



Start Up Loans

The marketing toolkit for start up businesses

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#startuploans

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Learn how to market your new business and reach more customers

Marketing takes time and effort but it doesn't need to cost a fortune. We reveal low-cost ways to market your small business and get your product or service in front of the right customers.

There are lots of different marketing channels and tactics you could use – from social media and customer events, to direct mail and digital advertising – but that doesn't mean you should take a scattergun approach.

Every business is unique and so are its customers. To do marketing well, you need to put your business in front of your customers, which means being where they are.

To do that, you need a marketing plan. And you need to know whether that marketing activity is worth the time, effort and money before you dive in.

Section 1.

What is marketing?

Why market your business?





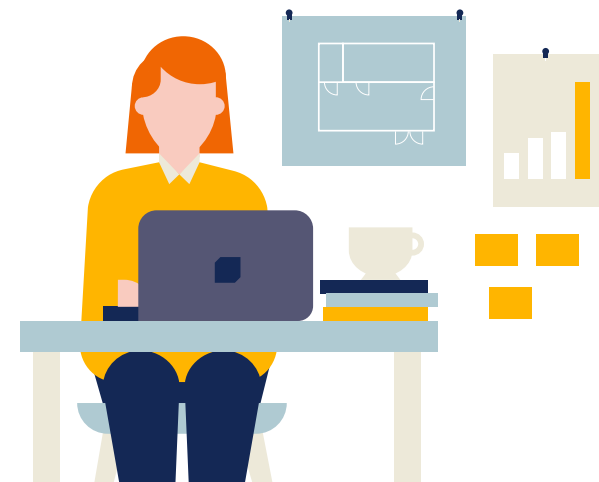
1. What is marketing?

Marketing puts your business in front of your customers. Done well, it raises awareness of your brand, gives people a reason to buy, and results in sales. Done badly, it can become a bottomless money pit.

Marketing is any activity that involves developing, promoting and selling your products and services. It covers advertising, promotions, customer service and public relations.

Marketing is essential to the success of any new business. You may have ground-breaking products or innovative services but if people don't know your business exists, you'll never make enough sales.

Marketing puts your products or services in front of potential customers. If your marketing's effective, it'll encourage customers to buy.



Why market your business?

1. Promotes your company

Effective marketing helps establish your brand, putting your products and services in front of customers who are willing to buy.

2. Boosts sales

Once your brand is visible, marketing can help increase sales to existing customers and increase new customer numbers.

3. Retain customers

Marketing helps create a base of loyal customers. With repeat business often cheaper than winning brand new customers, it's essential to retain and engage existing customers.

4. Compete and grow

Good marketing can help you compete with larger, more established brands, allowing your small business to grow and expand.

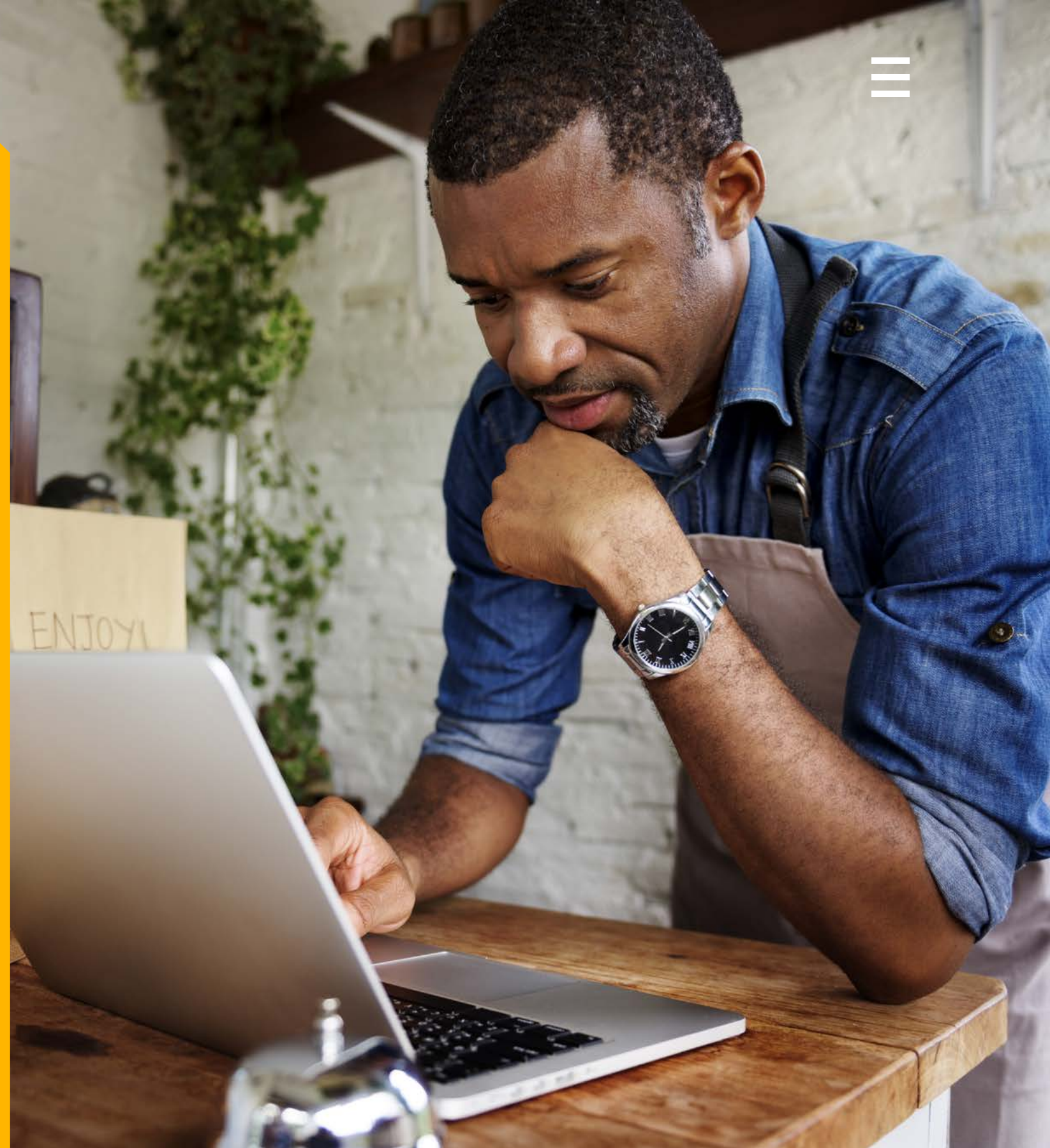


Section 2.

Market research

Desk research

Field research





2. Market research

Understand what your customers want through market research.

Market research is vital for any start up. Before you launch, you need to understand the market and your potential customers, and determine whether there's a demand for your products or services. If that demand isn't there, your business is unlikely to be viable.

Market research helps you understand demand. But it also gives indicators on how much customers are willing to pay, product features that will tempt them to buy and how you can continuously improve your offering.

Before you launch

- **Understand customers**
Learn where they live, what they like and how they shop or buy. This will help you identify how your business can meet their needs and interests.
- **Test your business idea**
Early feedback can help refine your business idea, price it competitively and see if there's demand for it.

When you're up and running

- **Improve your business**
Ongoing feedback on everything from customer service to how customers use your product is invaluable for improving your business and planning for future product launches.
- **Analyse your brand and competitors**
Discover what customers think about your brand and how they view your competitors, which you can use to develop a marketing strategy.
- **Create press releases**
Often overlooked, but a press release based on a customer survey or market research has a better chance of getting media coverage for your start up, particularly if you can tailor it to the media you're sending it to.

How does market research work?

There are different ways to carry out market research – some you can do yourself at little cost while others can require the services of a market research company.

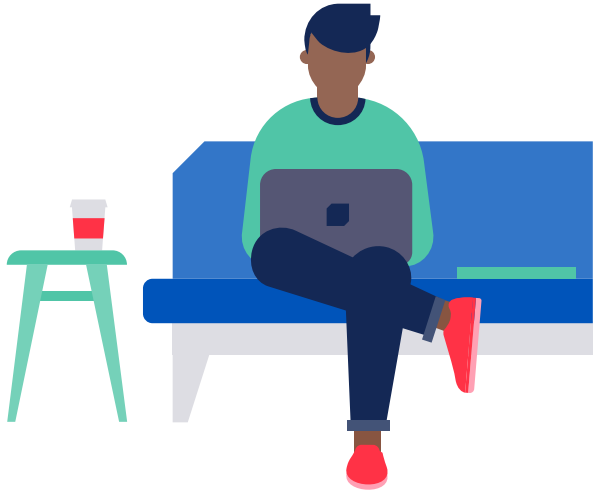
There are two ways you can conduct market research: desk research and field research.

Desk research

This involves researching your market online, using industry papers and reports, online marketing tools and even government services such as YouGov, all of which you can use from the comfort of your own desk.

Field research

Field research involves meeting customers and listening to their feedback. This can be in focus groups or observing them as they browse a store. Groups of customers can be invited to test a pre-production version of your product and give feedback, or you can conduct market research surveys by asking questions to people on the street.



Market research techniques

- **Institutional data**
Public sector bodies are a great source of data for market research. Through organisations like the Office for National Statistics, YouGov and the British Library, you can access lots of consumer information, including age, occupation and location, to kick-start your market research.
- **Industry data**
Trade associations and organisations have lots of information on the market such as statistics and facts on geographical areas or a specific demographic – useful for helping create your business plan and forecasting demand and market trends.



Marketing tools and software

There's lots of information available from marketing companies offering insight into consumers.

- Keyword (KW) research tools allow you to see search volumes for anything online and you can look at specific regions and date ranges. You can also compare historically to see whether interest is growing over time.
- social media and email marketing platforms offer regular whitepapers and reports into their users, which can provide helpful topline figures.
- Surveys from companies like SurveyMonkey and Hotjar allow you to talk directly to customers online and collect their feedback. And once they're set up, they look after themselves, allowing you to dip in and out of the results as and when you want.

