



33 Being creative with your ideas

What does being creative mean?

Being creative is all about your ability to come up with ways of doing things differently. It is about thinking outside of normal boundaries and rules, thinking outside of the box that the majority stay within. Creative thinkers use more of their right brain which is that part of your brain that accesses ideas and concepts, as opposed to their left brain which controls logic and order. We can all be creative if we allow ourselves to be and being good at marketing your business will need you to develop ways to capture the spirit of your business and stand out from the crowd.

Why is it important?

With the persistent competition for market share and the ever increasing pressure to do things better, cheaper and quicker in order to stand a chance of success, creative thinking is a must. If you can, come up with innovative ways of promoting yourself you will be remembered when others are forgotten. It is often easier to follow the crowd in any industry, to do something because it is expected or because it has always been done that way. It takes courage to break free and be different. Good creative ideas can propel you forward and help you to stimulate the mind of your customer.

Your challenge

Some business owners would not describe themselves as being creative. This is probably because they have never really allowed themselves to be. By creating the right circumstances and allowing your mind to run free we all have the potential for bright ideas. Being creative is all about opening your mind to possibilities and letting go of the reins of control. Most of us come up with our best ideas when we are relaxed, enjoying ourselves or being stimulated by a new environment. It is hardest to be creative when you are walking the treadmill of familiar daily tasks. Your greatest challenge will be to create opportunities to let your mind relax giving it a chance to get stimulated outside of a normal routine environment.

Creative marketing ideas – small business examples

Here are some good examples of how some small businesses have used their creative minds to come up with different ways of generating new leads and interest in their businesses.

A new hair salon wanted to get more attention in their city centre location to drive new customers to book appointments and to collect contact details for their customer database. Thinking outside the box and utilising the resources they had they came up with the idea of running a hair styling competition for the stylists at their salon, the results of which were modelled and voted on in the city centre on a busy Saturday. Shoppers who voted had to complete an entry form which allowed those who voted for the winning style entry into a draw to win a free makeover at the salon. The entry form included full contact details which enabled all those who took part to be mailed a special thank you voucher giving discounts on hair appointments. They achieved free press coverage both advertising for the models to take part and the event itself. Their stylists got some good exposure as well as generating entertainment and interest for shoppers on a Saturday.

A retail outlet selling teddy bears and a range of soft toys wanted to encourage more families with children to visit their shop. They wanted to communicate fun and excitement and to drive the right people to their door. They came up with the idea of running a hunt the bears competition. They took picture of all their top bears and gave them all a special name. They arranged to put pictures of the bears up in different places in the town centre. To enter the competition, families had to complete an entry form that requested contact details. The competition involved correctly matching the named bears with a location. All correct entries were entered into a draw to win the bear of their choice. Competition entry forms had to be delivered to the shop where entrants were given a special gift voucher. This creative marketing idea generated a lot of fun and attracted a crowd of excited kids who all wanted a bear.

An Indian restaurant promoted its special lunchtime menu by offering a tray of tempting sample dishes at a local riverside event which was taking place only five minutes' walk from their restaurant.

A ball gown specialist who wanted to target the local student market advertised for aspiring student models and ran a free fashion show and modelling competition at one of the universities. Students voted for both the best model and the best gown. The winner wearing the chosen gown got their picture in the local newspaper along with an excellent write-up about the event.

HOW TO BE CREATIVE – SPECIAL RESPONSE CHECKLIST

- ▶ Where are you when you find you come up with your best ideas? Go there more often.
- ▶ Have you tried a creative marketing ideas brainstorming session with your team?
- ▶ Take your team out of the office and just let your minds run free: all ideas are accepted no matter how crazy. If you create an environment that is free from criticism and analysis you will be amazed at what comes up.
- ▶ Some of the reality business programmes on television like *Risking It All*, *The Apprentice*, *Dragons' Den* are great for stimulating ideas. If you see something you like, think about how you could apply it to your business in a different way.
- ▶ What kind of fun creative activity do you think would get your business some attention?
- ▶ What kind of competition could you run?
- ▶ What could you do that would attract some positive press coverage?
- ▶ What could you do that is different and unique?
- ▶ Get yourself a brightly coloured artist's pad and some coloured pens. Help yourself think creatively by drawing and linking ideas together. Mind maps are a useful way of connecting your ideas and allowing one thought to branch off into another.
- ▶ Keep a record of your ideas whenever they occur to you and let them develop.
- ▶ What could you do that would really communicate the spirit of your business?

How to use this information

When you come up with a new and different approach to the marketing or advertising of your business make sure that it has the best chance of attracting the right people and giving out the right message about your business. Keep your eye on your brand image and make sure that anything you do is supportive of it. If your idea ticks all the right boxes give it a try and just like any other marketing method you use it will need to be tested and measured.

Think outside the box and stand out from the crowd