

Start Up Loans

Essential guide to marketing

startuploans.co.uk





Welcome to our Essential Guide to Marketing

Marketing is absolutely essential to any successful business but learning how to do it effectively (and within a budget) is a vital skill for any new business owner to learn.

Across eleven chapters you'll find helpful guidance on every aspect of marketing for a start-up - from how to come up with a marketing strategy to making the most of digital advertising.

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Jargon buster



This is an interactive document.

The contents on the left are interactive, allowing you to navigate through the documents sections. To return to the contents, click on the contents menu icon (≡) on the top right of each page.

What is marketing?

Marketing is any activity that involves developing, promoting, and selling your products and services.



It covers advertising, promotions, customer service, and public relations.

Marketing is essential to the success of any new business.

You may have ground-breaking products or innovative services but if people don't know your business exists, you'll never make enough sales.

Marketing puts your products or services in front of potential customers.

If your marketing's effective, it'll encourage customers to buy.

Done well, it raises awareness of your brand, gives people a reason to buy, and results in sales.

Done badly, it can become a bottomless money pit.

Learn more about [marketing on a budget](#) with our handy guide.

Why market your business?



Promotes your company

Effective marketing helps establish your brand, putting your products and services in front of customers who are willing to buy.



Boosts sales

Once your brand is visible, marketing can help increase sales to existing customers and increase new customer numbers.



Retain customers

Marketing helps create a base of loyal customers. With repeat business often cheaper than winning brand-new customers, it's essential to retain and engage existing customers.



Compete and grow

Good marketing can help you compete with larger, more established brands, allowing your small business to grow and expand.

How to conduct market research

Market research is vital for any start up as it helps you understand what your customers want.



Before you launch, you need to understand the market and your potential customers and determine whether there's a demand for your products or services.

If that demand isn't there, your business is unlikely to be viable.

Market research also gives indicators on how much customers are willing to pay, product features that will tempt them to buy, and how you can continuously improve your offering.

Learn more about [market research with our guide](#).

Before you launch

Understand customers

Learn where they live, what they like, and how they shop or buy.

This will help you identify how your business can meet the needs and interests of your customers.

Test your business idea

Early feedback can help refine your business idea, price it competitively, and see if there's demand for it.

When you're up and running

Improve your business

Ongoing feedback on everything from customer service to how customers use your product is invaluable for improving your business and planning for future product launches.

Analyse your brand and competitors

Learn what customers think about your brand and how they view your competitors, which you can use to develop a marketing strategy.

Create press releases

Often overlooked, but a press release based on a customer survey or market research has a better chance of getting media coverage for your start up, particularly if you can tailor it to the media outlet you're sending it to.

How does market research work?

There are different ways to carry out market research – some you can do yourself at little cost while others can require the services of a market research company.

There are two ways you can conduct market research: desk research and field research.



Desk research

This involves researching your market online, using industry papers and reports, online marketing tools, and even polling services such as YouGov, all of which you can use from the comfort of your own desk.



Field research

Field research involves meeting customers and listening to their feedback.

This can be in focus groups or observing them as they browse a store.

Groups of customers can be invited to test a pre-production version of your product and give feedback, or you can conduct market research surveys by asking questions to people on the street.

Market research techniques

Institutional data

Public sector bodies are a great source of data for market research.

Through organisations like the Office for National Statistics, and the British Library you can access lots of consumer information, including age, occupation, and location to kick-start your market research.

Industry data

Trade associations and organisations have lots of information on the market such as statistics and facts on geographical areas or a specific demographic – useful for helping create your business plan and forecasting demand and market trends.

Find out more about [market research techniques](#).

Marketing tools and software

There's lots of information available from marketing companies offering insight into consumers.



- Keyword research tools allow you to see how many people are searching for a particular topic online. You can then break this data down and look at specific regions and date ranges. You can also compare historically to see whether interest is growing over time.



- Social media and email marketing platforms offer regular whitepapers and reports into their users, which can provide helpful topline figures.



- Surveys, set up using companies like SurveyMonkey and Hotjar allow you to talk directly to customers online and collect their feedback. Once they're set up, they look after themselves, allowing you to dip in and out of the results as and when you want.

Discover more [examples of market research](#) with our guide.

Focus groups

Focus groups are a brilliant way to get feedback but can be difficult to organise and get right.

Picking the right people

Your focus group needs to mirror your customers or potential customers, otherwise their feedback is irrelevant.

Lots of big companies use focus group companies to recruit relevant users.

Running a session

Sessions typically last from one hour to three hours and involve around ten users who are usually paid.

Focus groups are shaped by what you want to get out of them and that should influence the questions and tasks you get participants to complete.

For example, if you want to know whether your website is easy to use, get participants to use the website and go through journeys you want your customers to complete.

Online focus groups

Focus groups can be conducted online.

Some market research providers use software that enables you to watch users interacting with your website.

What happens after a focus group session?

After a session, you should look for consistencies and common issues among the participants.

This should then inform your business strategy.

Get attendees to sign a non-disclosure agreement if showing them a new product or service and be sure to record feedback and take notes during the session.



Create your brand

Define your brand, business goals,
and company mission.



Customers rarely buy products.

Instead, they buy into and from brands that they feel positive about.