Focus groups

Focus groups are a brilliant way to get feedback but are difficult to organise and get right.

- **Picking the right people**
Your focus group needs to mirror your customers or potential customers, otherwise their feedback is irrelevant. Lots of big companies use focus group companies to recruit relevant users.
- **Running a session**
Sessions usually last from one hour to three hours and typically involve around eight to ten users. Focus groups are shaped by what you want to get out of them and that should influence the questions and tasks you get participants to complete.

For example, if you want to know whether your website is easy to use, get participants to use the website and go through journeys you want your customers to complete.
- **Online focus groups**
Focus groups can be conducted online. There are different providers with software that enables you to watch users interacting with your website.

What happens after a focus group session?

After a session, you should draw together all of your observations and look for consistencies and common issues among the participants. This should then inform your business strategy.

Note: Participants are generally paid to participate in focus groups.

Get attendees to sign a non-disclosure agreement if showing them a new product or service and be sure to record feedback and take notes during the session.



Section 3.

Creating a business brand

Brand basics





3. Create your brand

Define your brand, business goals and company mission.

Customers rarely buy products. Instead they buy into and from brands that they feel positive about. Whether a brand inspires trust, trendiness or innovation, people buy from brands they believe in.

This is doubly true for new businesses. Without the history of a long-standing brand, customers can quickly dismiss a start up that doesn't instantly capture their imagination or give them a reason to believe in the business.

Start by creating a company vision which covers:

- **Unique selling point (USP)**
How is your business different to competitors?
- **Reason to believe**
Why should a customer use your business? What is unique, compelling or different about your business?
- **What is the point of your business?**
What does your brand stand for? For start ups this is often the reason why you founded your company. It might be to deliver excellent customer service, to sell locally-sourced, sustainable products or to offer 24/7 access to a safe taxi service, for example.

This is often expressed as a mission statement – it details why your business is here, what it stands for and what it aims to achieve. It brings the values of your company to the forefront, such as being friendly, secure, caring and knowledgeable.

Make sure that your marketing activity communicates your brand vision and values, along with the products and services you're selling.

These values also determine the objectives you'll have and how you'll achieve them.





Brand basics

Getting the brand basics right is important. Make sure your brand name, logo, website and email address are the same across all your advertising.

Use your brand vision – its values, USP and reason for customers to believe – as a filter to pass all your marketing materials through. If it doesn't convey your brand, don't use it.



Brand logo

It's worth investing in professional logo design. Expect to pay between £500 and £2,000 for a decent logo and up to £5,000 for extras such as signage, vehicle livery and marketing materials.

Ensure your logo ties in with your business message and your business name. It needs to be memorable and easy to reproduce, so simple shapes and icons are better. Ensure your logo is recognisable in black and white. Try Fiverr if you are on a budget.

Brand advertising

Your brand will be the foundation for all your marketing material – from the copy you create to the images you use.

It's worth investing in some creative support at this stage. Get a designer to take your brand values and mission and put together some house styles for how you create advertising copy. What words and images should you use? What should you avoid?

Think about typefaces you'll use and why. For example, thin, sans serif typefaces are often used by technology and modern business (Apple uses the San Francisco typeface for products), whereas an old-fashioned serif type such as Times New Roman suggests a business that has a long history and is more 'serious.'

Set rules

Consistency is important in branding so establish ground rules for marketing and advertising copy.

Where does your logo appear? What tagline will you use? How does the website address appear? By writing down the guidelines you'll be able to communicate your brand across different channels easily.

Focus internally

At its core a brand identity gives a focus point for your business to live its values day-to-day. Make sure your staff are versed in it and ensure it appears everywhere in your company.



Section 4.

Digital marketing channels

Digital marketing





4. Digital marketing channels

Understand what marketing channels your customers use and how you can reach them.

Lots of new businesses struggle to market effectively, especially when operating on a shoestring budget while their competitors splash thousands of pounds a day on individual channels.

That’s why understanding which marketing channels your customers use, and how to get the most value out of them, is vital for your business and crucial to getting a return on the investment you make in your marketing efforts.

When choosing a marketing channel, think about:

- **Target audience**
What channels do your target audience use? Clues such as age, gender, location and economic status can help you identify the relevant channel. Look where competitors advertise and see how active your customers are online or on social media. Using your market research as a starting point, research different marketing channels to see if they suit your audience.
- **Free vs paid**
Some marketing channels can create customer leads for free but require lots of time and effort. Paid-for advertising can generate more sales leads but at a cost.
- **Marketing objective**
Your chosen channel should match your marketing objective. For example, if you’re advertising a 24-hour flash sale, social media is more suitable than a monthly magazine.


Social media

Free or paid


- Instagram
- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- YouTube

Social media is an invaluable way to market your products and services to your target audience, increase brand loyalty and develop customer relationships. But it takes time to build a successful presence.

It’s a full-time job. You’ll need to post frequently and interact with customers to maintain interest and keep conversations going. You can use social media for paid advertisements. Each platform has its own methods, advantages and disadvantages, and targeting criteria. It’s worth testing paid social media with a limited budget before committing to big spend.



Advantages: Value for money
Easy to set up.



Disadvantages: Time
Takes time to grow, lots of competition, difficult to stand out.


Email marketing

Free or paid


- Dotdigital
- Campaigner
- Mailchimp

Email’s strength lies in its ability to deliver targeted messages straight to customers. To get started, you’ll need a list of email recipients who have given you permission to send them messages, which can take time to build up.

Once you have a list of emails and customers to contact, you can use email marketing platforms. They can allow you to send bulk emails, triggered emails and segment your lists based on different characteristics to allow for more targeted sends.



Advantages: Value for money
Cheap to email, highly targeted.



Disadvantages: Time
Takes time to build a mailing list.



Digital advertising

Paid

- Google Ads
- Bing

There are different types of online advertising and different ways to pay for it. Display advertising involves designing image-based adverts and placing them next to relevant content on websites. Pay per click (PPC) means you only pay when a potential customer clicks on a link in your ad and visits your website. The most common types of PPC advertising are through search engines, such as Google AdWords. You can target relevant customers with online advertising and easily monitor how successful your ad has been.



Advantages: Huge exposure

Very targeted, pay on performance.



Disadvantages: Time

Highly competitive, can be expensive.

Affiliate marketing

Paid

- Awin
- Tradedoubler

Affiliate marketing works on a cost per acquisition (CPA) basis – you pay a commission on any sales that are referred to you by a third party, typically around 30% of the sale price. You can create your own network of third-party affiliates or use an established network which look after payments.



Advantages: Expensive

Very targeted, pay on performance.



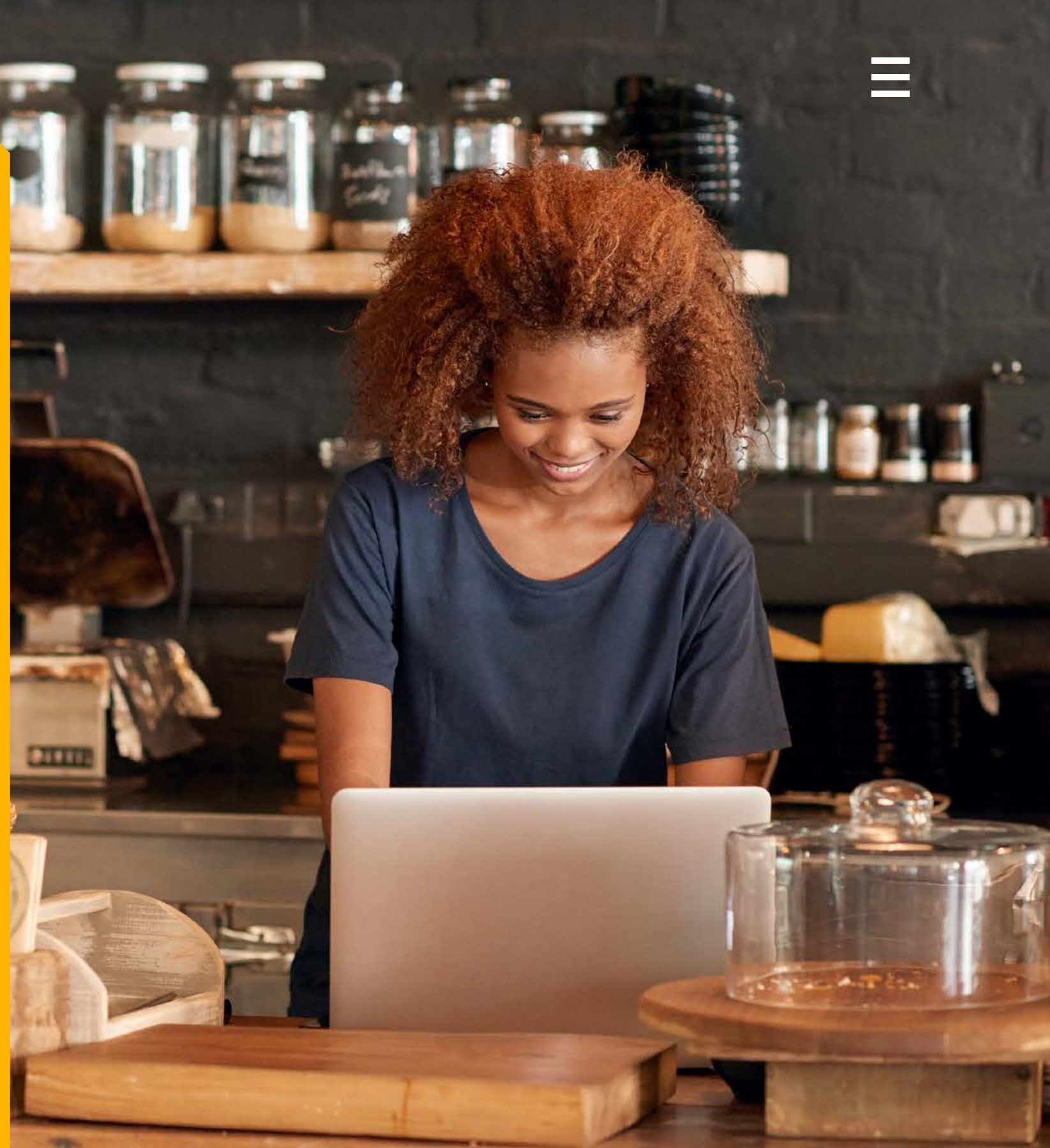
Disadvantages: Time

Can be time-consuming, cuts into profits.



