

M LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

The Marketing Guide for Local Businesses

February 2015

**5 Video
Marketing
Mistakes
That Turn
Customers Away**

*How To Handle
Customer Reviews
Online*

**Ten Tips for
a Terrific
Expo**

**Reputation
Marketing**

What You Need To Know

**Small Businesses
Beware!**

**Sponsorships -
An Excellent
Marketing Tool**



Infographic:
Common Website
Mistakes

FREE!

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If you're a Small business owner, you know how hard you work all year long. As providers of this magazine, we're in the same boat as you. We're extremely busy, wear multiple hats, and put everything we can into our business.

Some organizations within our population have most likely tried to scam you at one point or another. Some are small, while others can ruin a business.

In this issue, we call out a few of the common scams that are targeting businesses today in hopes that you aren't a victim.

We also discuss some ways to maximize the effectiveness of your participation in expos or trade shows. When you showcase your products or services in the proper way, to the right audience, these types of shows can be a great way to increase sales. At minimum, you should increase your email marketing contact list, allowing you to communicate in an on-going manner to potential customers.

We hope to continue providing you informative and relevant articles throughout the year that will help make 2015 a successful one for your business!

If you have any comments about this issue or would like us to help you with your marketing please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards,
David Akers
President / CEO
LMS Solutions, Inc.

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A Little About Us

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LMS Solutions was developed to give businesses of all sizes the ability to leverage the same cutting-edge marketing platforms that the Fortune 500 organizations use, at extremely affordable rates.

We offer an extensive catalog of cutting-edge Local Online, Mobile, Social, Pay-Per-Click, Video, Web and Direct Marketing Media Programs. Whether you're a small business, large business or an ad agency, our programs can help you find greater success.

If you are a small advertising agency, or an independent marketing consultant, you're a perfect candidate for our LMS Solutions Partner Program. Find out more by visiting our website.

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Marketing Calendar

Plan your marketing messages around these upcoming holidays and proclamations.

February

Black History Month
American Heart Month
International Boost Self Esteem Month
International Expect Success Month
International Friendship Month
National Cancer Prevention Month
National Children's Dental Health Month
Spay/Neuter Awareness Month

February 14th - Valentine's Day
February 16th - President's Day

1st - National Freedom Day
1st - Super Bowl Sunday
2nd - Groundhog Day
2nd - Rheumatoid Awareness Day
3rd - National Carrot Day
4th - Facebook's Birthday
4th - Homemade Soup Day
4th - World Cancer Day



6th - National Wear Red Day
8th - Boy Scout Day
9th - Autism Sunday
9th - National Stop Bullying Day
9th - Pizza Pie Day
9th - World Marriage Day
11th - National Inventor's Day
12th - Lincoln's Birthday
14th - National Organ Donor Day
16th - National Almond Day
17th - Random Acts of Kindness Day
19th - Chinese New Year
20th - Love Your Pet Day
20th - National Cherry Pie Day
22nd - Washington's Birthday
22nd - World Thinking Day
23rd - International Dog Biscuit Day
23rd - National Banana Bread Day
24th - World Spay Day
27th - STAND UP to Bullying Day
27th - International Polar Bear Day
28th - Rare Disease Day

March

Irish American Heritage Month (US, Ireland)
Women's History Month (US, UK)
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) Awareness Month
Employee Spirit Month
National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month
National Endometriosis Awareness Month
Multiple Sclerosis Education and Awareness Month
Red Cross Month

March 1 - St. David's Day (UK)
March 17 - St. Patrick's Day
March 29 - Palm Sunday

1st - National Peanut Butter Lover's Day
2nd - Dr. Seuss Day
3rd - National Anthem Day
4th - National Pancake Day - IHOP
4th - National Hug a G.I. Day
6th - National Dentist's Day



6th - National Oreo Cookie Day
6th - National Employee Appreciation Day
8th - Return of Daylight Savings (US)
9th - National Napping Day
10th - National Pack Your Lunch Day
11th - National Johnny Appleseed Day
12th - National Girl Scout Day
13th - National Good Samaritan Day
14th - National Potato Chip Day
17th - Corned Beef and Cabbage Day
19th - National Certified Nurses Day
21st - National Common Courtesy Day
22nd - National Goof Off Day
23rd - National Puppy Day
24th - Chocolate Covered Raisin Day
26th - National Spinach Day
29th - Mom and Pop Business Owners Day
30th - National Take a Walk in the Park Day
30th - National Doctors Day
31st - National Tater Day



Reputation Marketing - What You Need to Know

In the world of the Internet, your company is only as good as its online reputation. With everything from restaurant reviews to product information just a mouse click away, no company can afford to ignore how it is perceived in the online world.

