

Guide to

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A LIMITED SALES & MARKETING BUDGET

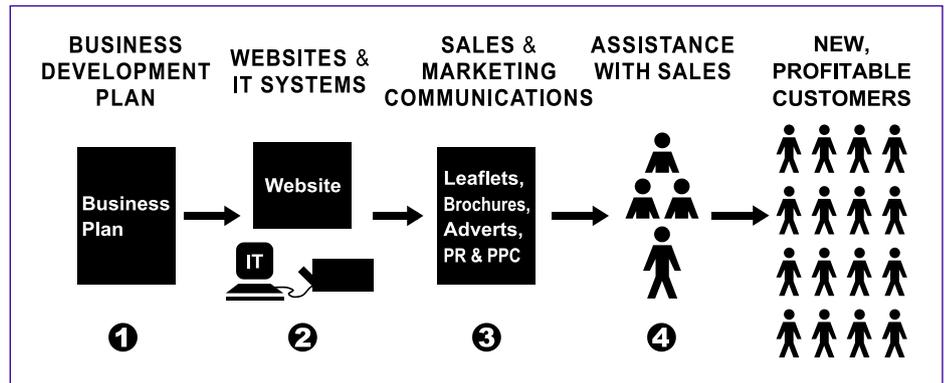
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PRACTICAL SERVICES
for
BUSINESS DIRECTORS

FOUR PROVEN STEPS TO INCREASED SALES & PROFITS



This straightforward 4-step process has been successfully used to help many small and medium sized enterprises get the most value from their sales and marketing budget.

Applicable to all types of businesses it has become practical and cost effective because of the new opportunities and facilities available to small businesses by the Internet, websites, low cost and powerful computer systems and, more recently, digital and lower cost printing.

Your challenges, opportunities and problems are unique. However these four practical steps have been proven time and again to lead the way to substantially improved profitability.

STEP 1. A BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Are your marketing materials, brochures, websites, sales activities and IT systems working together properly to help you successfully achieve your business objectives?

Although it is inexpensive to do, this first step, a business development plan, is fundamental if you are to successfully get the best value from your website, marketing and sales activities.

This first step starts with a systematic and structured review of all the important aspects of your business.

These should include: owners goals and objectives for the business; an analysis of the products and services you offer; a thorough understanding of your customers, who they are and why they buy from you; detailed knowledge about competitors, who they are and how they operate; industry structure, your company's strengths and weaknesses; and any major changes in your marketplace.

The outcome of this first step should provide good answers to the following questions:

- What products and services to offer?
- In which markets and market segments to operate?

- Who are the best potential customers?
- How best to reach them?
- How best to convince them to buy your products and services?
- What differentiates you from your competition?

In addition, this first step should provide a fresh perspective and uncover substantial new opportunities and improvements to your existing practices.

Much of the research can be successfully carried out on the Internet, but it should be remembered that this information is also easily accessible to your competitors.

In order to gain competitive advantage it is absolutely vital that you are fully aware of your competitors and what they are doing in your marketplace and how they are likely to respond to any marketing you do.

Sometimes the business planning process throws up unexpected first priorities such as the need to make better use of IT systems to improve productivity.

Although creating a business development plan can be carried out in house there are significant benefits to this work being done by an external person or organisation.

Firstly the time involved. Are there people within your business who have the time to do this as well as perform adequately the role they are employed to do?

Secondly will your people be able to use a tried and tested methodology? This helps get to the heart of the matter quicker. Also, will your people have the experience to ask the right questions and interpret those findings correctly?

Thirdly will your people be able to bring fresh eyes and experience to your business? This is often difficult for somebody working on a day-to-day basis within the business.

The Business Development Plan does not need to be a lengthy document. We

recommend one to four pages.

The Christopherson Associates Business Development Plan Services typically achieve this first step after just one paid for meeting taking up very little of our client's time or money.

We achieve this through very careful and skilled research and preparation as well as drawing on an extensive base of proven business experience.

The resulting Business Development Plan forms the sound foundation on which the subsequent steps are built.

STEP 2. WEB SITE DESIGN & IT SYSTEMS

Are you using your website to cost effectively test out your marketing communications?

The business plan should give you a clear vision of how to move your business forward and where you want it to be in 2 and 5 years time.

Your website should accurately reflect not just who you are, but who you want to be. In every instance where we have completed a business development plan for a client, it has resulted in substantial changes to their website if they already had one.

A website is the least expensive medium in which to develop, change, experiment, monitor and publish. And therefore makes an ideal platform on which to prototype your marketing messages.