Whether a brand inspires trust, trendiness or innovation, people buy from brands they believe in.

This is doubly true for new businesses.

Without the history of a long-standing brand, customers can quickly dismiss a start-up that doesn't instantly capture their imagination or give them a reason to believe in the business.

Start by creating a company vision which covers:



Your Unique Selling Point (USP)

Outline how your business is different to competitors.



Why customers should believe in your business

Why should a customer use your business?

What is unique, compelling, or different about your business?



The reason your business exists

What does your brand stand for? For start-ups this is often the reason why you founded your company.

It might be to deliver excellent customer service, to sell locally sourced, sustainable products, or to offer 24/7 access to a safe taxi service, for example.

This is often expressed as a mission statement – it details why your business is here, what it stands for, and what it aims to achieve.

It brings the values of your company to the forefront, such as being friendly, secure, caring, and knowledgeable.

Make sure that your marketing activity communicates your brand vision and values, along with the products and services you're selling.

These values also determine the objectives you'll have and how you'll achieve them.

Brand basics

Getting the brand basics right is important.

Make sure your brand name, logo, website, and email address are the same across all your advertising.

Use your brand vision – its values, USP, and reason for customers to believe – as a filter to pass all your marketing materials through.

If it doesn't convey your brand, don't use it.

[Learn more about brand names.](#)

Brand logo

It may be worth investing in professional logo design.

Expect to pay between £500 and £2,000 for a decent logo and up to £5,000 for extras such as signage, vehicle livery, and marketing materials.

Ensure your logo ties in with your business message and your business name.

It needs to be memorable and easy to reproduce, so simple shapes and icons are better.

Ensure your logo is recognisable in black and white.

Brand advertising

Your brand will be the foundation for all your marketing material – from the copy you create to the images you use.

It's worth investing in some creative support at this stage.

Ask a designer to take your brand values and mission and put together some house styles for how you create advertising copy.



What words and images should you use? Are there reasons you would want to avoid using certain words?

Think about typefaces you'll use and why.

For example, thin, sans serif typefaces are often used by technology and modern business (Apple uses the San Francisco typeface for products), whereas an old-fashioned serif font such as Times New Roman suggests a business that has a long history and is more 'serious.'

It's also worth giving some thought to whether your typeface is as accessible as it can be, [RNIB](#) have guidelines that may be helpful.

Learn more about [how to set up a brand](#) with our helpful guide.



Marketing channels

Lots of new businesses struggle to market effectively, especially when operating on a shoestring budget while their competitors spend thousands of pounds on individual channels.



That's why understanding which marketing channels your customers use, and how to get the most value out of them, is vital for your business and crucial to getting a return on the investment you make in your marketing efforts.

When choosing a marketing channel, think about:

What channels do your target customers use?

Clues such as age, gender, location, and economic status can help you identify the relevant channel.

Look at where your competitors advertise.

Using your market research as a starting point, research different marketing channels to see if they suit your audience.

Whether to use predominantly free or paid for channels?

Some marketing channels can create customer leads for free but require lots of time and effort.

Paid-for advertising can generate more sales leads but at a cost.

What your marketing objective is

Your chosen channel should match your marketing objective.

For example, if you're advertising a 24-hour flash sale, social media is more suitable than a monthly magazine.

Social media

Free or paid

- ✓ Instagram
- ✓ Facebook
- ✓ X (formerly Twitter)
- ✓ LinkedIn
- ✓ YouTube
- ✓ Pinterest
- ✓ Tiktok

Social media is an invaluable way to market your products and services to your target audience, increase brand loyalty, and develop customer relationships.

But it takes time to build a successful presence and you'll need to post frequently and interact with customers often to maintain interest and keep conversations going.

You can also use social media for paid advertisements.

Each platform has its own methods, advantages and disadvantages, and targeting criteria.

It's worth testing paid social media with a limited budget before committing to spending big.



Advantages:

- Value for money
- Easy to set up.



Disadvantages:

- Takes time to grow
- Lots of competition
- Difficult to stand out.

Email marketing

Free or paid

- ✓ Dotdigital
- ✓ Salesforce Pardot
- ✓ Mailchimp
- ✓ Hubspot
- ✓ Campaign Monitor
- ✓ Campaigner

Email's strength lies in its ability to deliver targeted messages straight to customers.

To get started, you'll need a list of email recipients who have given you permission to send them messages, which can take time to build up.

Once you have a list of emails and customers to contact, you can use email marketing platforms.

They can allow you to send an email to everyone in your mailing list or triggered emails which are sent automatically when a user performs a particular action, such as signing up to receive email updates from you.

You may also be able to segment your mailing lists based on different characteristics to allow for more targeted sending.



Advantages:

- Value for money
- Highly targeted.



Disadvantages:

- Takes time to build a mailing list.

Digital advertising

Paid

- ✓ Google Ads
- ✓ Bing
- ✓ Yahoo

There are different types of online advertising and different ways to pay for it.

Display advertising involves designing image-based adverts and placing them next to relevant content on websites.

Pay per click (PPC) means you only pay when a potential customer clicks on a link in your ad and visits your website.

The most common types of PPC advertising are through search engines, such as Google Ads.