Unfortunately for business owners everywhere, the Internet does not come with a fact checking mechanism, and false reviews often get as much press as accurate ones. Anyone can post an inaccurate or misleading review online, and that could cost your company money every time a would-be customer does a Google search or looks for online information.

An unwarranted negative review could be posted by a disgruntled customer who blew a small problem completely out of proportion and damages your online reputation as a result. More troubling still, competitors can post false information about your company and send customers to their doors instead. Given the anonymity of the Internet, it is hard to prove identity, let alone intent, when looking at negative reviews. With all that misleading information, it is easy to see why so many customers are confused by what they find online.

What is Reputation Marketing?

So many companies have found misleading information on the web that an entire new

industry has sprung up to fight those false claims and set the record straight. This new industry goes by a number of names, including reputation defense, reputation management and reputation marketing.

No matter what it is called, reputation marketing can be extremely important for businesses of all size. All companies, from the largest multinational corporations to the smallest mom and pop shops, can suffer great harm when misleading information about them is posted in a public forum. While misleading information has always existed, it is easier than ever to disseminate those false claims, given the power and worldwide reach of the Internet.

A Proactive Approach

Many people think that reputation marketing only consists of challenging unwarranted negative reviews and other false information online, but that is only part of the story. Reputation marketing companies do challenge false and misleading information, but they do much more than that. Reputation marketing companies take a holistic and proactive approach to helping their clients. They use a number of methods, techniques and approaches to help the companies they serve get the word out and build a solid online reputation based on facts.

Reputation marketing companies work to reduce the impact of unwarranted negative reviews, as well as false and misleading information. The proven techniques they use help to push any false claims down in the search engine results in popular search engines like Google and Bing.

That simple yet highly effective technique makes such false and misleading claims harder to find, and can limit the negative impact on the affected businesses.

Which Industries Use Reputation Marketing Services

Reputation marketing can help businesses of all types, from restaurants and caterers to retailers and hotel chains. Every type of business has its own unique challenges when it comes to defending their reputation, and a good reputation marketing firm will be able to tailor their approach to the needs of each client they serve.

A local restaurant might find itself besieged by negative reviews on sites like Yelp and others, and that negative press could drive diners away before they even taste the food. While some of those negative reviews are no doubt honest opinions, others may be planted there by competitors in the local restaurant scene. A good reputation marketing company will be able to sort out and target false and misleading reviews, disputing them and even having them removed.

Other types of businesses may face different challenges, but the solution can be very similar. Finding the truth behind those negative reviews and challenging the untruths is one of the best ways to turn things around and start turning things around.

Reputation Marketing Results

Many companies wonder how long it will take to see results after hiring a reputation marketing company. While there is no one answer to this question and everyone's results will be different,

many companies start seeing results within just a couple of weeks.

That is because the search engines that display those negative reviews and misleading product information are constantly being updated. By employing the right techniques, reputation marketing companies can change search results quickly and get results for their clients just as fast.

The cost of reputation marketing services will depend on a number of factors, from the nature of the online reputation problem and the complexity of the proposed solution. A restaurant or local hotel may be primarily interested in challenging or removing misleading negative reviews on popular review sites, and the limited scope of the work could keep costs down.

Other companies may have more complex requirements. They may need to go beyond simple review sites and negative information and delve into the search results themselves. Some firms may want to clean up only the first page or two of search engine results, while others might need to clean up additional pages as well. The more complex the work, the greater the cost will be.

As with any other type of marketing, it is important for businesses to weigh the benefits and risks when determining how far to go with reputation marketing and reputation management services.

For some companies, the risk of a would-be customer finding a negative review on page 10 of a Google search may not justify the extra cost to remove that information. For other companies, the risk of a potential customer being scared away by misleading information is more than worth the added expense.

Online reputation is an essential part of modern business, and every company needs to decide how important it is to keep false and misleading information away from their customers.



How To Handle Customer Reviews Online

Almost all buying decisions customers make online are directly influenced by reviews and recommendations. Whether they're shopping for a T-shirt or an afternoon snack, people like to look at reviews before they make a decision. Yelp, for example, has become the go-to resource for people who are looking to decide which restaurant they want to visit.

Reviews don't only benefit customers, however. Companies that build a good reputation online can grow their business tremendously based on

the strength of the positive feedback they've received online.

If you're skeptical, you might be wondering how many of the reviews you read online are genuine. After all, how can you tell if a company has paid for favorable reviews? As a business, you should inspire trust in your customers. The manner in which you handle reviews plays a large part in proving your integrity to customers. Let us take a look at how you should treat reviews about your business.

