

4 Marketing Strategies Every Startup Can Afford

You don't need to outspend your competition. You just need to out-think and out-work them.



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Do your products sell themselves?

Having a great product is essential, but that alone isn't enough to make your startup successful. Aside from your fantastic product, you'll also need a stellar marketing strategy to grow your startup. But for many entrepreneurs, it's simply not realistic to spend a lot of money to acquire new business.

Instead, consider a few of these cost-effective marketing strategies that can help generate early successes.

Affiliate marketing.

Affiliate marketing is the most cost-effective marketing strategy that works. I believe all businesses -- regardless of size -- should adopt referral, or affiliate, marketing. I've used it with a good deal of success and put it to work in all my online businesses.

Here's how it works: Encourage people to recommend your products to others, and pay a commission only when someone purchases your products through those referrals.

Start by setting up an affiliate program through networks such as [ShareASale](#) or [ImpactRadius](#). You then can promote your affiliate program by featuring it prominently on your website and inviting customers to join the program. Additionally, you can choose the right reward structure -- one that's compelling enough for your network's members to engage.

Email outreach also can serve as an efficient tool when communicating with influencers:

- Create a list of influencers and experts in your industry,
- Send an outreach email requesting they try your product for free, and
- Explain the monetary rewards they could earn by referring a user.

Content marketing.

According to the Content Marketing Institute, [nearly 90 percent of brands use content marketing](#) to grow their businesses. It's the perfect marketing strategy for startups and small businesses because it works within the confines of limited resources.

Even though [content marketing](#) is extremely popular, not everyone finds success with this tactic. Lack of a documented [content strategy](#) is one of the primary causes. Without this crucial piece, your efforts will be less effective. As a result, you could face significant challenges when you attempt to implement content-marketing tactics.

Streamline your content-marketing process by creating an editorial calendar. Identify any bottlenecks and evaluate your content planning. Measure your strategy's progress, tracking how well your content is performing to attract the audience.

Do-it-yourself PR.

[More than 540,000 new businesses](#) launch each month. That means you'll encounter some serious competition to grab your target market's attention. If you want to generate favorable and frequent public-relations mentions, build quality relationships with the journalists and bloggers in your industry.

Be prepared that you might not always get a response when you make your pitch. You can increase the likelihood of getting coverage if you differentiate your pitch so the tone or angle of each is exclusive to the journalist and her or his publication. Do some research to discover which writers or videographers cover which aspects of your industry. Then, tailor your press release, teaser, or pitch-by-phone to fit those respective beats. Free tools such as [Help a Reporter Out](#) can assist in your quest to gain access to email addresses that belong to journalists looking for interviews in your space.

Piggyback a popular platform.

When you're launching a bootstrapped startup, the real challenge is coming up with a marketing strategy that requires little to no funding. Piggybacking another well-grown platform is a great strategy to get your product in front of potential customers. Airbnb's integration with Craigslist is a perfect example of [ad hoc integration for user acquisition](#).

Craigslist doesn't allow integration with any third-party services that cross-post listings to the site. To build a backlink and attract users, the team at [Airbnb reverse-engineered](#) how

Craigslist's forms worked -- then made Airbnb's own site compatible with that workflow. Just a few clicks allow users to easily cross-post a listing to Craigslist while also placing a backlink that points to their own site.

The general rule of thumb: Find the right platform you can leverage to grow your startup and create a strategy that works to acquire customers.