Once you are sure it is effective you can confidently publish in more expensive media such as printed leaflets, brochures and advertisements.

If correctly planned from the outset, this also allows maximum reuse of the text and graphic material produced for the website, reducing development and production costs of your other marketing material as well as creating a consistent company image.

Your website should act as the "master document" for all your marketing messages. The images and text on the website should always be the most up to date reference point whenever you are creating any other form of marketing communications.

Your website allows you to inexpensively publish comprehensive information about your company, it's products and services. If the website comes up high in the free search engine listings, it can also attract new customers very cheaply.

As the Internet has become more and more popular as an everyday business tool and more companies are trying to exploit it's potential, the criteria for getting your particular

website high up on search engines have become more complex and sophisticated.

To achieve high free search engine positions, a website needs to be designed with this in mind from the start. You also need to know which two or three keyword terms are most likely to be typed in by a potential customer when searching the Internet for the sort of products or services you provide.

With a small marketing budget this is absolutely vital. It is also extremely important to make the website easy to navigate by potential customers. This is most easily done by having a rollover menu near the top or near the top left hand corner. It is also important to develop a consistent page identity, so that visitors always know when they are on your website and when they leave it.

Your web designer therefore needs to be able to demonstrate the ability and experience to provide you not only with websites that are easy to navigate, but are also optimised for the search engines.

In addition to the actual design of your website other aspects need careful consideration. These include: domain name selection, web hosting; email set-up; website maintenance; and up-date planning to ensure costs are kept as low as possible and the best value for money is achieved.

Quite often businesses operate in more than one market or market sector and in such situations more than one website and domain name may be required to achieve the best results.

The Christopherson Associates Web Site Design Services include arranging web hosting, setting up email, website design, website content, website maintenance planning, online ordering/e-commerce systems and search engine optimization (SEO).

With our very specialist knowledge of IT systems suitable for small businesses we can also work with you to ensure you have appropriate IT systems, processes and support for your business and if necessary, integrate these with your website. For further information please see details of our IT services on our website.

STEP 3. MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

If the very essence of marketing is clear persuasive communications, how effective are your marketing materials?

Your marketing communications should answer your potential customer's key questions:

- Who are you?
- What do you do?
- What's in it for me?
- What makes you better than others?

Having completed steps one and two, your website will already clearly and persuasively have answers to these questions.

The business development plan will also have indicated what mixture of sales and marketing activities to pursue and included priorities and cost estimates.

Therefore as soon as the first release of your new or redesigned website is completed, you will be well prepared to begin developing specific marketing programmes, reusing the proven text and graphics from your website.

Before Windows XP, it was not practical for small businesses to bring Desk Top Publishing (DTP) in house, as previous PC systems were not capable of handling photographic files properly.

Now Windows XP, combined with low cost powerful computers and software, allow the production facility for quality marketing tools to be brought in-house cost effectively.

Add in inexpensive digital cameras producing good high resolution photographs that can be cropped and manipulated by the software and it really does become practical for even the smallest businesses to help produce their own high quality marketing materials.

This can further reduce the cost of developing and prototyping your marketing and sales campaigns, which can now be targeted individually or to very small customer groups.

In the past year, breakthroughs in printing technology have resulted in significant reduction in the cost of high quality, short run printing.

Very small companies can now present themselves to their customers in ways that have only previously been cost effective for much larger organisations.

Any printed material should reinforce the information on the website.

It is extremely important that a consistent identity and message is projected in order to get the best return from your marketing spend.

The Christopherson Associates Marketing Communications Services include database sourcing, brochure, leaflet and advertisement design and production, Public Relations (PR) and development of specific marketing programs to increase sales such as well targeted Pay-Per-Click (PPC) Advertising, Direct Mail, Print Advertising or Direct Selling campaigns.

STEP 4. SALES CAMPAIGNS

Does your company make effective presentations to well qualified customer prospects?

For most businesses that provide products or services to other business the actual sales discussion is usually conducted in a face-to-face meeting.

The website, printed sales material and the marketing programmes must all support these sales meetings and compliment what is communicated verbally.

Often the website, a printed leaflet or flyer will be the first point of contact with your company, so it must do the initial selling and motivate a prospective customer to telephone you.

However good a product or service you offer, the decision as to whether it is purchased from you or one of your competitors is influenced by the way your company is perceived through your website and the quality and presentation of any printed material you send to them – and by the salesperson communicating with them on your behalf.