1. Be quick to respond.

Whether the review is positive or negative, acknowledge it. Posting a simple message that reads, "Thank you for your feedback" goes a long way towards letting your customers know that you are listening to their feedback. Don't leave it at "thank you". People might think you have an automated system that replies to each review. Along with your acknowledgement, you should include a reply that addresses the contents of that particular review.

2. Don't get defensive when the reviews are negative.

If you receive a negative review or a bug report, don't try to beat around the bush. If you've made a mistake, accept it and apologize. People like to see modesty and humility. If they see that you are willing to accept your mistakes on a public forum, they will be more trusting of you.

In addition, a mistake gives you a great opportunity to improve. For example, if you've developed an application, a user might bring to your notice a bug that you didn't know existed. You can start working on improving your product based on the feedback you get.

3. Reward your customers for leaving a review.

Every person who took time out of their day to leave a review about your business should be appreciated and thanked. You can send them some promo codes, coupons or other bonuses for reviewing your product or service.

4. Don't squash negative reviews.

Online reputation management is important, but it doesn't mean you should kill negative reviews. Information has a way of getting through on the internet. Even if you squash a couple of negative reviews on your website, people can still air their frustration over Twitter, Facebook or other platforms. If people find out that you have been ignoring or deleting negative reviews, the backlash you will face will be much worse than you expected.

Every business should encourage honesty. Letting your customers know that their concerns will be heard and remedied is a major part of building your brand. Negative reviews are just opportunities for you to improve.



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5 Video Marketing Mistakes That Turn Customers Away



Video is one of the most effective ways that you can personalize the content on your website. People love to view and share videos, and you don't have to spend a lot of money to create great content that will have customers coming back for more. Like any other marketing tool, video content doesn't guarantee fantastic results, and if you don't use the medium in the right way, you can actually drive customers away. Make sure you get the most out of your video marketing, and avoid the following basic mistakes.

Producing video that has no personality

You cannot expect video content to personalize your brand if the production has no personality. Too many businesses publish videos that feature people who simply aren't right for this kind of work, or who are working with material that bores the audience senseless. Video marketing works best when you use it creatively to inject a sense of fun or excitement into the message you want to convey. Consider using a mixture of animation and live action to help keep the content fresh, and where you feature people in your videos, make sure that they are good in front of the camera.

Publishing clips that are too long

Video content is a great alternative to plain text because visitors can just sit back and watch, but it's still important to remember that your viewers have a low attention span. Limit your video messages to a few minutes, and if you have a lot of material to present, consider breaking it into bite-sized pieces. If you are passionate about the subject matter, it's sometimes difficult not to talk at length, but it's really important to publish content that holds your viewers' interest from start to finish. Bored customers are unlikely to come back for more.

Failing to inspire customers to take action

Effective video marketing should inspire viewers to take further action. For example, a movie trailer should inspire viewers to go out and watch the film. A video introducing your chief executive may seem interesting, but what do you want customers to do once they have listened to what he has to say? Use video content to encourage your visitors to explore further, to contact somebody, to buy something or simply just to share the message with other people. There are lots of different options to consider, but the most important thing is that you have a logical call-to-action, or you haven't really engaged your customer at all.

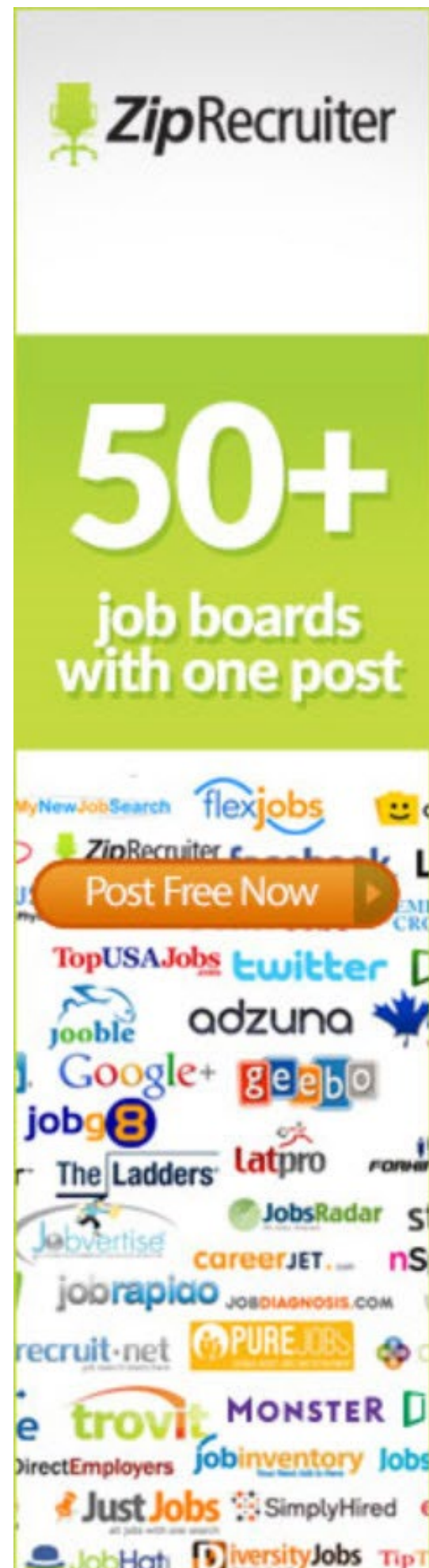
Producing content that doesn't represent your brand

