

Ideas for Marketing Your Small or Home-Based Business

Some of these will work better for you than others, so experiment with different methods, evaluate the results, and figure out what works best for you.

WEBSITE

- Get a business website. If you need to start from scratch to build a new site, or want to add online shopping/ payment options to your existing site, York County offers a grant to help with costs. Learn more here: <https://yesyorkcounty.com/3925/E-Commerce-Grant>
- Make it easy for website viewers to find out what you do and how to contact you.
- Use photos, videos, and concise text to tell your story & what makes you stand out.
- Keep it client-focused by talking directly to them, using your own words.
- Show testimonials from happy clients.
- Also consider including events, menus/ list of services, news about your business.
- Add a blog. Sharing authentic or entertaining stories and useful expertise will help readers feel a connection with you and will build credibility. Visit and comment (keep it professional and positive) on other blogs that your customers are likely to visit.
- Make sure to get your website listed on web directories.

SPONSORING

- Sponsor local events & organizations (non-profit, social, civic, youth clubs/ sports, etc) that are geared toward your target audience. This will help to increase exposure while also building goodwill with the organizers and the segment of the community that participates in the event. Examples: Business After Hours presented by the Chamber of Commerce, banners on sports fields, START Peninsula
- If you can't do a financial sponsorship, consider offering your services or goods as an in-kind sponsorship/ donation.
- Offer goods, high-quality branded items, or gift certificates as prizes for local contests/ events.

NETWORKING AND REFERRALS

- Join and get actively involved (within your capacity) in 1-3 local business/ networking organizations. Examples: Chamber of Commerce, Retail Alliance, Peninsula Women's Network, Women's Forum of Coastal Virginia
- Attend Home-Based Business Lunch & Learns and the HBB Conference. You can learn how to improve your business while meeting other small business owners.

- Talk to people with whom you do business (your dentist, barber, financial advisor, merchandise manufacturer, etc), ask them whether they or someone they know could use your service, and ask them to post/ share your information.
- Thank happy clients for their business, and ask them to write a review on Facebook, Yelp, etc. If you're asking via email or social media, include a link to the review site to make it easy for them. You could use writing a review as an entry into a contest you host.
- Give a few business cards to clients who appreciate your work and ask them to share your information.
- Consider starting a referral program (for instance, offering clients 50% off of a session every time someone they refer makes a booking).

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Pinterest for business, as relevant. For social media other than LinkedIn, make sure to set up a business account that is separate from your personal account. To save time, try using a post scheduling tool and linking your accounts. For example, you can set an Instagram post to automatically post the same content on Facebook and Twitter. However, you don't want all your content to be identical on each channel, so tailor some posts to the specific platform (for instance, a 25 second version of a video on Instagram, a GIF on Twitter, and a 90 second version of the video on Facebook).
- Post interesting, helpful, mostly original content. The more visual, the better- photos, videos, and relevant memes/emojis/GIFs can all make for more engaging posts.
- Post interesting content and share expertise in small, niche Reddit groups that relate to what you do.
- Consider occasionally boosting to a targeted local audience. This may be more cost-effective than more traditional forms of advertising.
- Use hashtags wisely. Look up which hashtags are trending and use one or two if relevant. Choose one for each of your campaigns/ product lines/ events and use it on all posts related to that thing. The way you use hashtags should vary by platform. For instance, it's usually ideal to use only one or two on Facebook and Twitter, but you can increase engagement on Instagram by using an average of eleven.
- Join niche and local groups, such as York County 411. People are often looking for recommendations and like to have the personal connection. Make sure to avoid only using the group for relentless self-promotion, though, since that will be seen as spamming and you'll probably be banned by admins. You want to be seen as someone who adds value.
- Engage with other relevant pages by liking and commenting on their posts (keep it positive!). The page admins will appreciate it, and their followers will start to recognize your business' name from seeing it in the comment sections. One page to start with is York County Economic Development (@YesYorkVA), since many of our followers are interested in supporting the local business community.
- Start a vlog on Youtube. Simple videos that share tips, insights, how-tos, and/ or stories can connect you to interested people.

- Effective methods for using social media change frequently, so follow a good social media marketing blog to stay updated.

EMAIL

- Build an email list to send a regular newsletter (monthly may be a good frequency) and birthday or other special messages. Consider including helpful articles, videos, and special offers.
- Offer something that clients would value (a free e-book or PDF, a discount) as an incentive for signing up for your email list.

MEDIA

- Try to earn media by sending press releases (accompanied by a photo) about unique endeavors, partnerships, and events, especially ways you're helping the community.
- If you're a subject matter expert of any kind, sign up for [HARO](#) to connect with reporters.
- When you gain publicity, share it (both digitally and in print as appropriate).
- Write an article for publications, especially those in your field. Whether it's your neighborhood newsletter or a national journal, it can get your name & contact info in print, add credibility, and connect you with a potentially interested audience.

OTHER IDEAS

- Offer free local seminars or webinars in your area of expertise.
- If you're a new business, have a fun grand opening event. Offering door prizes, activities, and refreshments can entice new clients. Contact our office (Economic Development) for assistance with your grand opening/ ribbon cutting ceremony.
- Take advantage of Google and Bing free business listings: <https://www.google.com/business/> and <https://www.bingplaces.com/>
- If you have a commercial location or clients visit you at your home office, having a virtual tour online can help potential clients feel more comfortable stopping by or making their first appointment. The Office of Economic Development offers a grant to help with costs: <https://yesyorkcounty.com/3926/Google-Virtual-Tour-Grant>
- Put flyers/ postcards in local cafes, community centers, gas stations, friends' businesses, etc. You may need to get approval first at some locations.
- Email us (Economic Development) your events and newsworthy information. We may include it in our monthly newsletter, add it to our website, and/ or post about it on Facebook.
- Offer to speak at relevant local events.

- Commission a local artist to create a mural that's aesthetically pleasing. Be sure to check local regulations and get permission before doing this.
- Get your business name, logo, tagline, and contact info on your professional car/ vehicle (window decal or magnetic sign).
- Offer free samples/ trials/ consultations, consider getting added to sites such as Groupon.
- Consider having a table/ exhibit at local events that are geared towards your target audience.
- Add or claim your page on review sites such as Yelp, and add a photo, contact info, hours, etc.
- Become a guest on a local radio program and find out whether there are affordable advertising options on local radio stations that your target audience is likely to listen to.
- Partner with other local businesses to provide events, special offers, etc. that are relevant to your business. Examples: Health fair, employee discount days, back-to-school event, seniors' day, children's activities. Some fun things you might include: Food trucks, bounce houses, face painting, giveaways, health screenings, free food, music, crafts, chair massages, photo ops with costumed characters.
- Host a contest. This will be most effective if you define your target audience, goals, budget, strategy, guidelines, and follow-up.
- Host a Meetup or other networking event focused on something related to your business.
- Apply for business awards. Often you can nominate yourself and encourage your friends and clients to vote for you. If you do receive the reward, display it prominently and share about it online to build excitement and credibility.
- Offer promotions that relate to holidays, seasons, big weather events, the anniversary of your business, etc.
- Set up an attractive background & props at your location and encourage people to take selfies there & tag your business.

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*Notes: The above items are meant only as marketing ideas and are in no way endorsed by York County, nor are the businesses listed herein. Various County permits may or may not be required for some of the above listed events.