You can target relevant customers with online advertising and easily monitor how successful your ad has been.



Advantages:

- Huge exposure
- Very targeted
- Pay on performance.



Disadvantages:

- Time
- Highly competitive
- Can be expensive.

Affiliate marketing

Paid

- ✓ Awin
- ✓ Tradedoubler
- ✓ Partnerstack
- ✓ Amazon Associate
- ✓ Shopify Affiliate Program

Affiliate marketing works on a cost per acquisition (CPA) basis – you pay a commission on any sales that are referred to you by a third party, typically around 30% of the sale price.

You can create your own network of third-party affiliates or use an established network which look after payments.



Advantages:

- Expensive
- Very targeted
- Pay on performance.



Disadvantages:

- Can be time consuming
- Cuts into profits.

Offline advertising

Paid

- ✓ Newspapers
- ✓ TV
- ✓ Radio
- ✓ Trade shows

Offline advertising covers print media, TV, radio, and exhibitions.

From ads in local newspapers and trade magazines, to business directories and local radio ads, offline advertising can reach lots of potential customers but it can be difficult to track and measure effectiveness.



Advantages:

- Mass reach
- Trusted channels.



Disadvantages:

- Time
- Expensive
- Hard to measure results.

Create a marketing plan

Plan your marketing strategy before launching to get the maximum impact from your advertising.



A well-written marketing plan is essential for every business.

It provides a clear direction for all your marketing activity and outlines your main objectives and how you will achieve them.

A marketing plan is different from a business plan.

A marketing plan focuses on how you'll meet customers' needs and communicate the benefits of your products or services to them.

It includes how you'll position your products or services, how you'll price your products, and what (if any) promotional activity and marketing channels you'll use.

Crucially it sets out what you expect your marketing activities to achieve.

Remember, a marketing plan is a live document.



Don't file it away once written – use it to monitor progress and keep your marketing strategy on track.

Don't be afraid to make changes if the market or economy demands – your ability to adapt will help keep your small business ahead of the competition.



Start with a situation analysis

Start writing your marketing plan based on a 'situation analysis' of your business.

This should include details such as:

Your business

What it does and what products or services it sells.

A SWOT analysis of your business

Look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of your business. Strengths and weaknesses are factors within your business while opportunities and threats are external factors, such as competitors and market trends.

In your analysis you should attempt to answer the following questions:

- ✓ [What's your key differentiator](#) and 'reason to believe'?
- ✓ What makes your business different to competitors?

These answers will underpin your marketing messages as you position your new business in the market.

[Find out more about SWOT analysis](#) with our helpful guide.

What to put in a marketing plan?

Identify your target audience

The more you understand your customers and their needs, the more effective your marketing will be.

Carry out market research to gather demographic data including gender, age, location, and buying habits.

Learn what your target customers like, such as quality or customer service.

Ask how often they buy, what media they consume, how brand loyal they are, plus if they have any unmet needs.

In your plan, segment your audience into three or four types.

You can then tailor your marketing to each segment, using different channels, images, and messages to increase effectiveness.

Personas can help bring these segments to life.

Set pricing and positioning

List all the ways your product or service meets customer needs.

Define your business' [Unique Selling Point \(USP\)](#), based on what your customers value the most and how you differ from the competition.

Look at competitor prices and conduct market research to find out how much people are willing to pay.

Discover more on [how to set the pricing of your goods and services](#).

Set marketing goals

Decide on your marketing goals.

These may include sales volumes or conversion rates from a marketing channel, such as the percentage of website visitors who become customers.

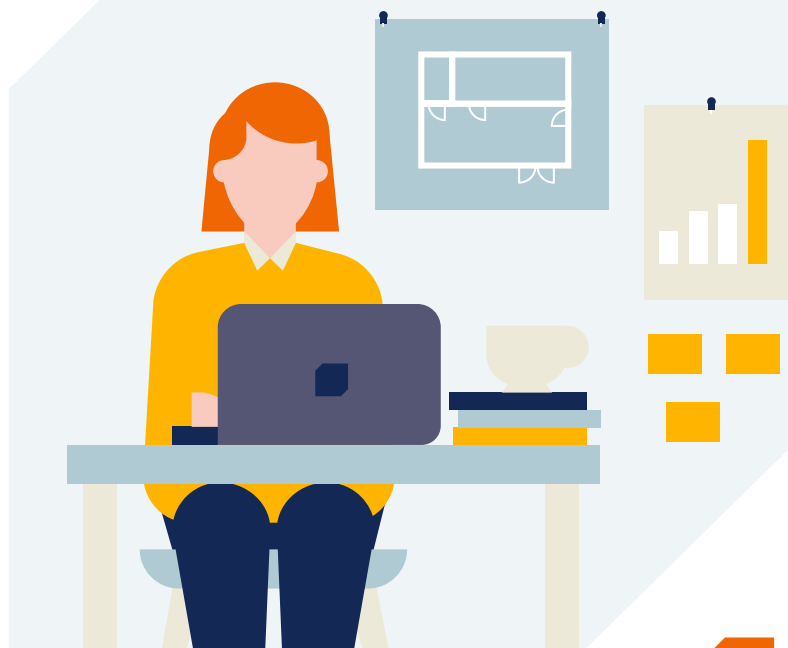
For example, if your aim is to gain ten customers a week via your website, work out how many potential visitors to your website you'll require.