It's important to make sure that your video marketing carefully represents your brand. You can't just throw content together that is out-of-touch with what your business is all about. Consider how suitable the content is. Could it actually offend or upset your target customers? Check that your video marketing fits in with all the other content on your pages. Is the tone right for your audience? Video content rarely works well in isolation, and needs to form part of your overall marketing plan.

Publishing poor quality content

Anybody can film video these days, especially with the ease and popularity of smartphones, which normally offer video recording facilities. However, access to the right technology does not mean that you are automatically a skilled director, and a bad-quality video is not going to win over any customers. Don't just publish the first clip you film. Produce different versions, and choose the video that has the best sound and image quality, even if that means you have to use editing tools to cut some of the content out. Test your video clips thoroughly before you upload them, and take time to produce content that looks professional to your customers.

People love to watch and share videos, and sites like YouTube make it really easy to publish content on your website. Bad video content can have a negative effect on your customers, and if you publish the wrong material, you may actually drive customers away. Focus on quality before quantity, and make sure that your videos always hit the mark.





10 Tips for a Terrific Expo

Expos can be a great marketing tool and an effective way to gain positive exposure for your company or product. But if you're new to the world of expos and trade shows, it can also be intimidating and potentially overwhelming. Here are ten tips to help newbies have a terrific expo experience.

1. Identify Three Reasons for Attending

This is the basis of your entire expo adventure: why are you there? While there will likely be many reasons you're attending, narrow it down to the three most important reasons. What does your company or product need the most, and how does this specific expo meet that need? Understanding what you need to get out of the

expo is vital to making it a success, because it's the basis for all the decisions you'll be making along the way.

2. Set Goals

This may seem obvious, but it's something that's often lost in the shuffle of the more practical preparations, like setup. With your three reasons for attending in mind (mentioned above), your goals should be strategic and measurable, but also realistic. Base goals and objectives on the expected attendance numbers, total number of exhibiting hours, number of your staff attending, and your total budget. Write your goals down, and keep track during the expo so you can adjust your tactics and presence as needed.

3. Competitive Research

Check out the other vendors signed up for the expo. Will there be any competitors? If there are several companies with similar products or services, you'll need to focus on the creativity and innovation of your display to set yourself apart. And if there are a large number of competitors, you may want to reconsider the expo altogether, and find one with less competition!

4. Pre-Expo Marketing

Advertise and market the expo to help draw in existing and potential customers. Creating awareness in your target audience prior to the show will go a long way to helping you meet the goals you've set for the expo itself. Use a variety of media to create excitement and buzz about your participation in the event.

5. Know Your Audience

Understanding your target audience and their specific needs is crucial to a successful expo experience. Who's the "perfect prospect"? What need do they have that your company can meet? Getting a firm grasp on this beforehand allows you to effectively "answer" the needs or wants of your target audience with your booth display.

6. Showcase a Product or Service

Even if your company has a large line of products and services, you need to narrow it down at the expo and choose one or two to showcase. Having a more narrow focus allows for a more powerful and effective display.



7. Streamline Your Exhibit

Along with showcasing a particular product or service, you need to keep your exhibit streamlined. A crowded exhibit is overwhelming to potential customers, who may just pass you by altogether, while an open and uncluttered booth is much more inviting. Utilize color and light to draw people in, and then keep them there with demos or presentations offered by a well-trained staff. Keep your space open by having no more than one staff member per 50 square feet.



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8. Prep Your Staff

An expo is a whole other world from your place of business, with specific guidelines, rules, and expectations. Be sure your staff is well-trained and well-prepared for the difference, because what works in the storefront might not fly at the expo. Booth staff need to be trained specifically in engaging expo customers; how to “invite” customers in with body language, probe with open-ended questions, and politely disengage unqualified attendees.

9. Record All Information Necessary for Follow-Ups

Have a formal, pre-determined means of recording customer information for follow-ups, as well as for demographics gathering. Develop

a simple rating system for leads to prioritize follow-ups--for example H for hot, C for cold, W for warm.

