

Sam's Advice on Advertising for Small Business

IA Women's Network Meeting Sept 2015

Entrepreneurs

The thing I like about business people, or entrepreneurs, is that we are very tenacious, creative people. We have great ideas that we want to bring to life. And we find ways to do that. Advertising is a way to reach out to our market. It is our lifeblood. And we need to find those creative ways to do it that are distinctive to our own particular business.

Advertising for small business is not about where you can put your ad to reach people. It is about much more than that. Everything you do is a public statement. Be aware of that.

But before you can do any advertising at all make sure you have these things in place (which we all already know):

A simple and recognizable logo or picture - Branding is very important. Hire a professional if you need to. And once you have a good one, keep it. Don't keep changing it. Over time, your market will come to recognize it.

For example, Bruins Plumbing. The Bruins are good friends of mine. Carol passed away a couple of years ago but she shared with me how when they started the company she made the picture of the bear holding the wrench and coined it "The Bear that Cares". It stuck and has never changed to this day and they are the largest plumbing and heating company in western Canada. It remains a symbol that is very well known in this community. Make yours too!

A name; one that clearly represents what kind of business you are offering. I saw the other day a business name on the back window of a pick-up truck (by the way, this is good advertising, but only if you are an excellent driver and remember that your vehicle is a moving advertisement). The name of the company was "acoustic systems", or something like that. I immediately thought that this company must have something to

do with music. But when I read the words beneath the company name it read something about plumbing services. I was confused (and don't remember it). So make sure your name reflects something that connects it to the type of business you are in.

The Golden Rule of Selling

What all good salespeople know is this form of selling (which is advertising):

Sell yourself

Sell the Company

Sell the Product

Sell the Price

Make a commitment for the sale

That's the format most salespeople use to sell their products or services. Do the same when you are advertising. **Sell yourself first. Do this by keeping it personal!**

Keep it Personal -Sell Yourself First

People want to do business with a real person, they want to know who the person is behind the company name, **someone who they can trust and build respect.**

Meet with people on a personal level where possible. In their home, in your home, in your office. Just meet with them and try to make a connection with them. Perhaps your children attend the same school or sporting activity? This is advertising.

Most people are very willing to pay a couple more bucks if they know they are doing business with someone who they can trust and respect, and who they know are **trusted and respected by others.**

Know your Market

Who in your community is going to be needing your products/services? We've all had to understand this when we first started up our businesses. But how does it apply to advertising? It is through understanding how advertising reaches your market. This will be the most important part of my speech today. The most effective way to advertise is to find ways to have your audience **reach you**, rather than you reaching out to them. That means: if you send flyers in the mail, in mailboxes, on car windshields, telemarketing, etc, you are trying to find ways to reach out to people. But most people just throw them away or hang up on you. That's because they may not be interested at this time but mostly they feel you are encroaching on their privacy. A more effective way is to be there when your market is **reaching out to you and are expecting to see advertising**.

For example, let's say someone is in a coffee shop and routinely reads the community paper or newspaper that is always at this particular coffee shop. They are expecting to read not just stories but advertising. They are looking for them. And they don't mind reading them. Some people will save that newspaper just to keep the name of the company they saw advertised. Or how about those ads you see at the hockey arena, on chuck wagon canvases, on the radio, on vehicles, etc.? Where else do you see advertising where you are expected to see them? Try to tap into those forms of advertising. They are the most effective. **Look for opportunities to advertise where people are expecting to see it!**

Print Advertising

Print advertising consists of both ads and Business Cards! Don't cheap out on business cards; they are your first line of advertising in person. They are a reflection of your business. Cheap cards give the impression that you are not professional. Put some effort into its design. And use the same rules that you will use for printed ads, which are:

Most print ads will only be seen by consumers for a mere few seconds. That means you only have a few seconds to make an impression. Some print ads will end up in a person's home and they can go back to refer to it, **if they noticed it in the first place**. But many ads are seen while on the go.

So how do you make sure you make an impression?