You'll then need to plan a digital advertising, social media, or email marketing campaign to drive that number of people to visit your website.

Monitor results

Measure everything you can: people who see your advertising, the number who become customers, which channel delivered the most customers, and how loyal these customers become or how much they spend.

By measuring the quality of customers each channel brings, you can calculate a Return On Investment (ROI) and discover which channel generates more customers for every pound you spend.



Setting up a website

A website is a vital tool for your business.



Websites can be cheap to create and for customers your business is just a click away via a search engine result or a link from another webpage.

Include your website address in all of your marketing collateral – from business cards to branded vans – and you’ve created a cheap way for potential customers to find out more and get in touch.

How much does a website cost?

You can create a basic website for free and pay just a few pounds each month to host it online.

There are plenty of free or cheap online website building tools that are easy to use and many let you create a basic website for free with paid-for extras if you’re looking for something more sophisticated.

Alternatively, free tools such as WordPress and Wix make it easy to build websites that range from the basic to fully formed online shops.

This route requires more IT know-how so if you’ve got the budget, consider hiring a website designer.

Get the name right

Your domain name is the web address of your website and it should match your business name as closely as possible.

Web domain companies sell domain names.

Type in your business name to see if it’s available – if not, alternatives will be suggested.

Don’t just pick the first suggested alternatives however.

Instead try adding words that are relevant to your business.

For example, ‘www.jackjones.com’ may not be available, but ‘jackjonesbuilders.com’ or ‘jackjoneshullbuilders.com’ might be.

Also think about your top level domain.

This is the bit at the end of your web address and is most often .co.uk or .com.

If you’re a UK-based business then .co.uk might be better than .com.



Build your website

Here are the minimum webpages your site should include:



Homepage

Include the name and logo of your business and a few lines explaining your business, its products and services, and why customers should choose you.

You should also make it easy for customers to do what you want them to do on your homepage.

If you're selling shoes, make it obvious how a customer can buy shoes on your website through a call-to-action.



Products and services

Detail the products or services you sell.

Add call-to-action buttons such as 'Learn more,' 'Buy now,' or 'Get a free quote'.



About

Provide more information about your business such as profiles of key staff or a list of professional organisations of which you're a member.



Projects/customer testimonials

This may feature quotes from satisfied customers or before and after shots of completed projects.



Contact us

Include your address, email, phone number, business hours, and links to any social media accounts you have.

Find out how to [build your website with our handy guide](#).

Make your website easy to find

Most people will visit your website using a search engine such as Google.

To attract visitors you need to rank highly in search engine results.

For example, if someone searches for 'Leeds plumber,' you'll want to be in the top results if you run a plumbing business in that area.



To achieve this, use relevant keywords on your website – words that customers type into Google when looking for a business like yours.

Google's Keyword Planner tool can help with this.

Learn about [how Search Engine Optimisation can help your business grow](#).

Selling from your website

If selling online, your website will need a shopping cart function and a secure payment facility along with a way to collect payments.

PayPal is popular, as are credit card payment gateways such as WorldPay.

Both are straightforward to add to websites built with tools such as WordPress.

Make buying easy by displaying up-to-date stock information as well as delivery and returns policies.

Find out more about [setting up an e-commerce website](#).

Win customers with SEO

It's important to optimise your website for search engine rankings to ensure your business is the first result customers click on.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) describes ways to improve where your site ranks in search engine results to increase the number of visitors you get from search engines like Google and Bing.

Search engine ranking is the position your website appears at in search results when someone uses a search engine.

The higher your search engine ranking, the more likely users are to click on your website.

SEO is sometimes referred to as 'organic' or 'free' traffic, making it a cost-effective way to reach relevant customers because you don't pay to feature in search engine results.

Successful SEO – achieving the highest possible search rankings – is incredibly competitive but a clear SEO strategy will help you compete.



Valuable content

Your content needs to be unique, relevant, and serve a purpose.

Put yourself in your customers' shoes and think about the questions and challenges they might face and answer them in your content.

Start a blog

Blogging is an effective way to boost your keyword rankings and organic website traffic.

Most small businesses have websites with few pages, which limits ranking potential – the more pages you have, the more opportunities to expand on the keywords you rank for.

Writing a blog means creating fresh content about your expertise and industry that makes good use of longer keywords phrases.

[Learn more about blogging.](#)

Keep it fresh

Google rewards websites with higher rankings if they're updated frequently.

Boost your SEO success by creating new pages or adding new content on a regular basis so Google knows you've an active website.

Smart images

Make sure all the images on your site have alt tags with keywords on them which include keywords in the filename.

Alt tags provide a text description of an image if the image itself can't be displayed or a screen reader is being used.

You should 'say-what-you-see' when creating alt tags.

If the image is of a woman sat behind a desk, your alt tag should reflect that.

Use social media

Adding content to social media sites means you're searchable on social media too and links from social media boost your website credibility.

Use internal links

Provide links to other relevant content on your website and link to other related websites as this shows that your business website is a useful resource.

Encourage inbound links

Websites with links from other authoritative and trustworthy sites rank more highly in search engine results.