Section 5.

Offline marketing channels to grow your business





Offline advertising

Paid

- Newspapers
- TV
- Radio
- Trade shows

Offline advertising covers print media, TV, radio and exhibitions. From ads in local newspapers, trade magazines and business directories, to local radio ads, offline advertising can reach lots of potential customers but it can be difficult to track and measure effectiveness.



Advantages: Expensive

Mass reach, trusted channels.



Disadvantages: Time

Expensive, hard to measure results.

Free advertising alternatives

If you have a very small marketing budget, think about using media coverage to generate interest.

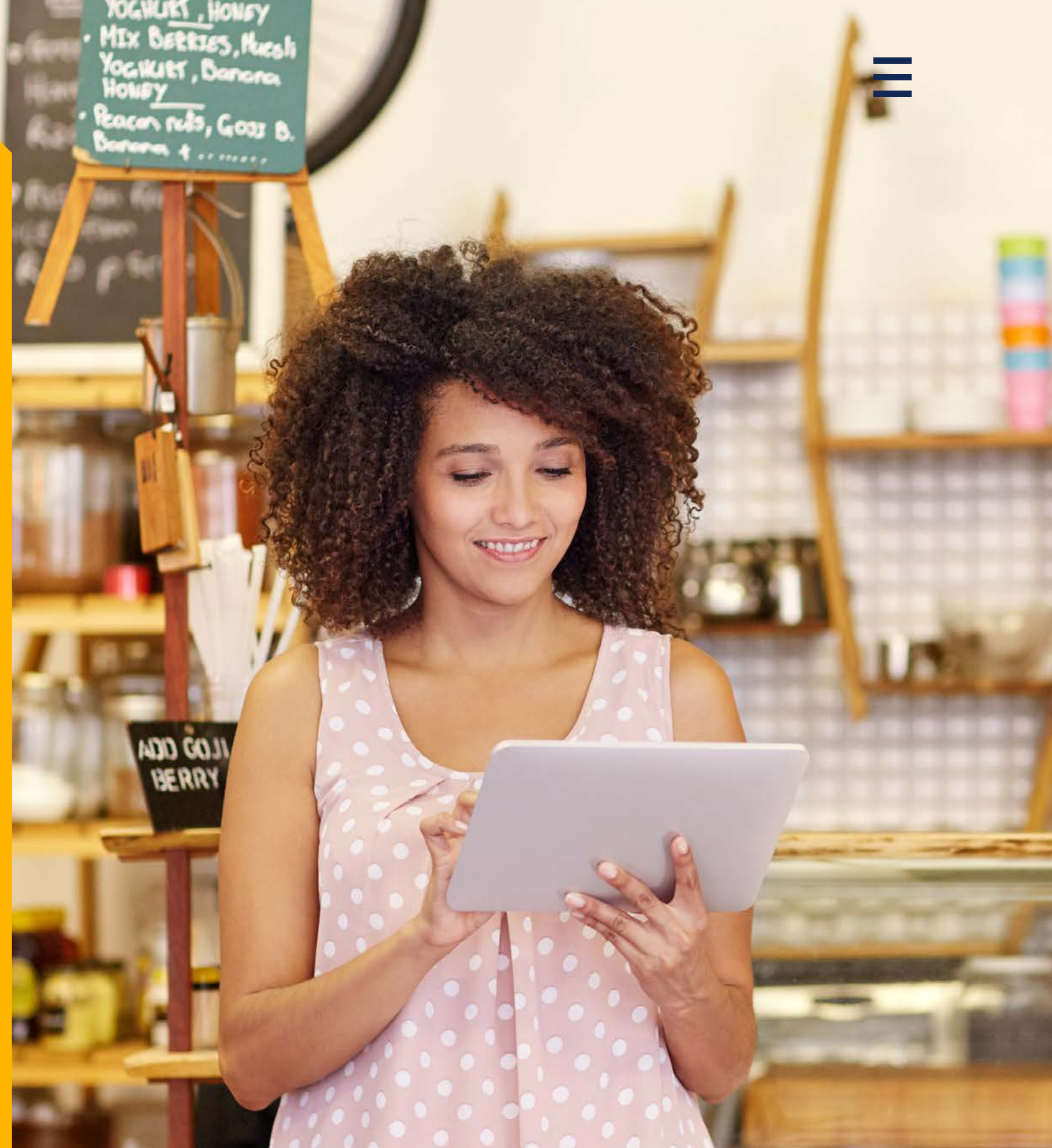
You can read about marketing on a shoestring (page 18), how to create a website (page 20) and using SEO techniques (page 22) to attract potential customers for very little upfront cost.



Section 6.

Marketing plan

Creating your plan





6. Create a marketing plan

Plan your marketing strategy before launching to get the maximum impact from your advertising.

A well-written marketing plan is essential for every business. It provides a clear direction for all your marketing activity and outlines your main objectives and how you will achieve them.

A marketing plan is different from a business plan. A marketing plan focuses on how you'll meet customers' needs and communicate the benefits of your products or services to them. It includes how you'll position your products or services, what pricing you'll adopt, and what (if any) promotional activity and marketing channels you'll use. Crucially it sets goals – that is, what you expect your marketing activities to achieve.

A marketing plan is a live document. Don't file it away once written – use it to monitor progress and keep your marketing strategy on track. And don't be afraid to make changes if the market or economy demands – your ability to adapt will help keep your small business ahead of the competition.

Start with a situation analysis

- Start writing your marketing plan based on a 'situation analysis' of your business. This should include details such as:
- **Your business**
What it does and what products or services it sells.
 - **A SWOT analysis of your business**
Look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of your business. Strengths and weaknesses are factors within your business while opportunities and threats are external factors, such as competitors and market trends.

What's your key differentiator and 'reason to believe'?
What makes your business different to competitors?
What is the 'reason to believe' in your business from a customer perspective? Is it low price? Superior quality? Brilliant customer service?

These will underpin your marketing messages as you position your new business in the market.

What to put in a marketing plan?

- **Identify your target audience**
The more you understand your customers and their needs, the more effective your marketing will be. Carry out market research to gather demographic data including gender, age, location and buying habits. Learn what your target customers like, such as quality or customer service. Ask how often they buy, what media they consume, how brand loyal they are, plus if they have any unmet needs.
- In your plan, segment your audience into three or four types. You can then tailor your marketing to each segment, using different channels, images and messages to increase effectiveness.
- Personas can help bring these segments to life.
- **Set pricing and positioning**
List all the ways your product or service meets customer needs. Define your business' unique selling point (USP), based on what your customers value the most and how you differ from the competition. Look at competitor prices and conduct market research to find out how much people are willing to pay.



- **Set marketing goals**
Decide on your marketing goals. These may include sales volumes or conversion rates from a marketing channel, such as the percentage of website visitors who become customers. For example, if your aim is to gain 10 customers a week via your website, work out how many potential visitors to your website you'll require. You'll then need to plan a digital advertising, social media or email marketing campaign to drive that number of people to visit your website.
- **Monitor results**
Measure everything you can: people who see your advertising, the number who become customers, which channel delivered the most customers, and how loyal these customers become or how much they spend. By measuring the quality of customers each channel brings, you can calculate a return on investment (ROI) and discover which channel generates more customers for every pound you spend.

Section 7.

Marketing on a shoestring

Build a website

SEO for your website





7. Marketing on a shoestring

Small marketing budget?
No spare cash to spend on advertising?
Try these low-cost marketing tactics

Leaflets and flyers

Distributing leaflets door-to-door or on busy high streets is a simple way to drum up business – all it costs is your time and the production of flyers. You could pay as little as £60 for 5,000 colour A5 flyers. However, response rates are generally less than 1%.

Ask to put leaflets in medical waiting rooms or reception areas of local businesses to encourage more people to read about your company.

Keep the message brief and include a call to action – such as a discount on a first purchase or a free gift if a customer spends a certain amount – and avoid using generic email addresses; they look unprofessional.

Start Up Loans customers get £30 free credit to use at Flyerzone, perfect for printing your first batch of flyers!

Use local newspapers

Rather than pay for an ad, send a press release to your local newspaper on something newsworthy about your business. This can result in valuable editorial coverage.

Alternatively offer to write articles, such as gardening advice if you run a gardening business.

Work with other businesses

Work with other local businesses and charities to increase your audience. You could team up with another local business and offer coupons to each other’s shops – look for businesses that offer complementary products and services to your business, such as joining up with a car spares shop if you offer car valeting.

Encourage customer recommendations

Drive sales by getting customers to recommend you. Word of mouth is invaluable.

Ask followers on social media to like and share your posts and consider ‘refer a friend’ discounts where both customers save money on their next purchase.

Get active on forums

Joining an industry forum or being active on advice forums allows you to help others and build a reputation as an industry expert. Use sites like Quora to give advice and help people with questions – ensure your company name and web address are visible in your profile so customers can find you. Make sure you post advice and tips on your social media channels as well.

Start a blog or YouTube channel

Writing a blog and regularly updating it with useful information can help customers find you online and feel confident that you’re an active business. A YouTube channel is a great way to promote your business by distributing how-to videos or demonstrations of your products. Regularly posting content engages with customers and helps attract new ones.

