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Marketing >

## Small Business Marketing Tune-up

Every day you are open for business, "marketing" happens.

Whether you've been in business for years or are just starting out, and even if you aren't spending a dime on marketing, you have a marketing program in place. Following are some practical steps you can take to assess your situation and take control of how your business presents itself to your customers.

**Consider the Totality of Your Organization.** More than just a logo on a building, your company's identity is defined by its totality. The quality of your products and services, the technologies you employ, the office, your web site, the company newsletter, and much more determine how your business is perceived. How the company is regarded in its totality shapes its "brand image." There are two fundamental ways to assess your company. The view looking in, and the view looking o



### The View Looking In

Without spending a dime, you can make great strides in taking control of how your business markets itself by assessing how it presents itself "on the inside."

**When you get ready for work each day, how do you dress?** Are you and your employees dressed appropriately given the nature of the business? A little fine-tuning in this area can positively impact both how folks look and how they feel about the service they provide.

**Enter your building through the main entrance.** What do you see? How does it make you feel? How might a potential customer feel making a first-time visit to your office? Are pictures hanging crooked on the wall? Are storage boxes stacked in traffic areas? Is there a light bulb that needs replacing? Chances are, if you notice things, others do as well. Do a "Ten Second Tidy" to ensure that your first impression is positive.

**Call your business from an outside location.** How is the phone answered? Is it answered within three rings? Is it answered at all? What snapshot of

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your company does the recorded message create? Are you able to navigate easily to voicemail boxes or leave a general message?

**Pause and listen.** At some point during a “typical” day at the office, take a moment to listen. Does the drone of the air conditioner signal the need for repair? Is white noise from outside auto traffic or nearby construction projects making it impossible for folks to communicate? It might very well be that something as simple as window or door insulation could make your office a more inviting environment for customers. Listen to what your staff and clients say – in the lunch room or on the way out the door. You may catch some “vibes” that will help you address small things before they become business-busters.

## The View Looking Out

Just as important as a look at your company’s internal operations, is consideration of how the company is marketed externally. Remember that your audience will respond to both the content of your offerings and the manner in which it is presented, and everyone will filter and interpret the messages differently. The goal is to ensure that as much as possible, your external marketing message is consistent with your company’s mission and objectives, thereby strengthening your brand.

**Write a Mission Statement.** Are you communicating that mission? Has the focus shifted over the years? Do you have a mission statement? In the midst of the busyness of running your company, it can be very enlightening to take a moment and jot down a simple statement about why you are in business - why you do what you do. This exercise can be both encouraging and sometimes frightening (“I’m in business to what? Why that isn’t at all how I spend my day...”) Regardless of the result, this exercise will provide useful insights.

Consider printing your mission statement on a banner and displaying it in a prominent location in your office to inspire staff and clients. Marketing goals and objectives can be summarized on a flyer or posted in a strategic location. These types of steps can help you evangelize your mission, goals and objectives within your organization and build a more focused, energized team.

**Everything matters.** From the condition of your facilities and the look and feel of letterhead to your Web site and direct mail pieces, everything markets your company. Make a list of every program in place and every tool being used. Include the small stuff – business cards, pads of paper with the company logo, pocket folders, etc. Consider the appropriateness of each of the programs and tools, measured against either your formal marketing plan or simply your business goals as far as they have been articulated. If necessary, (and this can be difficult) stop certain activities and stop using certain tools if they send the wrong message. This might mean recycling those pads of paper with the old company logo, purchasing a different style or color of pocket folder, or recording a more effective telephone greeting.

**Establish a Marketing Advisory Council.** This is a small group of trusted colleagues, associates and even clients who want to see your company flourish. Your marketing advisory council is a sounding board for your marketing plans. The advantage of having the input of such a group is profound. Because these folks are not employees, their insights come from a position outside the company – looking in. Their feedback can be more objective, less driven by the personal agendas, political alliances and other dynamics at play within a company that influence the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Your marketing advisory council provides feedback on anything you believe would be more effective if their input was included – a new logo design, article ideas for the company newsletter, special events, etc. And remember, everything matters!

Every day your company is open for business, “marketing” happens.

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Everything about your company markets the company so consider the impact of both your internal operations and external programs to fine tune the message your business is sending.

CORPORATION  
**831.438.0408**  
[www.reynoldsgroupcpa.com](http://www.reynoldsgroupcpa.com)



*Robert Henslin*  
[dziner@earthlink.net](mailto:dziner@earthlink.net)  
[www.rhdcreative.com](http://www.rhdcreative.com)