Ask customers, friends, partners, suppliers, and industry bloggers to link to your site.

Note: The best way to get inbound links is to create great content.

Optimise for mobile

Your site's mobile performance is vital for improving SEO.

Google uses the mobile version of your website to determine rankings before it looks at your desktop site.

If Google puts that much emphasis on your mobile site, then you should as well.

Understand keywords

The easiest way to increase your website's ranking is to use specific and relevant keywords throughout your website.

Keywords are words and phrases people type into a search engine to find websites.



Start by identifying a list of keywords that defines your product or service and that your target audience uses most often when searching for a product or service like yours.

Broad keywords are useful, but they're competitive, so the more specific and relevant you can be to your business, the better for both you and the customer.

Once you've identified your target keywords

Use these keywords in your title tags, body content, headings, image file names, and meta (webpage) description.

This tells search engines such as Google that you consider these keywords most important to your business and it will identify your business as relevant for anyone searching for those keywords.

Find out more about how [SEO can benefit your business.](#)

Social media marketing

Promote your business for free using social media and connect with customers.



Instagram, Facebook, and other social media channels can help you reach potential customers and turn existing customers into brand advocates eager to recommend your business to others.

Set your social media strategy

Before jumping in, decide what you want to achieve with social media.

Set a goal, such as raising your start-up's profile or attracting new customers.

Aim for a target number of followers or a set number of people clicking through to your website from social media channels.

Create social media content

Think about what you're posting on social media and tailor it to the channel you're using.

Don't just regurgitate every piece of content you create and don't just push sales messages either.

Audiences on social media like relevant content that encourages engagement.

Polls, surveys, and graphics are effective ways to engage your followers, as is responding to enquiries, queries, and questions.

It's also a good idea to tailor your content to a particular platform.

A long, detailed product update is more suited to a LinkedIn post than an Instagram post.

Which social media platform?



Facebook

Over 56 million people in the UK have a Facebook account.

It's good for sharing updates, promotions, and competitions with customers and getting feedback and likes.

Learn more about using [Facebook for business](#).



X (formerly Twitter)

X is good for handling customer questions, special offers and discounts, and sharing updates in a short-form format.

Discover more [marketing tips for X](#).



LinkedIn

Best used to recruit staff, sharing industry knowledge, and for joining relevant business groups and networks.

Find out more about using [LinkedIn to boost the reach of your business](#).



Pinterest

An online pinboard for sharing pictures, videos, and notes.

Popular with interior design, fashion, craft, and food businesses to showcase work and share ideas.



YouTube

The world's largest video-hosting platform.

Videos offering advice are a great way to demonstrate your expertise.

Learn more about [marketing on YouTube](#).



Instagram

Showcase for photos and short videos – great for introducing new products.

Learn how [Instagram can benefit your business](#).



TikTok

TikTok is a globally popular social media platform that hosts short videos designed to entertain and inform viewers.

Discover the methods [marketeers use to get their message to customers on TikTok](#).

Boost business with social media

Learn how to succeed when using social media in business.

Post regularly, post often!

Little and often is better than binge posting followed by long stretches of inactivity.

Build up a bank of content ahead of time, then get into a posting routine.

Scheduling social posts can help to make the most of your time.

- Aim to post at least once or twice a day on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn
- Aim to post daily on X to maintain followers' interest
- 50 pins or re-pins a day will help keep you visible on Pinterest.

Stay connected

Make sure your website links to your social media profiles and put X and Facebook details on company stationery or email signatures.

Invite customers to contact you using social channels but only if you're monitoring these channels regularly.



Think fast

Respond quickly to comments and questions to show that your business is listening.

Speedy replies make customers feel valued, making them more likely to recommend your business.



Take an interest

Comment on other people's profiles and join groups to boost your visibility.

Build strong relationships with social media influencers who have lots of followers – a retweet or a like from them will boost your reputation.



Take negativity offline

When feedback is negative, turn the conversation private – many social media platforms such as X have private messaging capabilities – rather than discussing it publicly on your social account.



Monitor and measure

Commit to a social media channel for at least three months and track what posts, updates, and content prove popular.

Learn what works and adjust your content strategy to create more successful outcomes.

Discover more [tips for using social media](#) to help your business grow.

Email marketing

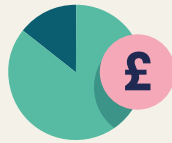
A successful email marketing campaign is a cost-effective way to promote your business directly to a customer's inbox.



Despite the buzz around social media and the sophistication of affiliate marketing, email marketing is one of the most effective ways small businesses can target customers and generate revenue.

It's a cheap way to connect with existing and potential customers, so you should start building an email database as soon as you can.

Why use email marketing?



Low-cost

With no print costs, postage, or advertising fees to be paid, costs are generally lower than other marketing channels.



Easy to create

Sending a marketing email doesn't require huge teams or lots of technical knowledge.

Fancy graphics and video can help but many successful email campaigns use plain text to deliver a clear message with a compelling offer.

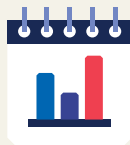


Segmentation

You can send targeted marketing messages to different types of customers within your email database.

Segmenting your mailing list, such as by location, can boost customer engagement.