10. Follow-Up as Promised

Nothing is worse than losing a hot lead because no one followed-up with them. If you promised contact within a specific time frame, be sure it happens. Create a standard follow-up letter and mail or email every contact made at the expo within a week of the show; thank them for attending your booth, reiterate the benefits of your product or service, and mail samples or coupons.

Good luck, and have a terrific and productive expo!

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competition**



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Exhibitor

Are Your Competitors Attending the Same Event?

Attending trade shows is an excellent way to grow your customer base and network with current customers. However, it is important to remember that your competitors will also be attending those trade shows, seeking to make your current customers theirs and keep you from snagging those new clients. Therefore, it is important that you make your exhibition stand noticeable when customers walk past and these tips can help you do just that.

You Need the Right Look

If your exhibition stand is not noticeable, rest assured that people won't notice it. Display customized banners that those attending the show will attract attention and bring visitors to your table. For example, customized table banners using your company colors and logo are perfect for drawing people into your booth. Because the table banners reach the floor, they allow you to use the underside of the table for storage, keeping your exhibit area neat and tidy.

Maximize Small Spaces

Most times, exhibition spaces are very small,

allowing for very little room to place displays. Consider using standard pull-up banners printed on premium satin to draw attention to your booth. The banners on their pull-up stands take up less room than others and banner printing can be customized to suit your needs as well. Remember to keep your branding in mind when deciding on banner printing as you want all information within your space to be consistent and send the same message to customers.

Remain Consistent

Giveaway items are always welcome at trade shows, but be sure to give items that have actual value to the recipient. Although pens are always welcome, they are very common, so consider items that are unique and fit the branding of your company. For example, if your company is in the travel or leisure business, consider a fun giveaway such as sunglasses or luggage tags with a catchy phrase. A company that specializes in hunting or fishing gear could giveaway flashlights with a phrase such as "helping you light the way toward savings." Items such as portable mobile phone chargers or reusable travel mugs are also well-received at trade shows.

Sponsorships - An Excellent Marketing Tool



Sponsorship is an excellent marketing tool for small businesses. A small investment provides long-term rewards. Use sponsorship as a way to reach out to your current clientele while increasing your company's overall customer base. Here are several ways that you can sponsor a good cause.

Youth Activities

Little League teams are run by volunteers. Kids who want to play ball must pay fees to cover the cost of uniforms and equipment. Help to lower the fees and get free advertising at every game by providing the team shirts. Put your business name and/or logo on the shirt. Moreover, mention your Little League sponsorship in the company's advertising brochures.

Everything from summer band camp to the school concert and church Christmas play needs a sponsor. Provide background props for a play or buy advertising in the program brochure that is handed out to everyone who attends. Your business can buy a small block of advertising for as little as \$25. Yearbook advertising costs slightly more but thousands of people will look through those yearbooks, and they will be around for decades.

Radio Shows

People spend a lot of time sitting in traffic as they go to work or drive the kids to after school activities. Research which radio stations and programs your target customer enjoys. For example, your customers might listen to morning talk shows on the way to work. Then approach the station about sponsoring one or more episodes.

Community Fundraisers

Provide food, transportation, or prizes to community fundraisers. Typical fundraisers that need sponsors include your local PBS television station, museum, library, a walk-a-thon for a cause, church carnivals, pet adoption events, and the county fair.

Professional Events

Professional events have different levels of sponsorship. Your company name might be on a banner, brochure, paper cups, etc. A small business does not have to compete against large corporations at first tier events. If most of your business is local, then consider sponsoring professional events at your community sports arena, bowling alley, or other venues.

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**SCAM
ALERT**

Small Businesses Beware!

As a local business owner, you're always keeping a close eye on expenses and cash flow. Becoming a victim to a common scam can be devastating, if not extremely annoying to a business. Unfortunately, there continues to be individuals and companies that prey on innocent and unsuspecting honest business owners. To help you protect your hard-earned money, we've listed a few of the popular small business scams and how to avoid them.

"Google Listing" Telemarketing Scam

It seems like multiple times each month, we receive an automated telemarketing call with a message informing us that our Google listing has not been claimed. There are many iterations of this message, but they pretty much all try to convey that they are a partner of Google, or calling on Google's behalf.

Truthfully, how many times has Google called you to discuss your business without you requesting them to call? Your answer here should be zero.

If your answer is anything other than zero, then most likely, you were not actually speaking with a Google representative. Google only calls your business when you request it, and these calls are usually automated. Sadly, there are several third party telemarketers that call claiming to be a Google representative urging you to "update your business listing."

It can be terrifying as a small business owner to receive a call and the person on the other line says "Your Google listing will be deleted in 72 hours if you don't verify it with us right away" or something very similar. Often times they'll also require a payment made in order for your business to be verified, and you're likely to give them the information you believe they need in order to keep your Google listing from being deleted. This is exactly the reaction the scammers are looking for.

