

Small business marketing and

Customer relationships in the digital age



Paid content

One of your core advantages as a small business owner is having a more personal connection with your customers and local community than large, national competitors. However, personal connections can feel lost in the digital age.

While small business marketing and customer relationship strategies have changed dramatically over the past decade, this core advantage still exists. By leveraging new technology, small business owners can nurture those professional relationships while potentially driving growth through different online channels.

The evolving landscape of digital marketing

Digital marketing is not new. Channels like email, social media, paid search engine optimization (SEO) and content marketing have been around for well over a decade. New technology has the potential to help make channels like these more accessible for small business owners.

For example:

- By tracking and analyzing performance metrics for digital marketing strategies small business owners can test which of their online ads deliver, which can help them allocate marketing dollars more effectively.
- Chatbots can offer 24/7 online customer support while your staff takes care of other responsibilities.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) and speech-to-text generation software have the potential to reduce the time and cost of creating written content.
- Creating quality video content has never been easier, thanks to smartphones, low-cost editing software and even auto-generated video.

Small business digital marketing channels and tools

As you develop your small business marketing strategy, consider these channels and digital tools to help make your marketing more effective.

Email marketing

Email is a tried-and-true small business marketing strategy because it is efficient, effective, low-cost, and lets you speak directly to your existing prospects and clients. It can be helpful to keep looking for ways to collect email addresses from prospects and existing customers.

Use small business email services to create more professional-looking messages. Some can be free up to a set amount, such as up to 1,000 emails per month. You can automate when your emails go out and track results. The programs can determine the most effective times to send emails and the ideal frequency for sending messages as part of a campaign.

Social media

Social media marketing is another way to help build effective customer relationships and your brand, helping you build awareness and drive traffic to your website or storefront. Given the options available and the time it takes to create content, focus on a couple of channels that best fit your target market.

Look for tools that allow you to map out your calendar of posts, track demographics and identify your top-performing posts so you can continue building your presence. In addition to regular posting, you can also launch paid ads targeting your ideal customers on social media to increase your business's visibility.

SEO and paid search

Search engines [rank pages](#) for various keywords. Ranking nationally can be challenging but more achievable on a local scale. For example, a local contractor might target “basement repair tips (name of local town)” for website content instead of the much broader “basement repair tips.”

You can help improve your website's SEO by regularly posting content using a few target keywords that are relevant to your type of business. Alternatively, you could look up the cost of a pay-per-click search, which might be more affordable in smaller, local markets. Look for SEO tools that can help you find keywords to target based on the cost, competition and total traffic.

Content marketing

Content marketing means creating articles, blogs, guides, videos and other materials for your target audience. You can then publish your content on other digital channels and, with permission, on other websites to rank for SEO. The disadvantage of content creation is it takes time to put together, but new AI tools could help speed up the process if used appropriately. For instance, AI can create drafts of written content, headlines, images, even videos. Be sure to check the content for accuracy and relevance before posting.

Small business digital marketing tips

As you plan out your digital marketing strategy, these tips can help you make the most of your efforts:

Concentrate on what makes your business different

If you post the same materials as everyone else, you'll get lost in the crowd. Think of what you offer that your competitors don't, whether it's knowledge of the local market, a unique product or customer service that goes above and beyond. Make sure that your digital marketing efforts focus on this point of difference. If you use AI-generated content, edit and customize what's created to add your personal touch.

Use conversational marketing

Rather than trying to pitch your services and products on every interaction, treat your digital marketing as a conversation. You're there to share information and solve common customer issues. This can help you build relationships so when a customer has a need, they are more likely to think of you.

Commit to regular digital marketing efforts

Digital marketing can work but you have to make it a priority and maintain consistency. Considering there are so many digital marketing platforms and tools, you may want to start by targeting those on which you feel most comfortable first. Create a planning calendar around different seasonality needs or relevant events to help manage the flow of your email, social and content marketing content.

Research new approaches

Technology and digital tools for small businesses will only improve over time. Keep testing new platforms, tools and strategies to find what works for your business. You never know when you'll make a breakthrough.

Maintain your in-person efforts

Digital marketing should enhance, not replace, your traditional sales and marketing. Consider continuing to make your presence known in your local community with physical ads and in-person events.

Digital strategies to enhance customer relations

If executed effectively, small business marketing can prompt people to check out your business but you still need to nurture those relationships. That way, you can build trust, loyalty and long-lasting customers. Here's how to do so in the digital age.

Create personalized experiences

The plethora of different digital channels can make it seem like everyone is receiving the same message. As you work with your target market, consider how you could make your messages more personal. For example, with email marketing, you could give people the option to only receive messages for the services they care about or change the frequency of messages, such as from weekly to monthly. Consider crafting future outreach for existing customers to match their past purchases and profiles. Keep in mind, however, [Federal law](#) requires that marketing emails include an “unsubscribe” link or alternative means by which customers may opt-out of future communications if so desired.

Share your story

Remind customers about the humans behind your business through digital outreach. Share your background, information about your staff and your ties to the local community.

Be responsive

Make sure to reply to comments and messages on your social media platforms. You could repost interesting content from your existing and potential future customers. This shows you are listening and increases the amount of helpful material you are providing to others.

Show that you are working to improve

Regularly ask for feedback on your website and marketing materials. You could also host an online customer appreciation and digital engagement session. If customers share something that could have been better, listen and make the improvement. Then, explain what you're doing differently in your future outreach. Your large competitors may not be able to be as responsive.

Use a mix of human and automated contact

Automation can speed up and improve your customer service, but if it goes too far, it can damage relationships. Consider how to use a blend. For example, use a 24/7 chatbot on your website for immediate support, with the option for customers to chat with or call a live staff member when needed.

A human touch in the digital age

As so many aspects of our lives continue to move online, people still crave personal connection. Don't forget that as you build your digital presence. By taking advantage of these small business marketing and customer relationship strategies, you will eventually find a balanced approach to growth, engagement and productivity.

If you'd like to invest more in digital outreach, make sure you have the technology and infrastructure to back it up. Learn more about [Verizon's solutions](#) for powering your small business digital marketing strategy.

The author of this content is a paid contributor for Verizon.