

## 8 Ways to Jump Start Your Business

Now is a great time to take a look at the state of your business, reassess your goals, revise practices that could be more effective, and reinforce those that are working well. Here are some things you can do to give your business new life.

1. **Write (or revisit) your business plan.** You may already have a business plan in place, but with the uncertain economy it's a good idea to revisit your goals and objectives for the next six months, the next year, the next five years. Make your business plan a living document and update it at least quarterly, or even better, every month. It will help you stay on track and more easily adapt to changes in customer demand.
2. **Be known as an expert.** You know you are an expert, but if you write, speak, and network like one people will automatically associate you with your niche. You'll make a much greater impression as the speaker at an event than simply shaking hands and handing out business cards. And you can further build expert status by writing articles for publication, having your own newsletter, or starting a blog.
3. **Define your niche.** Many people feel that being more general about what they offer makes them more marketable. Often the opposite is true. Most people want to work with a specialist, and one of the best ways to stand out in a crowded market is to be very specific about what you do and who you do it for.
4. **Become (or hire) a marketing expert.** At core marketing means building relationships, being able to speak clearly about the benefits of your offerings, and having conversations with people who might need your products or services. Search the Web for tips, use Pinpoint to find expert help, and talk to other professionals about the marketing efforts that work best for them.
5. **Follow-up with new contacts, maintain connections with current ones.** You've likely collected numerous business cards, but what have you really done with them? Following up is critical to business success. Consider these ways to keep your company in the front of people's minds:
  - o Send individual e-mails recalling specifics of your conversation with an invitation to visit your Web site.
  - o Invite contacts to periodic open houses to see what you do firsthand.
  - o Distribute a newsletter or blog that builds your reputation as an expert.
  - o Promote special offers to pique contact interest in what you offer.
6. **Provide information in addition to your offerings.** Build customer trust by providing clear, succinct information about your products and services, with emphasis on the benefits to customers and your expertise in meeting their needs. Providing helpful tips on your Web site where appropriate establishes your credibility and helps customers see how what you do can provide value to them.
7. **Keep prices competitive, offer incentives.** Everyone is looking for a deal these days. Whether it's reducing your prices, offering something free as incentive on your Web site, or providing additional services to customers when they contact you, doing something above just selling your product or service can give you an edge on your competitors.
8. **Promote results and benefits, not processes.** Most people don't care how you help them reach their goals, as long as you do it with integrity, efficiency, and within their budget. Instead of talking about how you work, be clear about your expertise and the changes people can expect from working with you. Get into the habit of asking clients for testimonials and referrals and consider writing (or hiring someone to write) case studies on successful engagements you've had. The most effective promotion comes from satisfied customers.

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