of these ideas work best for you - and best get the word out about your small business.