Get listed

Register your business with a Google My Business Account so that it can be found on Google Maps and Google searches. Yahoo! Local and Bing also have local listing services. Ensure you are listed on local directories such as Yell, and regional directories.

Get reviewed online

Get your business reviewed. Good reviews are important in generating potential customers and most platforms let you respond to bad reviews, allowing you to appear professional. Other industry-specific recommendation sites, such as Checkatrade, are worth looking at – great reviews are a valuable source of new customers and can also help with content creation and advertising.

Enter industry awards

An award is a great endorsement and helps differentiate your business from the competition. While many industry awards charge hundreds of pounds to enter, there are many free awards aimed at recognising start ups and small businesses.



Build your website

Get your new business off the ground quickly with our handy guide to building a low-cost company website.

A business website is a vital tool in your marketing armoury. It's cheap to create and for customers your business is just a click away from a Google search result or a link from another webpage. Include your website address in all your marketing collateral – from business cards to branded vans – and you've created a cheap way for potential customers to find out more and get in touch.

How much does a website cost?

You can create a basic website for free and pay just a few pounds each month to host it online.

There are plenty of free or cheap online website building tools that are easy to use including **Web.com** and **Create**. Many let you create a basic website for free with paid-for extras if you're looking for something more sophisticated.

Alternatively, free tools such as **WordPress** make it easy to build websites that range from the basic to fully formed online shops. This route requires more IT know-how so if you've got the budget, consider hiring a website designer.

Get the name right

Your domain name is the web address of your website and it should match your business name as closely as possible.

Web domain companies sell domain names. Type in your business name to see if it's available – if not, alternatives will be suggested.

Don't just pick the first suggested alternatives however. Instead try adding words that are relevant to your business. For example, 'www.jackjones.com' may not be available, so try 'jackjonesbuilders.com' or 'jackjoneshullbuilders.com.'

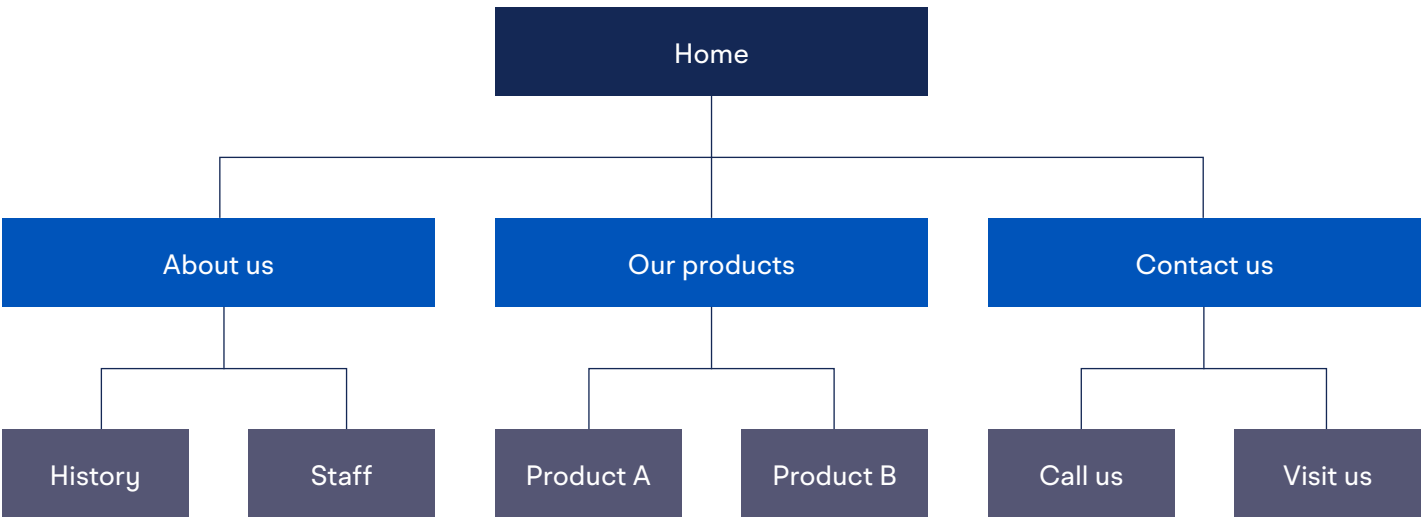
Also think about your top level domain. This is the bit at the end of your web address and is most often .co.uk or .com. If you're a UK-based business then .co.uk might be better than .com.

Build your website

Learn how to get the best results from your website. What should be on your website? Here are the minimum webpages your site should include:

- **Homepage**
Include the name and logo of your business and a few lines explaining your company, products and services and why customers should choose you. You should also make it easy for customers to do what you want them to do on your homepage. If you're selling shoes, make it obvious how a customer can buy shoes on your website through a call-to-action.

- **Products and services**
Detail the products or services you sell. Add call-to-action buttons such as 'Learn more,' 'Buy now' or 'Get a free quote'.
- **About**
Provide company background, profiles of key staff and list professional organisations of which you're a member.
- **Projects/customer testimonials**
This may feature quotes from satisfied customers or before and after shots of completed projects.
- **Contact us**
Include your address, email, phone number, business hours and links to your social media accounts such as Twitter and Facebook.





Make your website easy to find

Most people will visit your website using a search engine such as Google. To attract visitors you need to rank highly in search engine results. For example, if someone searches for ‘Leeds plumber,’ you’ll want to be in the top results if you run a plumbing business in that area.

To achieve this, use relevant keywords on your website – words that customers type into Google when looking for a business like yours. **Google’s Keyword Planner** tool can help with this.

Selling from your website

If selling online, your website will need a shopping cart function and a secure payment facility along with a way to collect payments. **PayPal** is popular, as are credit card payment gateways such as **WorldPay**.

Both are straightforward to add to websites built with tools such as **WordPress**. Make buying easy by displaying up-to-date stock information as well as delivery and returns policies.

General data protection regulation (GDPR)

GDPR came into existence in 2018 and has changed the way businesses can collect and process user information.

If you’re selling a product on your website, collecting email addresses or monitoring website traffic, you’re likely to be processing personal information, which means you need to be aware of GDPR alongside the Data Protection Act 2018.

Learn more about **GDPR**





Win customers with SEO

Optimise your website for search engine rankings to ensure your business is the first result customers click on.

SEO stands for search engine optimisation. It describes ways to improve where your site ranks in search engine results to increase the number of visitors you get from search engines like Google and Bing.

Search engine ranking is the position your website appears at in search results when someone uses a search engine. The higher your position in search engine ranking, the more likely users are to click on your website. The lower down you rank, the less likely a user will be to visit your site.

SEO is sometimes referred to as ‘organic’ or ‘free’ traffic, making it a cost-effective way to reach relevant customers because you don’t pay to feature in search engine results.

Successful SEO – achieving the highest possible search rankings – is incredibly competitive but a clear SEO strategy will help you compete.

- **Valuable content**
Your content needs to be unique, relevant and serve a purpose. Put yourself in your customers’ shoes and think about the questions and challenges they might face and answer them in your content.
- **Start a blog**
Blogging is an effective way to boost your keyword rankings and organic website traffic. Most small businesses have websites with few pages, which limits ranking potential – the more pages you have, the more opportunities to expand on the keywords you rank for. Writing a blog means creating fresh content about your expertise and industry that makes good use of longer keywords phrases.
- **Keep it fresh**
Google rewards websites with higher rankings if they’re updated frequently. Boost your SEO success by creating new pages or adding new content on a regular basis so Google knows you’ve an active website.
- **Smart images**
Make sure all the images on your site have alt tags with keywords on them which include keywords in the filename. Alt tags provide a text description of an image if the image itself can’t be displayed or a screen reader is being used. You should ‘say-what-you-see’ when creating alt tags. If the image is of a woman sat behind a desk, your alt tag should reflect that.

- **Use social media**
Adding content to social media sites means you’re searchable on social media too and links from social media boost your website credibility.
- **Use internal links**
Provide links to other relevant content on your website and link to other related websites as this shows that your business website is a useful resource.
- **Encourage inbound links**
Websites with links from other authoritative and trustworthy sites rank more highly in search engine results. Ask customers, friends, partners, suppliers and industry bloggers to link to your site. **Note:** The best way to get inbound links is to create great content.
- **Optimise for mobile**
Your site’s mobile performance is vital for improving SEO. Google uses the mobile version of your website to determine rankings before it looks at your desktop site. If Google puts that much emphasis on your mobile site, then you should as well.





Understand keywords

The easiest way to increase your website’s ranking is to use specific and relevant keywords throughout your website. Keywords are words and phrases people type into a search engine to find websites.

Start by identifying a list of keywords that defines your product and services and that your target audience uses most often when searching for a product and service like yours.

Broad keywords are useful, but they’re competitive, so the more specific and relevant you can be to your business, the better for both you and the customer.

Once you’ve identified your target keywords

Use these keywords in your title tags, body content, headings, image file names and meta (webpage) description. This tells search engines such as Google that you consider these keywords most important to your business and it will identify your business as relevant for anyone searching for those keywords.

Working example

If your business sells brown crayons, you could look at keywords like art supplies, crayons or brown crayons.

They all reflect your business but arguably brown crayons is the most relevant to what you provide.

Because it’s more specific to your product, you’re only going to be competing with other businesses that sell brown crayons. Whereas if you were to focus on art supplies, you’ll be competing with every business that sells art supplies, which is likely to be more competitive.

On top of that, it’s more useful for you and your customers to be specific and relevant in the keywords you’re targeting because they’re looking for brown crayons and that’s exactly what you sell.

Someone who’s looking for a paintbrush may search for art supplies and they may see your website in the search rankings. If they click on your site, see there are no art brushes and leave immediately, it’s a bad customer experience and results in a high bounce rate for your site, which is bad for SEO.

Free keyword search tools such as Google’s Keyword Planner can help.

Notes

Notes area with a grid of dots for writing.