In many small businesses staff that do not come from a sales background carry out this task and they have simply acquired or grown into this additional role.

You owe it to your business to ensure your staff who do the selling receive the best possible training, help and support because they play the pivotal role in converting enquiries generated into orders for your company.

What often happens is once they understand the business development plan, see the new or revised website and have at their disposal good printed sales material, their own enthusiasm and commitment is re-energized bringing an effective new focus to the sales activities.

The result is almost inevitably more sales.

COSTS

As the chart on this page illustrates the cost involved in creating an effective Business Development Plan is very small in comparison to the amount of money typically spent on subsequent sales and marketing activities. Obtaining good answers to the questions posed in the Business Development Plan is usually the least expensive part of this process, but this is vital to ensuring that the money spent on the other parts of the plan is as effective as possible and not wasted as is often the case.

SUMMARY

This 4-step process exploits all the tools and technologies that are now available to small businesses to create a very effective marketing and sales capacity in house.

It cannot be emphasised enough however, that the first two steps are fundamental, and if completed properly, make the remaining steps much easier and minimize their cost as well as making them more effective.

If you are interested in any of our Business Development, Website, IT, Marketing or Sales Services, please telephone us on 01225 480325 or complete the contact form on our website www.practicalservices.co.uk to arrange a free discussion.

The author of this article is available for group presentations to your business or organization. If interested, please call us on 01225 480325 to arrange.

See the downloads section of our website for similar articles for small business owners.

About Christopherson Associates

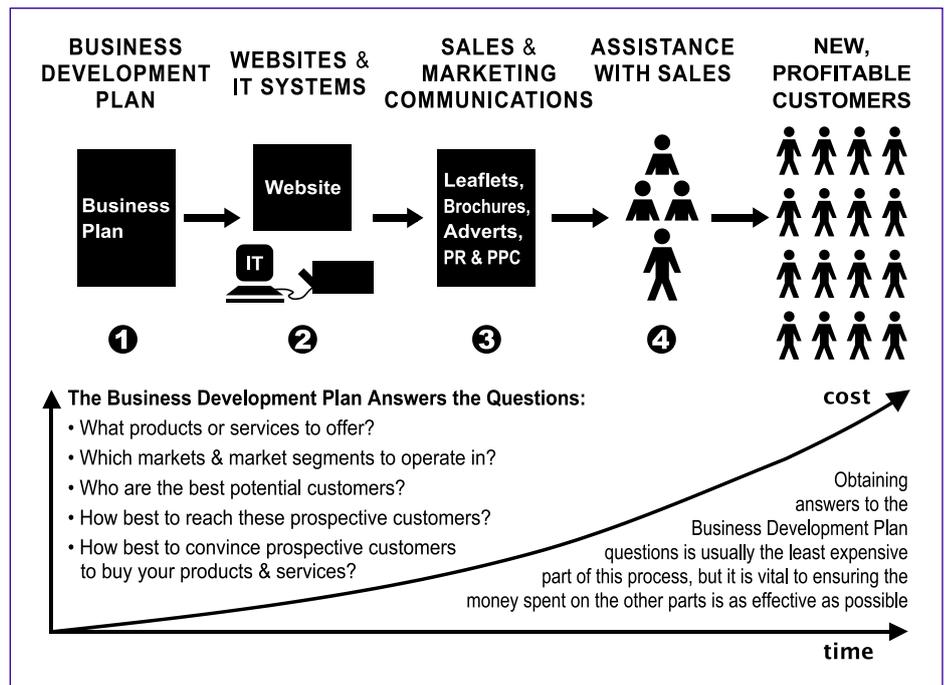
Christopherson Associates help business owners achieve their goals by providing a whole range of practical services.

These services include boosting profits, increasing sales and marketing activities, streamlining operations, installing Quality or IT systems, ensuring compliance with Health and Safety regulations or Employment legislation, raising finance, planning and implementing an exit strategy or helping with any business problem outside of the experience of the business owner.

All our associates are seasoned and mature business professionals with decades of relevant business experience either at board or director level of major companies or have run their own businesses.

They are well trained in working with business owners and take a highly practical approach to solving problems and enhancing your business by working closely with you every step along the way.

COST DIAGRAM SHOWING THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPLETING THE BUSINESS PLAN FIRST



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Health & Safety (H&S) for Small Companies
Getting The Most Out Of Your Accounting Systems for Small Companies
Raising Finance for Small Companies
Getting The Most for Your Company When You Decide to Sell