



Six key marketing strategies to help grow your small business lending program

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Marketing is a vital component of any small business lending program. A smart marketing strategy spreads awareness to your current and prospective customers, differentiates you from your competitors, and convinces small business owners to take the first step in applying for new funding products. Marketing is the best way to showcase what you do differently (and better) than other lenders, which makes it one of the most reliable ways to attract new small business customers and grow your small business lending program.

The success of any small business lending program relies on effective marketing, but figuring out how to do it and where to invest resources can be tricky. Since your marketing approach should be customized to the objectives, resources, and conditions of your unique business, there isn't an exact playbook to follow. That said, there are some marketing strategies that every lender can utilize to build the marketing program that works best for them. Whether you want to call them secrets, hacks, or golden rules, these six marketing strategies could help you take your small business lending program to the next level.

1. Identify your target audience

Narrowing who you want to talk to helps you fine-tune your messaging. After all, only certain business owners are interested in – and qualified for – the loans you’re offering. And if you’re talking to more than one group of prospective customers, each one may require a slightly different message to address particular needs. This is called audience segmentation.

There’s no shortage of ways to segment your audience. You can do so by industry, business size, structure, location, or many other factors. If you’re just starting out with audience segmentation, try keeping things simple by grouping your target audience into three main buckets:

Current customers: Retaining customers is five times less expensive than finding new ones. Start with customers who already use financial products with your firm who may be looking for loans, but prefer to work with an entity that they already know and trust – your bank.

Prospective customers: Many banks don’t offer small loans, which means many qualified small business owners aren’t able to secure funding from the lenders they already know. Identifying and connecting with these people is a huge opportunity, but they must be treated differently than customers with whom you already have a relationship.

PPP customers: You may have built new relationships with small business customers via the federal [Paycheck Protection Program \(PPP\)](#), rolled out in 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. Although the program has ended, some of your customers may still need other financial products, which you can offer them.



2. Meet your customers where they are

Identifying your audience helps you tailor your message, but that message won't do you any good if the right people don't see it. That's why the second key strategy is to figure out where your customers are, and meet them there. Where do the entrepreneurs in your target audience spend most of their time? LinkedIn? Local networking events? Yelp? For many small business owners, a large chunk of their time is spent marketing their businesses online. To reach them, make sure you have a presence on the social media platforms they frequent. For example, Instagram is a crucial tool for many types of small businesses, so an up-to-date profile there that includes valuable content and clear calls-to-action can be a great source of warm leads.

Another consideration for today's lenders is that roughly half of all borrowers start their loan applications from their mobile devices. The easiest way to meet these customers where they are is to optimize your website to be highly mobile-friendly. This one simple step gives your customers a more pleasant experience and boosts your conversion rate. Being mobile-friendly also lets you keep pace with the new crop of alternative lending platforms and gives you an advantage when people search online for small business loans in your area.

3. Re-engage your existing customers

Maintaining organized, segmented lists of customers and their email addresses, along with investing in an email marketing tool, are paramount to a successful marketing campaign. Your email list is both low-hanging fruit and a highly effective marketing audience. Since these folks are already connected to your bank, they may be more inclined to open emails about new product launches. Remember this when emailing current customers – since they're already aware of you, there's no need for long introductions, just dive right into why they should choose you for lending.

Once you send an announcement, use your email marketing platform's tools to see who's opening and who's clicking. Consider following up with these customers with another email or even a sales call. Thoughtful follow ups can gradually move those customers along in your sales funnel and eventually result in more applications.

4. Find the right marketing partners

Knowing what to outsource and what to build in house will help you get the most return on your investments. Many of the most effective marketing tactics for financial products are labor, data, or technology intensive and can be handled much more efficiently by an agency or consultant that specializes in those areas. For example, SEO (a.k.a. “search engine optimization” or “organic search” comprises several moving parts. These include the keywords people are searching, the content you publish on your website, and technical SEO (the way your website is structured for search engines to access it. An SEO professional is well-versed in each of these areas and can typically deliver faster, better results than someone who doesn’t live and breathe search engines.

The same is true for direct mail. Direct mail is still effective for financial products – that’s why we all still get those credit card and personal loan offers in the mail. This tried-and-true method has also gotten smarter over time, which can help narrow recipients to more likely prospects. Direct mailing partners stay on top of recent advances in this field, and many now have the ability to use data to narrow lead lists, resulting in a higher conversion than you could get on your own. Working with such a company can maximize your return on investment and help you find borrowers right in your backyard.

5. Let your customers sing your praises

Most customers – 79 percent – trust [online reviews from other customers](#) as much as they trust recommendations from people they know. That’s powerful! Your marketing should lean on testimonials from borrowers whose small businesses you’ve helped. After a successful closing, ask a borrower to leave a review about your process and service on a frequented review source like Google Business Profile or Yelp. You can also publish this feedback on your website.

Taking it a step further, you can prepare case studies that detail your success stories before, during, and after the loan process. These stories go into more detail about how you helped a particular client solve a sticky problem. You can share these stories on your website, on social media, or email marketing.

6. Make it easy for customers to take the first step

Before marketing your loan offerings to current, prospective, and PPP customers, you need to make sure your loan application is hassle-free for both your staff and your customers. However, creating and managing a loan program can be a significant lift in terms of money and time. That changes when you partner with SmartBiz.

SmartBiz's AI-powered, human-supported lending platform quickly tells you which customers may qualify for SBA 7(a) loans or bank term loans based on customizable criteria. You can also use SmartBiz to operate an easy-to-use, mobile-friendly loan application for all your customers. As borrowers make their way into the system, SmartBiz can quickly identify who's qualified and who isn't, saving your team countless hours of time. SmartBiz technology makes it easy for your customers to take that first step, and the dedicated partner success team helps them move seamlessly through the funding process, from application to approval, while you easily keep tabs on all your referrals.

To learn more about how AI-powered, human-supported technology can help improve the small business lending process for you and your customers, contact [SmartBiz](#).



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