Section 8.

Social media marketing

Platforms

Boost your business





8. Social media marketing

Promote your business for free using social media and connect with customers.

Twitter, Facebook and other social media channels can help you reach potential customers and turn existing customers into brand advocates eager to recommend your business to others.

Set your social media strategy

Before jumping in, decide what you want to achieve with social media.

Set a goal, such as raising your start up's profile or attracting new customers. Aim for a target number of followers or a set number of people clicking through to your website from social media channels.

Create social media content

Think about what you're posting on social media and tailor it to the channel you're using. Don't just regurgitate every piece of content you create and don't just push sales messages either.

Audiences on social media like relevant content that encourages engagement. Polls, surveys and graphics are effective ways to engage your followers, as is responding to enquiries, queries and questions.

And tailor your content. A long, detailed product update is more suited to a LinkedIn post than an Instagram post.

With millions of users in the UK, social media is a powerful and cheap way to market your business, keep customers loyal and win new ones.

Which social media platform?

- **Facebook**
Over 30 million people in the UK have a Facebook account. It's good for sharing updates, promotions and competitions with customers and getting feedback and likes.
- **Twitter**
Limits posts to just 280 characters, called tweets. It's good for handling customer questions, special offers and discounts, and sharing updates.
- **LinkedIn**
Used to recruit staff, share industry knowledge and for joining relevant business groups and networks.
- **Pinterest**
An online pinboard for sharing pictures, videos and notes. Popular with interior design, fashion, craft and food businesses to showcase work and share ideas.
- **YouTube**
The world's largest video-hosting platform. Videos offering advice are a great way to demonstrate your expertise.
- **Instagram**
Showcase for photos and short videos – great for introducing new products.





Boost business with social media

Learn how to succeed when using social media in business

Post regularly, post often!

Little and often is better than binge posting followed by long stretches of inactivity.

Build up a bank of content ahead of time, then get into a posting routine. Scheduling social posts can help to make the most of your time.

- Aim to post at least twice a day on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- You need at least 10 tweets a day on Twitter to maintain followers' interest.
- 50 pins or re-pins a day is necessary on Pinterest.

Stay connected

Make sure your website links to your social media profiles and put Twitter and Facebook details on company stationery or email signatures. Invite customers to contact you using social channels but only if you're monitoring these channels regularly.

- **Think fast**
Respond quickly to comments and questions to show that your business is listening. Speedy replies make customers feel valued, making them more likely to recommend your business.
- **Take negativity offline**
When feedback is negative, turn the conversation private – many social media platforms such as Twitter have private messaging capabilities – rather than discussing it publicly on your social account.
- **Take an interest**
Comment on other people's profiles and join groups to boost your visibility. Build strong relationships with social media influencers who have lots of followers – a retweet or a like from them will boost your reputation.
- **Monitor and measure**
Commit to a social media channel for at least three months and track what posts, updates and content prove popular. Learn what works and adjust your content strategy to create more successful outcomes.



Section 9.

Email marketing

Create a campaign





9. Email marketing

A successful email marketing campaign is a cost-effective way to promote your business directly to a customer’s inbox.

Despite the buzz around social media and the sophistication of affiliate marketing, email marketing is one of the most effective ways small businesses can target customers and generate revenue. It’s a cheap way to connect with existing and potential customers, so you should start building an email database as soon as you can.

Why use email marketing?

- **Low-cost**
With no print costs, postage or advertising fees to be paid, costs are generally lower than other marketing channels.
- **Easy to create**
Sending a marketing email doesn’t require huge teams or lots of technical knowledge. Fancy graphics and video can help but many successful email campaigns use plain text to deliver a clear message with a compelling offer. And with most email marketing platforms, building attractive emails is fairly straightforward.
- **Segmentation**
You can send targeted marketing messages to different types of customers within your email database. Segmenting your mailing list, such as by location, can boost customer engagement. Emails about local deals and offers are a good example of this.
- **Easy to track**
It’s easy to see what works and what doesn’t with email marketing. Most email marketing platforms let you test subject lines, track open rates and click-through rates, so you can make future emails more effective by learning from what’s worked before.
- **Email hosts**
Limits usually apply to the number of emails you can send from your normal business email address, so you’ll have to use a separate email service to send your marketing emails if sending to a long list of customers.

Email hosting services include tools for testing email campaigns and tracking activity and many are free for small businesses.

Create an email campaign

1. Mailing list

You need a list of email addresses of people who have agreed to receive marketing from you. You can rent a mailing list but this is expensive and response rates can be low. It’s better to organically build a list from customers and visitors to your website.

Add an email newsletter form and use incentives such as discounts to encourage sign-ups on your website.

2. Segmentation

Use additional information such as age, gender or location to tailor email campaigns to customer segments. The more closely you align your marketing to your target audience, the more successful it’s likely to be.



3. Subject line

Keep your subject line short and snappy and test different subject line topics to learn what makes your customers open your emails.

4. Personalisation

Address the email recipient on a personal level. Using their name is much better than ‘Dear Customer.’ Where possible, make content personal, such as ‘As a thank you for your recent purchase...’, rather than blanket emails.

5. Content

Include a clear call to action and place it along with your key message at the top of your email. A well-designed email uses a mix of images and text but don’t overdo images as it can make the email slow to display.

6. Email schedule

Don’t send emails too often: once or twice a month is fine for small businesses. Test when your customers are more likely to open emails. Generally, Monday mornings, Friday afternoons and weekends are considered bad times to send emails.

7. Evaluate

Analyse each email’s performance to refine your email marketing strategy. Look at open and click rates to learn what worked well.

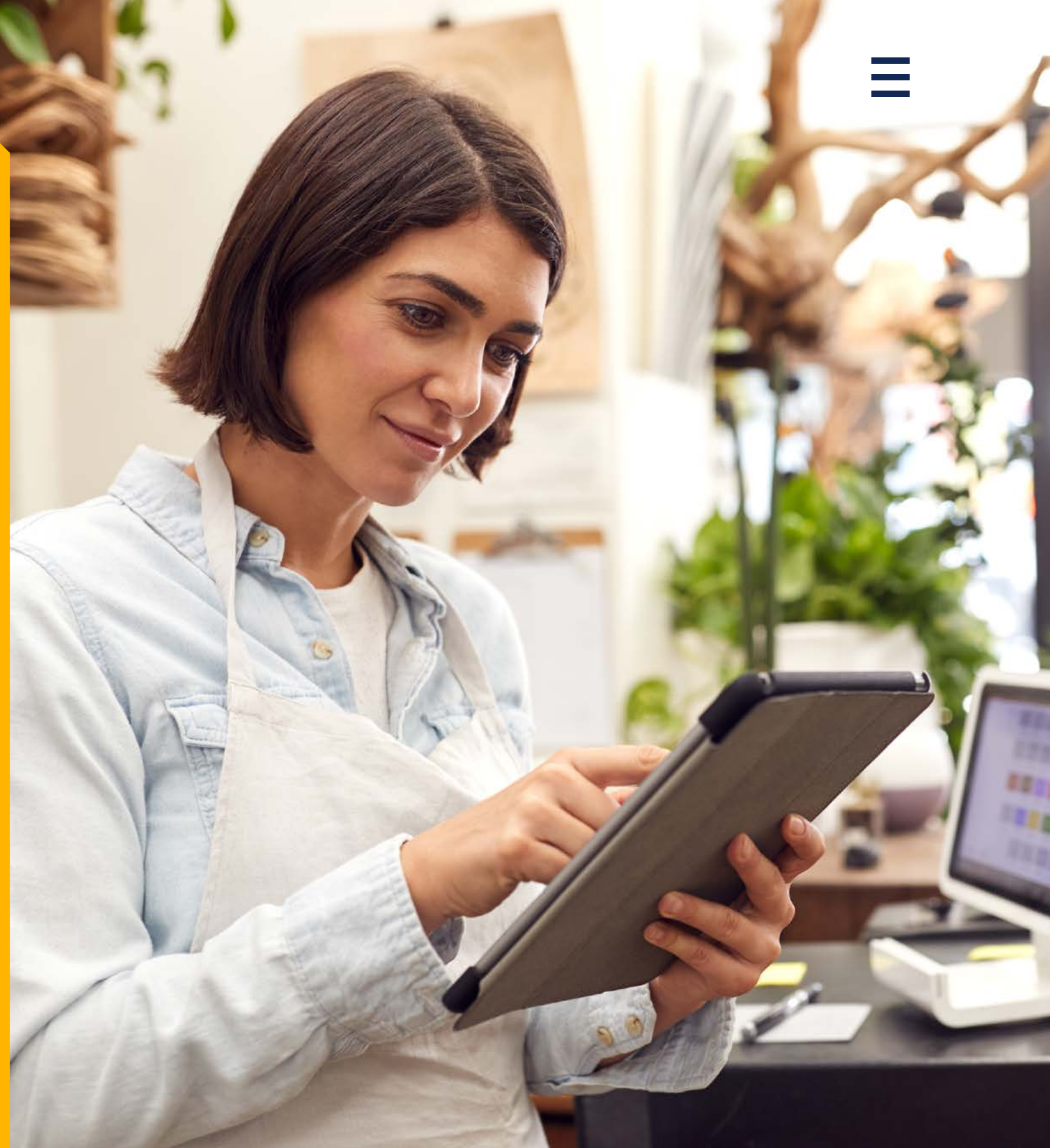


Section 10.

Digital advertising

Pay-per-click

Affiliate marketing





10. Digital advertising

Discover the benefits of digital advertising and learn how to create cost-effective pay-per-click campaigns with Google AdWords.

There are hundreds of types of digital ads – from YouTube video ads and banner ads on websites, to search engine ads and advertising on social media – and they allow you to target customers based on their profiles and browsing history.

While finding your customers is straightforward, standing out is a lot more difficult in crowded and competitive landscapes.



