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Good marketing, properly targeted, properly thought through and properly costed will always benefit a company.

But many small and medium sized businesses ('SMEs'), with time and budget constraints, often pay too little attention to this key business activity. In a competitive market place, doing nothing is not an option.

**Peter Mann** of Buzz Associates, who works with SMEs to help them improve their marketing, believes companies should use common sense when planning their marketing and their **marketing communications**.

His advice is to think about what you would like to do, justify your ideas to your colleagues, budget carefully and measure the results.

# Common sense Marketing

*Marketing communication – it used to be called publicity – is the side of marketing everyone likes to have a hand in. Here are a few pointers to getting the best out of your budget and your ideas.*

## Budget first

Set a realistic budget – realistic in relation to your turnover and profits. Itemise the actions that will best promote your business. Look at where your orders come from and measure the results of your marketing – *and then concentrate on the actions that bring the greatest return.*

## Advertising

Advertising can be very effective, but you *must* understand who reads the publications in which you plan to advertise – ask your customers what they read and forget any title which is the least bit dubious. Always ask for a discount. Keep your ads as simple as possible – and plug the major benefits, not just the features.

## Press releases

PR is a great way to build credibility because your announcement effectively has the backing of well known trade magazines. Remember, though, that editors want news that is relevant to them. Try to avoid 'colour separation' charges.

## Promotional literature

Make your brochure a sales aid that helps you to sell when face to face with a prospect. Keep your literature simple but good looking and easy to read. Highlight all the benefits and use facts not waffle. It's worth investing in good photography too – which can also be used in ads, PR, exhibitions, packaging and on your website for years to come.

Colour printing is inexpensive and of extremely high quality these days, so don't be stingy – your brochures should show your company in the best possible light.

## Direct mail

Despite the emergence of electronic media, good direct mail, whether a postcard, sales letter or catalogue, can work – but, as with all forms of publicity, accurate targeting and relevance to the prospect are vital.

How current is your database? Keep adding contacts and all prospects who are relevant – and mail them on a regular basis before they forget about you and go to your competitors.

## E-mail shots

Great for short, sharp reminders of a special event or offer. Tying in with a conventional mailshot does wonders for response rates.

## Newsletters

Excellent for keeping in touch with customers, prospects, staff and distributors – but the emphasis must be on *relevant news*: relevant to the main audience you're targeting, so don't navel gaze. Regularity of publication is important too – as is making it easy and attractive to read.

## Websites

How important is having a website? Very. It's expected of you in what is now a very computer literate marketplace. Websites can either be an electronic brochure or a vehicle for buying direct. Both are fine and either can be right for your business.

Quality of presentation matters – your site should be fast to download, up to date, easy to read and navigate, with plenty of useful information, including your contact details on *every* page. The golden rule is **Are we making it easy for the visitor – and the search engines?** And do promote your web address.