What to Do: Now that you know about this scam, here's how to avoid it when it comes to your Google Local business listing.

First, simply hang up on the automated message. They offer an option to press a certain number to be removed from their call list. We recommend you don't even do this; since these companies already stoop to robo-dialing to get call thousands of business owners every day, they may flag your number as being a legitimate number and call you more often.

Do not EVER give any log in information to anyone. Google can verify your business and doesn't need your log in information in order to do so. Once you give away your information, you're giving permission for that person to change anything they want.

Don't do business with someone that claims to work with Google. Google employees don't make cold calls, and they certainly don't reinforce that they work for Google in order to try and seem credible.

There are advertising agencies that are certified Google Partners. These legitimate businesses can show you proof of their qualifications.

If you haven't yet claimed your Google+, or Google My Business listing, do so immediately, or have a legitimate marketing company help you.

Also beware of companies who make claims that they can get you page one ranking on Google. No one can promise a number one rank or even a page one rank. They will often optimize you for an obscure keyword phrase, and charge you a good amount for something that won't really benefit your business.

Verify who you are talking with. Get their company name, website, phone number, and some credentials. If they're scamming you, they may not want to give their info, or they could give false information.

As a small business, you need a verified, well-optimized Google Local Business Listing. It's a great idea to go in and claim and verify your

Google local listing if you want to get your business in front of more customers. You can do this or you can trust a reputable company to help you optimize your local listings.

False Billing from "Yellow Pages"

Neither the name Yellow Pages nor the logo of the "walking fingers" are trademarked meaning scammers can easily use this largely known brand name to trick you into thinking you owe hundreds of dollars.

Typically with this scam, you will receive a call from someone representing an online business directory that they claim is an online version of the Yellow Pages. The caller tells you they are updating the directory and asks some basic information, address of the office, phone number, email, etc. After giving the information, the caller will repeat what you said back to you in order to confirm the listing.

Several weeks later your business will receive an invoice for several hundred dollars for an ad from the Yellow Pages online directory.

Shocked, you'll call to complain only to have the representative tell you that you verbally confirmed the placement. They will even play back an altered recording so that you sound as if you were agreeing to place an advertisement. In reality, you were just confirming they had the information correct, or your "yes" and "no" answers to their questions were edited to show your approval.

This scam happens all too often. A variation of this is an official looking Yellow Pages invoice that you will receive in the mail. The small print will state that it is a solicitation, and not an invoice, but the overall look, feel and wording used makes it look like an invoice you owe.

What to Do: Do not confirm any information to a caller you do not know.

File a complaint with the BBB. Because this scam

is so common, several hundreds of complaints against businesses accused of this scam have been resolved, thanks to business owners like you.

If you receive the solicitation letter/invoice, discard it.

Domain Name Registration Invoice

If you have recently secured a new domain name, you most likely have received a letter from the Internet Corporation Listing Service (ICLS.net). Their envelope and enclosed offer make it look like this is something you need to register your new domain name.

Their description of services states “Annual Website Search Engine Listing” and goes on to explain that they will submit your domain name to 25 established search engines and will provide you with quarterly reports for eight keyword/phrase

The price for their subscription is \$65, and with that you get your domain name submitted to 25 “established” search engines, and quarterly search engine position and ranking reports for 8 keyword/phrase listings from 25 “major” search engines. They also offer discounted per-year rates if you pay for 2 or 5 years in advance.

Do not send money!

Search engines actively “search” the web looking for new sites and content. If your business is listed on major directories, it will likely be listed on smaller ones as well.

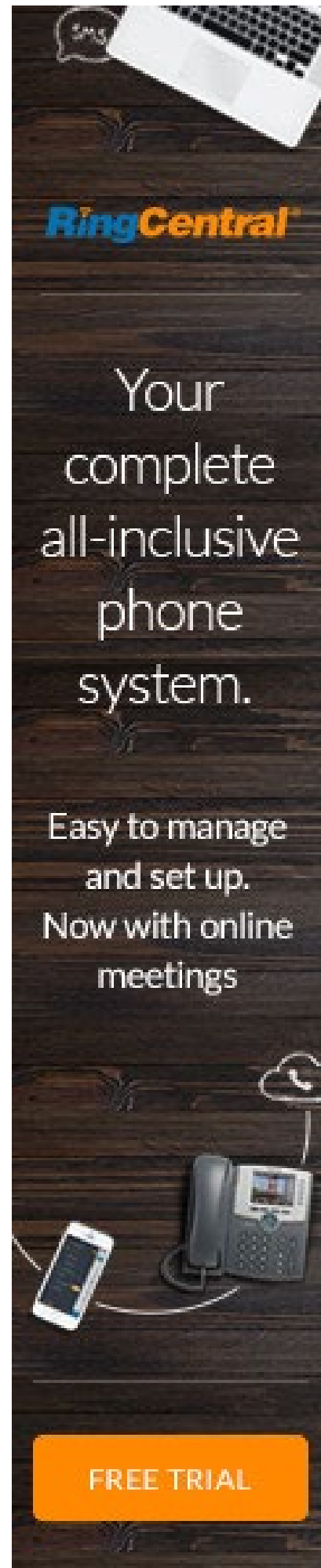
One BIG way you can tell this is a scam is the “25 major search engines” your business is promised to be submitted to. There are 3 major search engines, Google, Yahoo, and Bing.