Emails about local deals and offers are a good example of this.



Easy to track

It's easy to see what works and what doesn't with email marketing.

Most email marketing platforms let you test subject lines, as well as tracking open and clickthrough rates, so you can make future emails more effective by learning from what's worked before.



Email hosts

Limits usually apply to the number of emails you can send from your normal business email address, so you'll have to use a separate email service to send your marketing emails if sending to a long list of customers.

Email hosting services include tools for testing email campaigns and tracking activity and many are free for small businesses.



How to create an email marketing campaign

1. Mailing list

You need a list of email addresses of people who have agreed to receive marketing from you

You can rent a mailing list, but this is expensive and response rates can be low.

It's better to organically build a list from customers and visitors to your website.

Add an email newsletter sign up form to your website and use incentives such as discounts to encourage take up.

Remember that you should give people the option to unsubscribe from your mailing list in each email you send.

Most email marketing platforms will include an unsubscribe button as standard in any email sent from it.

2. Segmentation

Use additional information such as age, gender, or location to tailor email campaigns to customer segments.

The more closely you align your email marketing to your target audience, the more successful it's likely to be.

3. Subject line

Keep your subject line short and snappy and test different subject line topics to learn what makes your customers open your emails.

4. Personalisation

Address the email recipient on a personal level.

Using their name is much better than 'Dear Customer.'

Where possible, make content personal, such as 'As a thank you for your recent purchase...', rather than blanket emails.

5. Content

Include a clear call to action and place it alongside your key message at the top of your email.

A well-designed email uses a mix of images and text but don't overdo images as it can make the email slow to display.

6. Email schedule

Don't send emails too often: once or twice a month is fine for small businesses.

Test when your customers are more likely to open emails.

Generally, Monday mornings, Friday afternoons, and weekends are considered bad times to send emails.

7. Evaluate

Analyse each email's performance to refine your email marketing strategy.

Look at open and click rates to learn what worked well.



Discover more tips on [how to get started with email marketing](#) using our guide.

Digital advertising

Discover the benefits of digital advertising and learn how to create cost-effective pay-per-click campaigns with services like Google Ads.



There are hundreds of types of digital ads – from YouTube video ads and banner ads on websites, to search engine ads and advertising on social media – and they allow you to target customers based on their profiles and browsing history.

While finding your customers is straightforward, standing out is a lot more difficult in crowded and competitive landscapes.

Types of digital advertising:

Banner ads

Also known as digital display advertising, these are typically graphic-based ads that appear on websites such as online newspapers and blogs.

Search engine ads

Appear on search engine results, such as Google, when the user types in a relevant phrase.

Advertisers ‘bid’ to appear for specific search terms and pay when someone clicks the ad.

Native ads

Advertising that’s more like an article or piece of content.

Written to promote your product or service, it shares the same editorial style as the website it appears on.

It targets users using the behaviour, interests, and demographic data shared with and collected by big tech companies such as Amazon, Google, and Meta.

Social ads

Generic term for ads that appear on X, Facebook, YouTube and more.

These can be hyper targeted and microgranular, reaching exactly the right audience you want.

Video ads

These are ads that feature video as its primary component.

Video ads have a strong record of boosting conversions and increasing traffic to a website.

Audio ads

With the widespread adoption of podcasts as a form of entertainment, the humble audio ad is making a comeback and no longer just to be found on commercial radio.

Paying for advertising

Unlike traditional media, you typically pay the website owner who hosts your digital ad only when a visitor clicks on it.

This makes digital advertising more effective as you only pay for visitors to your website who have the potential to become customers.

Payment types include:

✓ CPA (cost per action)

You pay only when a visitor clicks your ad and then completes an action, such as buying something on your website or signing up to your newsletter.

✓ PPC (pay per click)

The most common form of payment – you only pay when someone clicks on your ad that links through to your website.

✓ CPM (cost per mille)

You pay per thousand people who see your ad, irrespective of whether they click on it.

Less effective but sometimes used for brand advertising.

Our eight-step guide to creating a pay-per-click (PPC) campaign

Using a service like Google Ads means you can target people based on what they're searching for online.

1. Define your goal

Such as increasing sales or generating newsletter sign-ups.

Without a clear goal your campaign may not be effective.

2. Allocate your budget

Effectively a 'pot' of money that you pay to the advertising platform, which is debited every time someone clicks your ad.

It is possible to 'plan' your spend using the Google Ads platform so it lasts for the length of your campaign or to set a target amount to spend per month.

3. Choose your keywords

Think about the types of phrases and terms that a customer would type in when looking for a business or product such as yours.

4. Refine your keywords

Use tools such as Google's Keyword planner tool to see the volume and competition for the keywords you're targeting.

High volume means lots of people search using these words and low competition means that there are few companies bidding for these keywords.

5. Bid on keywords

Set up a Google Ads account and bid on your keywords.

6. Create your search engine ad

It needs a catchy headline with engaging copy of a few words to encourage people to click on the ad.

7. Create a landing page

For your campaign, create a 'landing page' on your site – this is the page you want people to go to when they click on your ad.

8. Measure and optimise

Use Google's reporting tools to monitor the campaign and see if your ad is working well.

Test different ad copy and keywords to see if you can reduce the amount you spend to acquire each customer.