Pay attention to color. It must be noticeable and stand out in the crowd (Darlis). Depending on where you are putting your printed ad, compare how it looks to other ads or on the medium in which you are using. Also pay attention to font and your logo size. It takes years for people to become accustomed to seeing your logo and recognizing it. Use it often and make it noticeable and **simple!**

Do not clutter! Stay away from putting too much information on your card or print advertising. You want people to see your logo, your name, what you do in a few simple words (there are lots of words in the dictionary, find ones that represent what you do or what people can expect from you), and one (maybe two but no more) ways to reach you. Long addresses in tiny letters don't help. If you have a complicated address use a landmark instead. Always put on your website. That is usually the first place people will look to find you. For business cards a phone number, address and website. No need for a fax number or alternate numbers.

Call to Action

A call to action is where you entice people to respond to your ad in some way. You can offer a discount if they mention the ad or bring in your business card or come to the store on a certain day, etc. Using it on a specific ad will let you know that people are reading it.

These have been notes from Sam Rattai, Vice Chairperson with IA Women's Network. Sam presented for the September Luncheon with IA.

Social Media

I don't think I have to remind anyone that social media is a very effective way to reach your audience. I am not an expert by any means. But I do know the value of it. But why is it so effective? Because it's **PERSONAL!** People who stay close to their social media platforms like to recommend a good business experience to others, that's personal. It builds that trust and respect that is required in order to secure business.

Internet Presence

Again, I don't think I need to remind anyone that having a good, interactive website is of vital importance. This is the way people find information these days and you need to be part of it. *Get a good website, that is easy to find with Google, and fill it full of "personal" information about your business.*

Personal meaning, when your company was started, your philosophy, a picture of you, the owner, or someone who works there who is trusted, **your personal story, your connection to the community (charitable work, etc).** **People respond better to this information than they will to facts and figures.**

Make sure you have an easy way for customers to find you, talk to you, and do business **instantly** with you! Remember that the more time people have to "consider" the less likely you are to make a sale. For example, if someone is looking for a plumber, they likely need one right away. The first thing they will do is look on the internet for a local, trusted and respected company. If they can't find you easily, they will move on. If they can't get a quote quickly and easily, they will move on. If they can't find your office, or if no-one answers the phone right away, they will move on. People these days are very into "**immediate gratification**". This may not be a good thing, but it is reality. **People want what they want RIGHT NOW!** Make sure you are prepared to give that to them. Return phone calls, emails, social media messages, etc. immediately! And make sure your information is readily available at any time of day or night.

Testimonials

Why are these so important? Because it is advertising and it comes back to **KEEPING IT PERSONAL, BUILDING TRUST AND RESPECT!** Most people who have a positive business experience are happy to provide a testimonial. Ask for one. A lot. And post it on social media and on your website. Keep them from local people, not from people who live across the nation somewhere. People want to deal with local business where possible.

Community Matters

One of the best ways to build your business through advertising is through advertising, again, yourself on a personal and business level, to community events and charities. You can also piggy back on that events promotional material. Attend or sponsor golf tournaments, marathons, annual events, etc., and when given the chance, jump at every opportunity to flaunt your business name on their promotional materials.

One of the quickest ways to become respected is to hang out with others who are already respected. If your company name is listed as a sponsor right beside a very successful and recognizable company, yours will automatically be presumed by your audience as also respected. Schmooze with other business people who are present. Wear your company name on your shirt or jacket, have promotional material available, set up a booth or find ways to sponsor that event in a way that can promote you better. Perhaps you want to sponsor the loot bags and have your company name on them.

What other creative ways can you promote your company through a charitable event? Think of some that are appropriate for that event.

Get in Front of People

Volunteer to speak and write at every opportunity. Every business is in business because they are **an expert at something**. Where can you go to flaunt your knowledge?

Can you write a monthly newsletter to your clients?

Can you put on a workshop?

Can you write an article on Linked In?

Can you write an article for the local newspaper?

Can you speak at a charitable event?