To their credit, they make it clear that their letter is a solicitation and not a bill. At the bottom of the page, in bold type, it reads “You are under no obligation to make any payments...” However, if you do send in initial payment, they will invoice you on an annual basis, since you are agreeing to a subscription.

What to Do: The best way to avoid this scam - if you receive a piece of mail from the Internet Corporation Listing Service OR Domain Registry of America, disregard it and throw it away.

The Overpayment Scam

Do you sell products online? In this scam, a “buyer” will express interest in an expensive product and either send a check or make a credit card charge for more than the amount due. He or she will then ask you to refund

A vertical advertisement banner for RingCentral. At the top, there is a partial view of a laptop keyboard and a speech bubble containing the text "CALL". Below this is the RingCentral logo in blue and orange. The main text, in white, reads "Your complete all-inclusive phone system." Below this, it says "Easy to manage and set up. Now with online meetings". At the bottom, there is an orange button with the text "FREE TRIAL". The background is a dark wood-grain texture with faint images of a smartphone and a corded office phone.

the amount that has been overpaid, after the check has been deposited (or the charge made). However this realistic-looking check will bounce, or you'll learn that the credit card is stolen, leaving you to pay the entire amount.

What to Do: Do not accept any check for more than the purchase price of the item(s) being sold. That should be your first clue that something is not right. If that doesn't tip you off, remember to always verify the buyer's address and contact details. If the buyer requests that you wire the refund back to him or her, this should also raise a red flag. Avoid wiring funds for any reason.

Replacement Toner Rippoff

In this scam, an innocent sounding salesperson will attempt to pose as a current vendor, looking to find a new hire, temporary worker, or any individual that is willing to give out information. They may even ask for something as simple as the model or serial number of a printer. Faced with what seems like such a harmless request, the employee often provides the information with no hesitation.

Now that they have this information, they will provide an incredible sale on the right toner for your machine. Of course, the deal is so good that the offer is based on a limited supply or limited time, pressuring the employee to act fast and get their money's worth. While they may be somewhat cautious at this point, if the caller has already established the belief that they're an approved vendor - the employee is liable to believe that the scam artist is able to authorize the sale.

Upon delivery, both the employee and the company are usually in store for a big surprise. Maybe the order was actually for a lower-rate toner sold at leading name brand price. Perhaps the case of toner contained far fewer cartridges than promised. Or most often you are charged an incredibly high amount for the toner you received.

When someone finally complains about the order, they will often go on the defensive and claim that the invoice is legitimate, stating that failing to pay could result in you being responsible for legal fines and fees. They may even elude that it was all an error on part of the salesperson and offer the products at a reduced, yet highly profitable price; one still much higher than you would have normally paid.

What to Do: Make sure your employees are aware of this scam, and set specific responsibilities for those that are allowed to place office supply orders. Only order from trusted companies.

Domain Name Purchasing Offer

Many business have a .net, .org or other extension for the domain they use, but do not have the .com extension. Don't be surprised if you receive an email or letter offering you the .com domain for a bargain price — usually a couple of hundred dollars.

The "seller" doesn't really own the domain but it may be available and the scammer may be operating legally — just trying to make a fast buck. Or someone may already own the domain and the "seller" is out to con you.

The solution: It is easy to check the availability of a domain. Any main domain reseller, such as GoDaddy, allows you to freely and easily check to see if a .com version of a domain is currently available. If it is, it will either be readily available for the normal price (under \$15/year) or might have a premium price assigned to it. You can then decide on whether you want to secure the .com version of your domain. Certainly, you should never send money to an unknown individual who offers you a domain.

Unfortunately, due to the practices of a few unscrupulous individuals, small business owners need to be vigilant to avoid becoming a victim of one of these scams. Educate your employees, implement processes, and don't hesitate to search online to see if an offer is legitimate or not.