Types of digital advertising:

- **Banner ads**
Graphic-based ads that appear on websites such as online newspapers and blogs.
- **Search engine ads**
Appear on search engine results, such as Google, when the user types in a relevant phrase. Advertisers 'bid' to appear for specific search terms and pay when someone clicks the ad.
- **Native ads**
Advertising that's more like an article or piece of content. Written to promote your product or service, it shares the same editorial style as the website it appears on.
- **Social ads**
Generic term for ads that appear on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and more.

Paying for advertising

Unlike traditional media, you typically pay the website owner who hosts your digital ad only when a visitor clicks on it. This makes digital advertising more effective as you only pay for visitors to your website who have the potential to become customers.

Payment types include:

- **CPA (cost per action)**
You pay only when a visitor clicks your ad and then completes an action, such as buying something on your website or signing up to your newsletter.
- **PPC (pay per click)**
The most common form of payment – you only pay when someone clicks on your ad that links through to your website.
- **CPM (cost per mille)**
You pay per thousand people who see your ad, irrespective of whether they click on it. Less effective but sometimes used for brand advertising.



Our eight-step guide to creating a pay-per-click (PPC) campaign

Using a service like Google Adwords means you can target people based on what they're searching for online.

1. Define your goal

Such as increasing sales or generating newsletter sign-ups. Without a clear goal your campaign may not be effective.

2. Allocate your budget

Effectively a 'pot' of money that you pay to the advertising platform, which is debited every time someone clicks your ad.

3. Choose your keywords

Think about the types of phrases and terms that a customer would type in when looking for a business or product such as yours.

4. Refine your keywords

Use tools such as Google's Keyword tool to see the volume and competition for the keywords you're targeting. High volume means lots of people search using these words and low competition means that there are few companies bidding for these keywords.

5. Bid on keywords

Set up a Google Adwords account (<https://www.google.co.uk/adwords/>) and bid on your keywords.

6. Create your search engine ad

It needs a catchy headline with engaging copy of a few words to encourage people to click on the ad.

7. Create a landing page

For your campaign, create a 'landing page' on your site – this is the page you want people go to when they click on your ad.

8. Measure and optimise

Use Google's reporting tools to monitor the campaign and see if your ad is working well. Test different ad copy and keywords to see if you can reduce the amount you spend to acquire each customer.





Affiliate marketing

Use third parties to generate leads and reach more customers for your business than you can on your own.

Affiliate marketing allows you to promote your business and sell your products or services through other websites, blogs or social media profiles – reaching far more customers than you could achieve using just traditional marketing channels.

Sounds great – but there is a cost. Affiliates take a cut of sales as commission and in exchange carry your advertising, write product reviews or even sell your products via their website.

There are different types of affiliates, ranging from price comparison and cash-back websites to bloggers and traditional publishers. Many successful affiliates use their social media profile to promote goods and services to their followers as well.

How affiliate marketing works

- Your affiliate puts your products or services on their site.
- Customers buy your product or services via your affiliate’s promotion.
- That sale or conversion is tracked and attributed to the affiliate.
- Your business pays commission to the affiliate for that sale.

One of the good things about affiliate marketing is that the affiliate network does most of the hard work for you and you generally only pay for completed sales.

That means if a customer clicks on a link from an affiliate, finds their way on to your site but doesn’t make a purchase, you don’t have to pay the affiliate a fee, which is different to most digital marketing channels. This is known as a pay-per-sale model, as opposed to a cost-per-lead (CPL) or cost-per-acquisition (CPA).



Get started with affiliate marketing

Contact bloggers and social media influencers aligned to your industry and ask online publishers if they’d be interested in reviewing your products and services in return for a sales commission. Don’t expect success overnight – an affiliate programme is a long-term investment and running your own programme can be time-consuming.

Choose an affiliate network

Alternatively, opt for an affiliate network such as:

- Awin
- CickBank
- Affiliate Future
- FlexOffer

This provides immediate access to publishers who will help sell your products.

Most networks have tracking and reporting tools so you can see how affiliates are performing, along with easy payment systems.

Do your homework before joining

Some large global networks charge a one-off joining fee in addition to a monthly admin fee. Research their publishers and the type of products they advertise.

Provide promotional content

Make your affiliates’ job easier by providing pre-made promotional content such as ad banners, product images, videos and website landing pages. If you haven’t got the time or skills, hire a freelance designer or use an online service such as eGraphix, People Per Hour, Fiverr and Design Crowd.

Promote your programme

As you’re unlikely to be the only product or service your affiliate is promoting you’ll need to keep your business at the front of their mind. Create relationships with your best-performing affiliates and keep them informed of upcoming sales and promotions.



Section 11.

Traditional advertising

Public relations (PR)





11. Traditional advertising

Traditional advertising channels – including print and radio – still offer effective marketing opportunities for a new business if used wisely.

Traditional advertising channels such as print and radio have taken a backseat for many new businesses who favour online marketing channels. However, offline marketing channels have plenty of advantages for start ups and small businesses, especially when they're used alongside digital channels.

Offline advertising is useful for:

Reaching an offline audience

If your customers are less engaged with technology or don't use social media, traditional advertising is worth investigating. Find out what media your customers use to help you plan an effective strategy.

Cutting through digital noise

Online marketing is competitive and many publishers fill their webpages with lots of advertising, making it harder for your business to stand out.

Editorial combined coverage

Offline media works well when part of a PR campaign such as running a competition or announcing a new product launch in the press. Supporting the coverage with advertising can drive customer engagement.

Leaflets and posters

Using leaflets and posters – known as outdoor media – can be a relatively cheap and effective way to advertise your business.

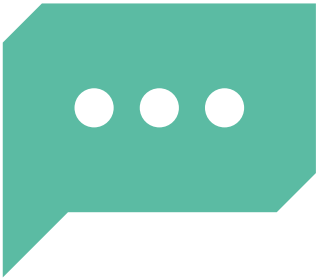
Distribute leaflets door-to-door or hand them out in busy areas that your customers are likely to visit. Include leaflets with discounts for future purchases with any products you send out to encourage repeat business.

Take advantage of supermarket community boards and newsagent windows to put up small A5 posters. Talk to the shop owner to create a poster for their store offering a discount to their customers to encourage your poster to be displayed, and include a website address and email address for customers to contact you.

Newspapers and magazines

Advertising in large national newspapers gives a wide reach but is expensive whereas a regional newspaper is more cost-effective, especially for local businesses. Running an ad in a trusted newspaper will give credibility and build up your reputation in the local area. Local newspapers offer a variety of advertising spaces, from classifieds costing less than £50 to full-page spreads that cost upwards of £1,000. Remember to factor in at least £100 for a graphic designer to create your ad.

Trade magazines and directories are also useful print channels. Use them to target businesses you're selling to and, when booking for the first time, haggle to get a discount.



Local radio

Radio is an excellent way to advertise your business. It reaches a large audience and it has the lowest level of advertising avoidance as listeners are unlikely to switch the station.

Developing a radio ad takes time and can be expensive – you'll need a script, music and sound effects, and possibly actors too. Expect to pay around £1,500 per week to air the ad on a large local radio station. A good rule of thumb is to pay around £2 per thousand listeners.

Different radio stations have different listeners so ensure the demographic of your target market matches the station's audience. The frequency of the ad is also important. An ad that plays several times a week for a longer period will be less effective than one that plays several times a day for a short period of time.



Use public relations to support your marketing

A feature in a local newspaper or a write-up on a popular blog can help spread the word about your business. Learn how to plan a successful PR campaign.

Public relations (PR) is all about getting your start up noticed in a positive way. Good PR can build brand awareness, establish a good reputation and generate customer interest.

Many start ups overlook the benefits of PR but it should be a fundamental part of your overall marketing strategy. A well-planned PR campaign can have a huge impact on your company's sales.

Successful PR is cheaper than advertising and a positive mention in a magazine or newspaper is more effective. Customers view editorial coverage, such as a news story or product review, as more trustworthy than an advertisement.

Create great public relations

Creating a successful PR campaign takes time and effort. Most cash-strapped start ups can't afford to hire a PR agency but there's plenty you can do yourself for little cost. PR is a long-term strategy and you'll need to build relationships with local newspapers or online blogs that your customers read.

Public relations channels

To generate news coverage consider the following:

- **Local media**
Regional newspapers and radio are great for new businesses. Look for a local angle on your business and send a press release to local stations or newspapers.
- **Blogs and websites**
Find blogs that cover your industry or are read by target customers. Consider offering 'first looks' at products, send free samples for review or offer an online competition.
- **Trade press**
If you're selling to other businesses, identify the publications your customers will be reading to help them choose services and products for their company.
- **Press events**
This can be a publicity stunt aimed at potential customers (such as free samples given away on the high street) or a launch event that you invite the media to attend.





Online platforms

There are online services that can help start up businesses at relatively low cost.

Journolink, for example, enables you to manage your own PR and send out your press releases to journalists and bloggers.

Start Up Loans recipients can take advantage of an exclusive offer of 25% off a monthly or annual subscription to JournoLink and save up to £75 p.a.

Full details are available at <https://www.startuploans.co.uk/business-offers/journalink/>

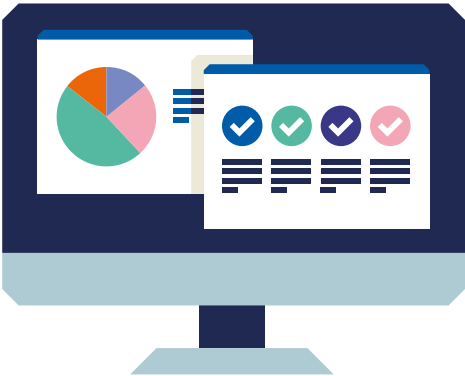
Public relations to support your marketing

Our six-point plan to building a PR campaign.