Don't be afraid to offer your services. Building good business connections helps with this also.

Follow the Leader

Where do you go to learn how to advertise your business better? You follow those who are successful. Find out how they advertise. Follow them. Learn from them. And, **make friends with them!** Go to events they would go to (business events, charitable events, etc.). These are the people who will lift you up!

Trade Shows

Attend trade shows that are in your price range (save up if you have to, they are worth it if you pick the right ones and are well prepared with promotional material and good staff if needed. If you don't have someone you can trust to work your booth do it yourself). Go to lots of trade shows and watch what other people are doing. Keep the same principals as print advertising - simple, uncluttered, paying attention to color, visual effects. But remember that what people will remember most is **YOU!**

Loot bags are ok for very large trade shows but if someone really wants to do business with you they will put your business card in their purse or wallet. Watch for this.

Netweaving

When you are building your business you need to appeal to two markets. The general public, who will be buying your products/services, and the business community, who will be supporting you through building connections. You must connect with both audiences.

You reach the public through advertising and community involvement, but you reach the business community through networking. **Networking is advertising.**

How many people, honestly, actually enjoy networking? There is something about approaching a complete stranger and trying to sell your company to them in a 5 minute time frame that makes most people squirm. Including me. But there is a better way. It's called Netweaving. How many people have heard of it? How many people practice it?

Netweaving was coined by a guy named Bill Littell, owner of a company called "Littell Consulting Services" based out of Atlanta, Georgia. The concept behind it is based on a "Pay it Forward" kind of networking. Meaning "What goes around, comes around".

Here's how it works: You have two contacts who you think would benefit from meeting each other. Through a virtual or some other type of introduction, you help them exchange bios and arrange to meet in person. When the two parties get together, a new partnership forms, and they find ways to help each other. They follow up with you later (and if they don't you follow up with them) to let you know the outcome of the meeting.

Many successful business people have been doing this for years, they just didn't know what to call it.

This type of networking takes the pressure off of the concept of selling yourself directly and moves the focus onto selling each other to one another. And in turn, your efforts will be rewarded. Those people who you introduced would be more willing to return the favor, recommend you to others, and in turn **"Make what goes around, come around"**.

This concept is really taking off in the business community, and has been coined for around 12 years now. It is effective because it is a more personal and genuine way to connect with others. You are genuinely interested in helping other business people.

You can also apply this concept to networking meetings. Instead of trying to find someone to sell yourself to in 5 minutes try this. Decide that if you make one solid connection with another business owner at a networking event then you are happy. A good connection is one where you have actually become friends, have found things that you have in common, and who you know that if you were to call that person up the next day and ask them to have a coffee with you they would, even if they are busy. That's a good connection. Shoot for that.

Start your conversation always with asking about their business (you will get around to yours later). And ask personal questions like "How did you come to open this business?" People love to talk about how they got started.

This is very important in a small community like Red Deer. Everyone knows everyone else here. Always be genuine.

Make your "30 second commercial" or "Elevator Speech". Google this and practice so you are always prepared.

Know your Competition!

You know what they say "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer!!" This is true in business. But don't think of them as enemies. Think of them as learning tools. Always know what is working for them so you can follow what they are doing. And **NEVER BAD MOUTH THE COMPETITION TO ANYONE, ANYWHERE!** You never know if you are talking to the second cousin of the wife of the owner! And bad news travels much faster than good news. So beware of what you are saying to others.

Be prepared to do the grunt work yourself

If you have a great salesperson on staff who can represent you, then great! If you have a heavy budget that allows you to advertise everywhere then that's nice. But most of us don't. So be prepared to do the work yourself, including netweaving and networking. Go to as many networking events as you can. There are many out there, including this one (IA Women's Network also known as Independent Achievers). The Chamber of Commerce has one called "Business after 5" and the booths are inexpensive and it is usually well attended. Most outlying communities have one, too. Read as much as you can on networking and netweaving and do it yourself. This is advertising your company on a personal level. It will grow! Keep it up and **follow through on your leads immediately.**

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