Get started with affiliate marketing

Contact bloggers and social media influencers aligned to your industry and ask online publishers if they'd be interested in reviewing your products and services in return for a sales commission.

Don't expect success overnight – an affiliate programme is a long-term investment and running your own programme can be time-consuming.

Choose an affiliate network

Alternatively, opt for an affiliate network such as:

- ✓ Shopify
- ✓ eBay Partner Network
- ✓ Awin
- ✓ Amazon Associates

This provides immediate access to publishers who will help sell your products.

Most networks have tracking and reporting tools so you can see how affiliates are performing, along with easy payment systems.

Affiliate marketing

Use third parties to generate leads and reach more customers for your business than you can on your own.

Affiliate marketing allows you to promote your business and sell your products or services through other websites, blogs or social media profiles – reaching far more customers than you could achieve using just traditional marketing channels.

Sounds great – but there is a cost.

Affiliates take a cut of sales as commission and in exchange carry your advertising, write product reviews, or even sell your products via their website.

There are different types of affiliates, ranging from price comparison and cash-back websites to bloggers and traditional publishers.

Many successful affiliates use their social media profile to promote goods and services to their followers as well.

How affiliate marketing works

- ✓ Your affiliate puts your products or services on their site
- ✓ Customers buy your product or services via your affiliate's promotion
- ✓ That sale or conversion is tracked and attributed to the affiliate
- ✓ Your business pays commission to the affiliate for that sale

One of the good things about affiliate marketing is that the affiliate network does most of the hard work for you and you generally only pay for completed sales.

That means if a customer clicks on a link from an affiliate and finds their way on to your site but doesn't make a purchase, you don't have to pay the affiliate a fee, which is different to most digital marketing channels.

This is known as a pay-per-sale model, as opposed to a cost-per-lead (CPL) or cost-per-acquisition (CPA).

Do your homework before joining

Some large global networks charge a one-off joining fee in addition to a monthly admin fee.

Research their publishers and the type of products they advertise.



Provide promotional content

Make your affiliates' job easier by providing pre-made promotional content such as ad banners, product images, videos, and website landing pages.

If you haven't got the time or skills, hire a freelance designer or use an online service such as eGraphix, People Per Hour, Fiverr and Design Crowd.



Promote your programme

As you're unlikely to be the only product or service your affiliate is promoting, you'll need to keep your business at the front of their mind.

Create relationships with your best-performing affiliates and keep them informed of upcoming sales and promotions.

Learn more about [affiliate marketing](#) with our guide.



Sustainable marketing:

how to avoid greenwashing

With the Government having set a legally binding target to reach net zero by 2050, start-ups have been quick to recognise what customers want from them when it comes to sustainability.



In 2022, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) found that 74% of adults agreed that environmental issues were really important to them and 79% agreed businesses have a wider social responsibility beyond simply making a profit.

With so much public will, and with smaller businesses accounting for almost half of all greenhouse gas emissions from UK businesses, the advantages of every start-up to be 'born sustainable' are huge.

Some businesses however engage in false marketing to make their products seem more environmentally friendly than is actually the case.

This is called greenwashing.

What is greenwashing?

Greenwashing, also known as "green sheen", refers to a kind of practice where companies may not be entirely truthful about the eco-friendly nature of their products or services.

A company engaging in greenwashing may make claims in their marketing materials that appear green and sustainable, but in reality, those claims are not entirely accurate.

This not only misleads customers into thinking they're making environmentally conscious choices, but it could also potentially harm the environment.

In the long run, it may discourage other businesses from nurturing responsible environmental practices and maintaining commendable corporate sustainability.



The golden rule to remember is that just because a product's label says that it's environmentally conscious, or eco-friendly, doesn't mean it's necessarily true.

How can a Start-up avoid greenwashing accusations?

There are a number of steps a start-up can take to protect themselves from accusations of greenwashing.

Honesty and transparency

It seems straightforward, but the first step to ensuring your business cannot be accused of greenwashing is to make sure all of your environmental credentials are fact-based and verifiable, ideally by an independent source.

Greenwashing typically uses language, not numbers, so committing to publish the statistics behind your claims is key here.

Always check your marketing materials are not making claims that can't be backed up if a customer asks.

Explore certification

It can be a good idea for a start-up to look to a third party to verify the high standards they set for themselves when it comes to sustainability.

There are a number of these bodies that a business can apply to for accreditation to support their sustainability claims.

A good example of this is the [B Corp scheme](#) which businesses use to add weight to their ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) efforts in the eyes of consumers.

[ISO 14001](#) is a form of accreditation that offers guidance for businesses looking to measure and report their impact on the environment.

The [LEED rating system](#) can help start-ups get their buildings accredited for environmental performance, on a scale from certified to platinum.

Learn more about [sustainable certification schemes](#).

Understand your supply chain

Although the practices of your start-up may be sustainable, do you know for sure that your suppliers are just as conscientious?

Be sure to thoroughly vet your suppliers before you work with them to ensure their standards and practices match your own.

It might also be a good idea to look at [smaller local suppliers](#) in addition to larger ones who may have less of an environmental impact since they're physically closer to your business.

Read our guide on how to [build a sustainable supply chain](#).