- 1. Research media channels**
Learn what your potential customers watch, listen and read both in print and online. Don't assume coverage in a national newspaper is best. Local newspapers or trade websites may be more effective in reaching your target audience.
- 2. Make it personal**
Get to know journalists as this helps ensure your press release is read and hopefully published. Get on their radar by following them on social media, commenting on and sharing their posts or tweets.

Build a reputation as the go-to expert in your industry – you may be asked to comment on other stories as well.
- 3. Understand press deadlines**
Don't expect to submit a press release and get it covered immediately. Learn the lead times for your chosen media – how long it takes before a story is published. Consumer magazines typically plan three months ahead while local newspapers operate on a weekly schedule.

- 4. Write a press release**
Make sure your press release stands out by giving it a 'hook' – an angle that makes it newsworthy. For example, lead with how a new product can help people or solve a known problem rather than listing technical specs. Keep press releases brief – no more than a page in length – and put all the important information in the first paragraph. Include company contact details at the end.
- 5. Include photos**
Accompany your press releases with good-quality photos as this can help get your story published.
- 6. Product reviews**
Give journalists product samples for review. Time this with relevant events throughout the year such as Christmas, Mother's Day or Valentines Day.



Section 12.

Events marketing





12. Events marketing

Create and host a successful customer event for your business.

An event is a great way to introduce new customers to your business. Traditionally used by car dealers, restaurants, retail and entertainment businesses, an increasing number of start ups are using events to get their business noticed and win customers.

There are four stages to holding a successful customer event – pre-event planning, promotion, the event itself, and post-event activity.

Pre-event planning

- **Your aim**
Decide why you're holding an event. It may be to attract new clients, to pitch yourself as an expert in your industry or launch a new product.
- **Time and date**
Schedule your event carefully; too close to public holidays or other industry events may mean people won't attend.
- **Event type**
This will depend on the aim of the event and can be anything from a drinks reception and launch party to a workshop or speaker session. Decide guest numbers and the type of refreshments you'll serve to suit your budget. For example, finger food and canapes may be an easier and cheaper alternative to a sit-down meal.
- **Establish a budget**
Set a detailed budget and stick to it. Consider partnering with a non-competing business. If you have similar customers or work in the same industry it's a great way to double the reach of your marketing. If you have the budget, consider hiring a professional event planner.
- **Choose a venue**
Using your store or office can be a good way to avoid venue hire fees, providing it is big enough. You may need to provide portable toilets or extra chairs.

Promote your event

- **Social media**
Use social media to market your event. Set up a Facebook event, tweet or create an online community around your event.

Ensure your profile includes a detailed description of your business so people know what you're selling.

Post regular updates because the more people that share, like and comment on your upcoming event, the wider your reach and the greater the number of potential attendees.
- **Flyers**
Flyers are another cheap way to advertise your event. Distribute invitations through letterboxes or hand them out in busy areas, like supermarkets.
- **Press release**
Send a press release to local newspapers and radio stations as they may wish to send a journalist along to cover the event. You can advertise your event in many newspapers' community calendars for free.



At the event

- **Engaging customers**
During the event focus on engaging customers and making them feel welcome. Have your attendees check-in on arrival to keep track of guest numbers, taking down their details in exchange for a name badge or goodie bag.

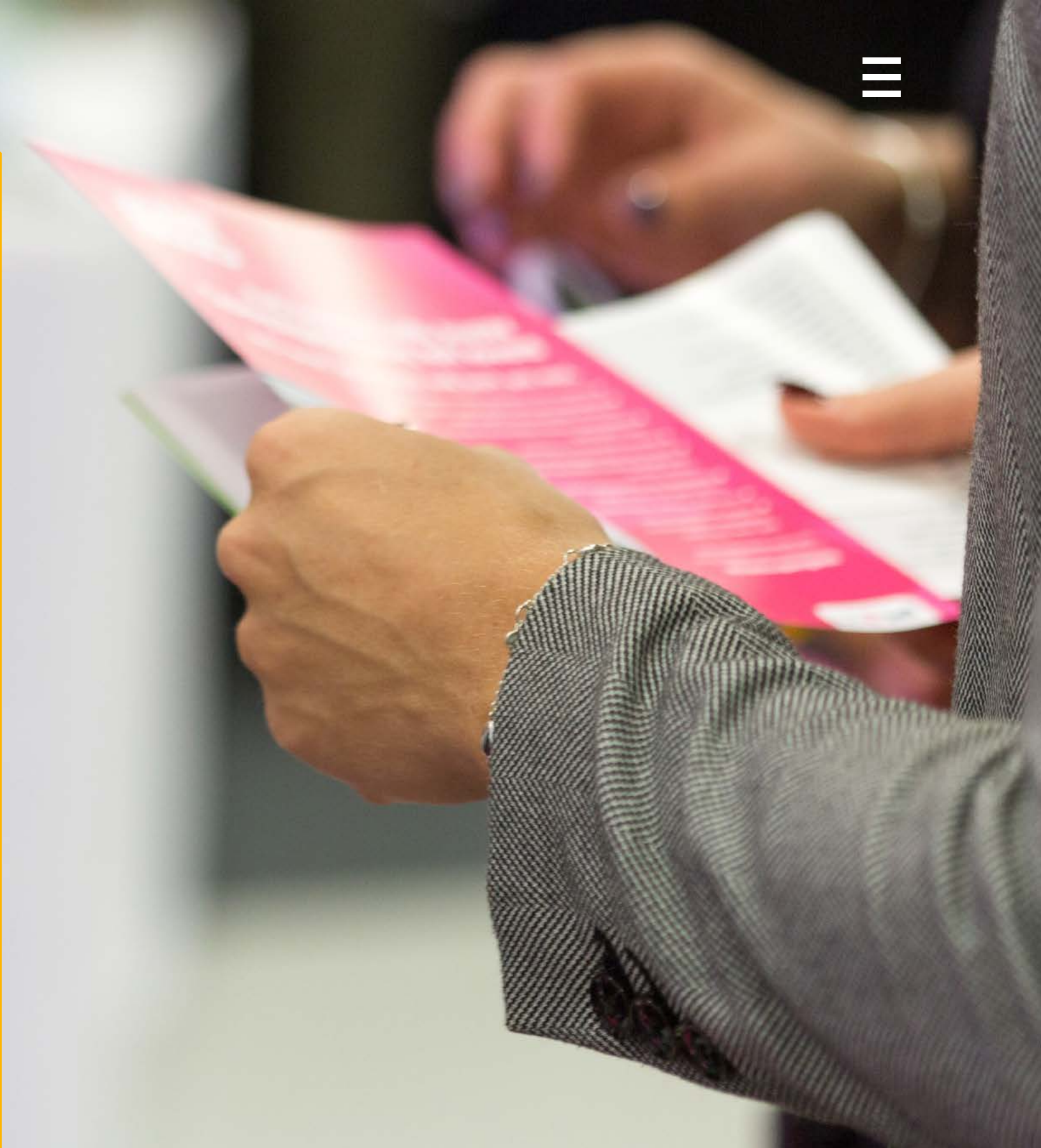
Introduce yourself to each visitor and take a genuine interest in them, avoiding the hard sell. If you're giving a speech, practise beforehand.
- **Merchandise**
Give out merchandise with your logo on so that people can remember your business and capture customer details along with permission to contact them after the event.

After the event

Stay connected with everyone who attended your event with a follow-up email or newsletter, offering exclusive discounts or invitations to future events. Feedback is valuable, so ask guests to complete an event survey. Send thank you letters to speakers and sponsors to keep them sweet.

Section 13.

How to use direct marketing





13. How to use direct marketing

Discover how direct marketing can deliver sales from existing and new customers.

Direct marketing is a cost-effective way to deliver a specific message to targeted customers. It’s a powerful sales tool for small businesses which lack the marketing budget for brand advertising.

Use tactics like direct mailing and leafleting to attract new customers and retain existing ones. Other popular methods include email marketing, telemarketing and text message marketing.

Create a direct marketing mailing list

The quality of your mailing list is important in achieving a good response rate. Existing customers are a prime source of new sales so create a database of their names and contact details. You can use an Excel spreadsheet, a free online database or invest in a customer relationship management (CRM) tool to store customer information.

Gather details from customer enquiries too but make sure you comply with data protection and privacy laws, including storing customer information securely.

Direct marketing and the law

You can only directly market – which includes sending mail, emails and text messages or making outbound sales calls – to people and businesses that have given permission to be contacted. It is your responsibility to check that your direct marketing activities are within the law as set out by the Data Protection Act 2018.

You cannot sell or exchange your mailing list unless customers have given their consent to being contacted by other businesses. Members of the public can register with the Mailing Preference Service (MPS) to opt out from receiving direct mail. **The Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO)** guide explains your legal obligations for direct marketing and data protection.

Get the best from direct marketing

- **Know your target audience**
Start by targeting existing customers and gather further information, such as age, location and interests. This means you can tailor your marketing messages more closely.
- **Set objectives**
The aim of direct marketing is to increase the number of responses you receive. Typical response rates for direct mail to new prospects range from 1% to 4%, higher for existing customers.
- **Choose a mailing list**
There are many firms that can help with your direct marketing campaign including list brokers who will find a suitable mailing list. You can source companies via <http://www.data-broker.co.uk/>. If you don’t have a mailing list you’ll need to rent or buy one that suits your needs. Expect to pay around £100-£120 per 1,000 names.