5 Must-Know Time Management Strategies for Small Business Owners



It goes without saying that time is a precious commodity for every professional, but this is especially the case for small business owners and entrepreneurs. Limited access to staff and corporate resources combined with packed schedules often mean that there just aren't enough hours in the day to get absolutely everything done. How do other independent businesspeople do it while also managing to keep their sanity intact?

The secret to their success is simple, actually. It's all about time management - learning how to take the same limited 24 hours that everyone has to work with and really make them count in a big way. Let's take a closer look at how you can make this simple but powerful concept work for your small business.

1. Define and understand your goals.

The first order of business as a small business owner is to clearly define and outline your goals. Focus your energies on activities and pursuits directly related to the accomplishment of these goals. For most small business owners, the main concerns are going to be making money and helping the business to grow and evolve toward the future. Anything else has the potential to turn into a time waster on one level or another.

2. Learn how to prioritize.

Every successful business owner needs to learn how to assign priorities to tasks to make sure the truly urgent stuff is taken care of right away. Start each day by creating a task list that organizes

each item on your to-do list according to how important (and how urgent) it is. Consider delegating some of the lower priority items to other individuals on your staff if possible. This will leave you with more time and energy to devote to the items that can only be completed by you.

3. Nix the distractions.

It's next to impossible to be as productive as you need to be if you're dealing with constant interruptions and endless distractions. Consider closing your office door or setting up certain hours during the day when calls are allowed to go directly to voicemail to maximize your time when it really counts the most.

You'll also want to make sure you're not creating your own distractions. Don't let notorious time sucks like social media or text messages rob you of your precious time. Instead, make a deal with yourself that you'll catch up with those things during designated break periods only.

4. Leverage the manpower around you.

People go into business for themselves because they're independent self-starters that don't

shy away from a little hard work. However, it's important to understand that there's a difference between taking an active role in running your own company and doing way too much. Part of building a successful business is surrounding yourself with talented, reliable employees that can handle some of your day-to-day tasks on your behalf. Make sure you're leveraging your workforce as much as you should be.

5. Learn that it's OK to say "no".

While it sure would be nice if it were possible to keep everyone happy 100% of the time, that's simply not reality when you're a small business owner. Give yourself permission to say "no" to projects, partnerships, or tasks that aren't serving the interests of your business. You're perfectly within your rights to define your own priorities as far as your end goals. That's part of what being the boss is all about.

At the end of the day, successful time management is about planning ahead, defining boundaries, and setting priorities. Look for ways you can apply what you've learned to the daily workings of your business today!

LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

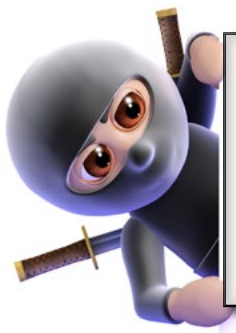
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Networking Tips

- ***Business Owners Beware!
Common scams that you
should be aware of.***



COMMON WEBSITE MISTAKES

SMALL BUSINESSES MAKE

KEYWORD STUFFING

Utilizing proper keywords in your content is important - but resist the temptation to stuff a page with them. You could get banned from the search engines.



SPELLING / GRAMMER MISTAKES

Spelling and gramatical errors on your website can give a site visitor an unfavorable impression of your company.

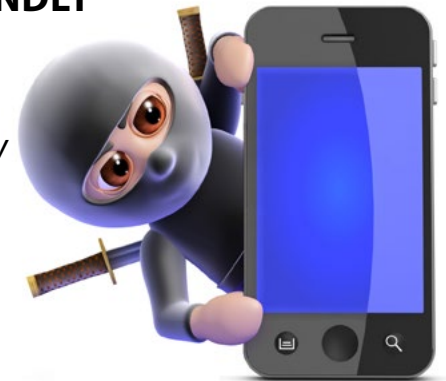


NO SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION

Show your site visitors that you are socially engaged.

NOT MOBILE FRIENDLY

50% of all searches are now perfored on a mobile device. How does you site look on tablets and smart phones?



CONTENT OUTDATED

Site visitors want to see a site that is maintained and updated. Besides helping you keep visitors engaged, fresh content helps your rankings.



IMAGES NOT OPTIMIZED

Proper image optimization is important. Large image files can cause a site to load slowly. Using proper "Alt" tags on your images can help your site images show up in Google Image searches, which can drive more traffic to your site.

BAD NAVIGATION

Site visitors want to be able to find the informaiton they want quickly and easily. Include sitemaps, which can help your ranking as well.



ON-SITE SEO NOT COMPLETED

You need potential customers to find your website. Performing on-site SEO tasks can greatly help you site rank higher on Google, Bing and other search engines.

***Is Your Marketing
Missing
Something?***

***We Might Be The
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