Jargon buster

We've put together a list of marketing terms to help you navigate the world of marketing.



B2B (Business-to-Business)

A term for a business that primarily sells to other businesses as opposed to consumers.

B2C (Business-to-Consumer)

A term for a business that primarily sells to consumers.

B-Corp

A company verified by B Lab to meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability.

Call-to- Action (CTA)

A friendly nudge that comes in the form of a text link, button, image, or web link. Its goal is to encourage visitors on your website to take the next step, such as heading to a landing page and potentially becoming leads. Think of CTAs as gentle invitations to engage, like “Subscribe now” or “Read more.” These prompts are designed to motivate and guide users towards further interaction with your content.

Click through rate (CTR)

Click-through rate is a handy way to see how well your audience is engaging with your website and moving along in your marketing campaign. Imagine it as a percentage that tells you how many people are taking the next step, like clicking from one part of your website to another. It's calculated pretty simply: take the total number of clicks your page or call-to-action (CTA) gets and divide it by the number of chances people had to click, such as the number of pageviews or emails sent.

Conversion rate

A helpful metric that shows how many people completed a desired action on a web page, such as filling out a form. Keeping an eye on your conversion rates can help you understand and enhance the performance of your web pages.

Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO)

Conversion rate optimisation (CRO) focuses on discovering the best ways to boost conversions on your website or specific web pages. At its core, CRO involves experimenting with different strategies to see which ones perform best and help increase the number of visitors who take desired actions on your site.

Customer journey

The customer journey is a roadmap that traces the path customers take from their first encounter with your brand all the way through to making a purchase and beyond. It's all about guiding them every step of the way, using smart marketing tactics to encourage them to buy and then keeping them engaged with follow-up care to nurture brand loyalty.

Customer segmentation

Customer segmentation brings a personal touch to your marketing efforts. This approach involves sorting and organising both your current and potential customers into groups based on shared traits such as interests, geographic location, and preferences. By doing so, you can tailor your marketing messages to better resonate with each segment.

Engagement rate

Social media engagement is a popular metric that captures the level of interaction your content receives, including likes, shares, and comments. When your audience engages with your content, it shows that they find it interesting and relevant, helping you understand what resonates best with them.

Green/Sustainable marketing

A way for companies to showcase how their products are either genuinely sustainable or perceived to be so. For instance, a company might highlight that their manufacturing process results in fewer emissions, making it a cleaner choice for the planet. This not only boosts their green credentials but also shows their commitment to making a positive environmental impact.

Keyword

Keywords, often referred to as “keyword phrases,” are the essential topics that search engines like Google, Yahoo, and Bing use to index webpages. Selecting the right keywords is crucial because they help your content appear more prominently in search results, making it easier for people to find your website.

Lead

Someone who has expressed interest in a product or service. Leads are essential in the sales process because they represent potential customers who are more likely to engage further with your business, making them valuable prospects to nurture and convert into loyal clients.

Pay-Per-Click (PPC)

A popular advertising method where businesses place their ads on platforms like Google Ads or Facebook. The unique aspect of PPC is that you only pay when someone actually clicks on your ad, making it a cost-effective way to drive targeted traffic to your website. This approach helps ensure that your advertising budget is spent reaching people who are genuinely interested in what you have to offer, enhancing the chances of converting these visitors into customers.

Personalisation

Personalisation is all about crafting marketing messages that resonate by customising your communications based on the insights you have about your customers. By utilising what you know about their preferences and behaviours, you can make each interaction more relevant and meaningful. This approach not only helps in building stronger connections with your audience but also ensures that you're delivering content that holds genuine value for them. It's about making each customer feel understood and appreciated, enhancing their overall experience with your brand.

Return-On-Investment (ROI)

A handy metric for gauging how efficient and profitable an investment is. The formula for ROI is straightforward: you take the Gain from Investment, subtract the Cost of Investment, and then divide by the Cost of Investment. This result is usually expressed as a percentage or ratio. A negative ROI means that the investment is currently losing money. It's important to note that this calculation can vary based on what you consider as gains and costs, so always ensure you're using accurate figures.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

SEO is a strategy designed to enhance brand awareness and drive traffic to your website. Think of SEO as a long-term investment in your business's online presence, helping your web pages climb the ranks in search engine results so customers can easily find you. By focusing on important elements like keyword usage, mobile optimization, and building quality backlinks, SEO works to establish your website's authority in the digital space. These factors collectively help your pages outrank competitors, boosting your visibility and connecting you with a broader audience.

Social mission

A cause for a business (other than profit) that benefits the economy, environment, or society in some way. It's a company's core reason for being and what drives its business. A social mission can help a company communicate its values to its employees, customers, and stakeholders.

User Experience (UX)

Customer experience is all about the complete journey a customer takes with a business. It begins with their first discovery and awareness of the brand, continues through every interaction and purchase they make, and includes their ongoing use of the product or service. It even extends to when they become advocates, sharing their positive experiences with others. This holistic experience shapes how customers perceive the brand and influences their loyalty and satisfaction.

Word-of-Mouth (WoM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing is the process of sharing information from one person to another. Traditionally, this involved face-to-face conversations, but in today's digital age, it also encompasses online interactions.

Contact

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