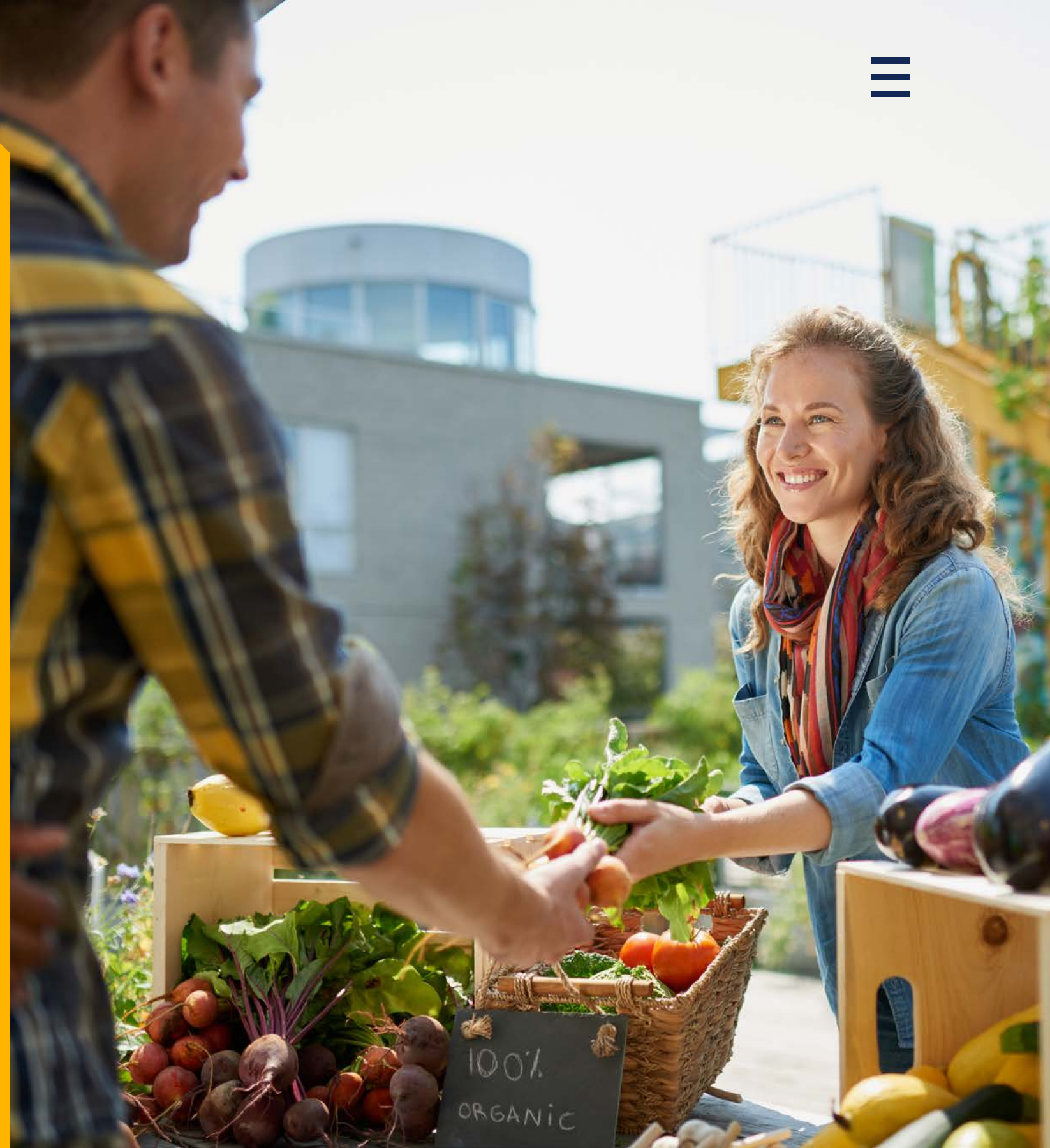
- **Find a mailing house**
Depending on the resource available to your small business, you may need to use a mailing house to handle your direct mail campaign. Look for one that can handle the scale of your mailing via the Direct Marketing Association. When using a mailing house ask for a copy of the Royal Mail posting docket as proof of mailing.
- **Evaluate the response**
Generally a successful direct marketing campaign is one that pays for itself, delivering either a high response rate or high value per response, or both.
- **Create a compelling mailshot**
Encourage recipients to open an envelope or read a flyer with a compelling opening. Don’t use heavy sales language; focus on the benefits your goods or services provide. Provide incentives for a quick response such as time-limited discounts, coupons and prizes. Make it easy to respond, with clear phone numbers or website addresses.

Start Up Loans customers can get 20% off mailing lists with Experian



Section 14.

Marketing glossary





14. Marketing glossary

Marketing terms explained in plain English.

Bounce rate	The percentage of people who land on a page on your website and then leave without clicking on anything else. With email marketing this is the rate at which an email was unable to be delivered to a recipient’s inbox.	Inbound link	A link coming from another site to your website.
Call to action	A message prompting a customer action such as ‘Call Now’ to call a phone number or ‘Find Out More’ by clicking on a website link.	Keywords	The words and phrases typed into search engines by people looking for information on the Internet.
Conversion rate	The percentage of people who complete a desired action such as purchasing goods or signing up for your newsletter.	Long-tail keywords	The amount of money an advertiser pays a publisher each time a digital ad is clicked on by a potential customer.
Cost-per-lead (CPL)	The amount it costs to acquire a sales lead.	Return on investment (ROI)	A way to measure the efficiency and profitability of an investment. A positive marketing ROI would mean your marketing generated more sales than it cost.
Cost-per-action (CPA)	The amount it costs per 1000 people who see your ad.	Search engine optimisation (SEO)	The tactics used to improve where a website appears in search results.
Customer acquisition cost (CAC)	How much it costs to acquire a new customer, including all marketing activity.	Unique selling point (USP)	What makes your business different to competitors.
Customer relationship management (CRM)	Activity that manages the relationships and contacts you have with customers, typically using CRM software to target your marketing based on customer preferences, activity and demographic.	Word-of-mouth (WOM)	The passing of information from person to person, usually verbally but can also be via social media.



Success stories

“

The rigour of going through the process, of making a business plan was really useful and the fact that some people had scrutinised that plan and said yes, we'll give you a loan, gave us confidence that there was actually a business here. Also, having a mentor that was in our industry was a massive reason why we went for Start Up Loans.

”

Joseph Munns, Managing Director, Bakedin

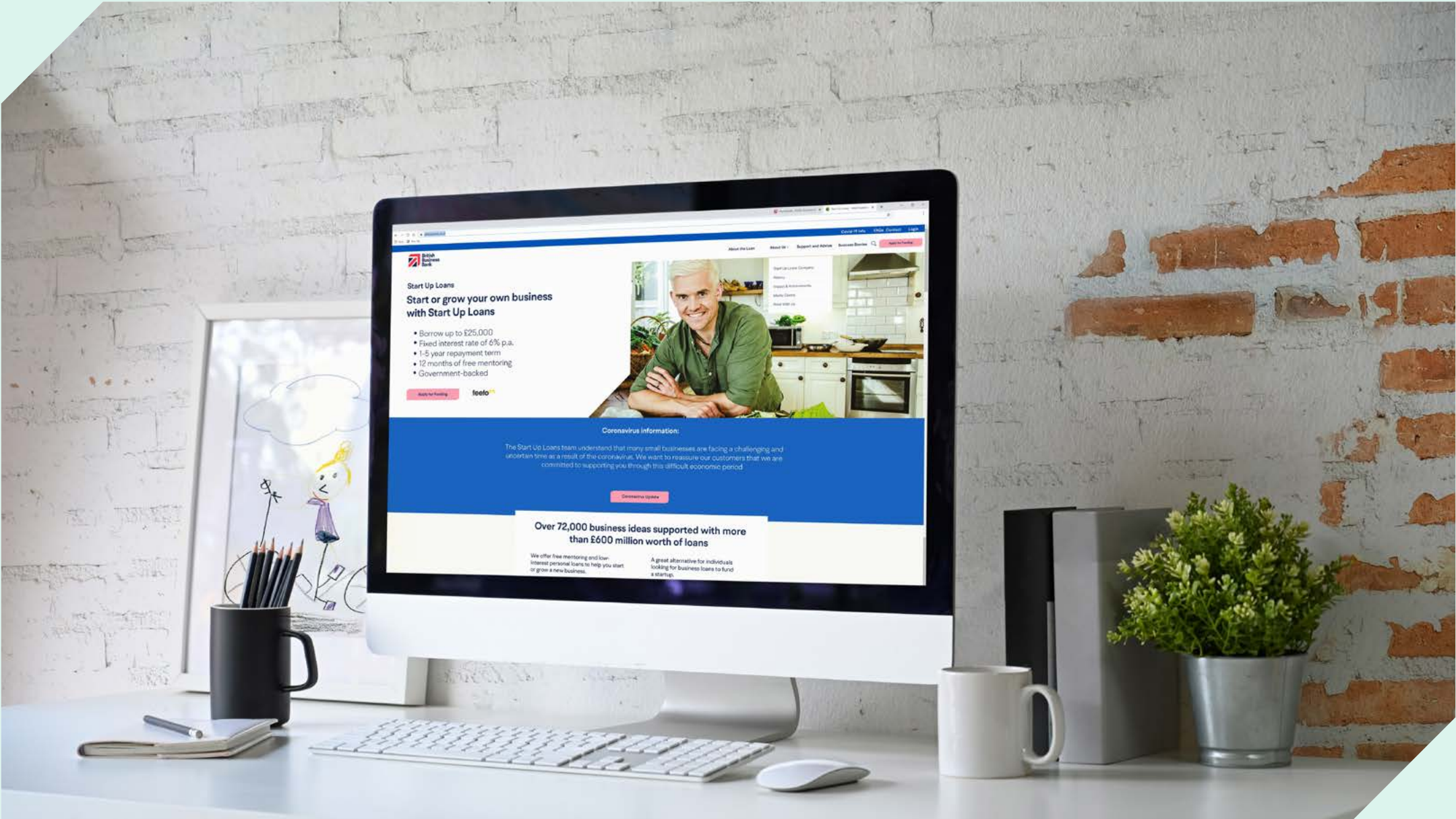




Other free toolkits

We've created free toolkits, covering some of the most important topics for start ups like yours, including:

- The essential guide to starting a business >
- Social media toolkit >
- PR toolkit >
- SEO toolkit >





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