

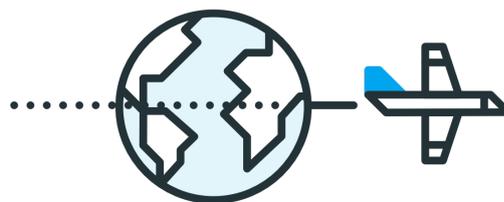


The Single-Handed School of Marketing

Winning new and repeat business with quality-over-quantity tactics

There's a particular kind of pressure that falls on independent businesses to constantly be available and find a way to accommodate every potential customer that comes along. It's only natural, since it's your bottom line on the line, as it were. But that urge to say an emphatic YES to everyone and their dog can end up encroaching on your down time.

What you need to take some of this pressure off are some practical ways to (a) find and attract new business, in a way that doesn't take all your time and energy, and (b) work at building strong relationships with existing customers, to encourage repeat business. When you're no longer always worrying about getting people through the door, you can start enjoying your valuable breathing space.



Bringing customers in

Love at first sight

What's the first impression customers get of your business? These days it's likely to be one of two things: your website, or your social media presence. Luckily for you, these are both areas that can, without too much time and energy, be a great magnet for custom.

Optimizing your website for conversion

Contrary to popular belief, the focus when it comes to your website should not be on driving traffic there but rather converting that traffic into customers. Just thinking about the numbers: it's better to have a website that gets 100 visits a month and has a 6% conversion rate, than 400 views a month with just a 1% conversion rate. That's two extra customers a month, just from concentrating on conversion first and worrying about traffic second.

Design for your customers, not yourself

It's worth remembering that just because you like how your website looks doesn't automatically mean that your customers will find it easy to navigate and use. To really find out how your website is being used -- which links are clicked most, etc. -- you can use the [In-Page Analytics](#) sections of your Google Analytics account. This will tell you how visitors interact with your website, and help you understand how to make it more user-friendly and engaging.

Magnetic Content

A really good way to make your website an attractive and interesting place for visitors to stay long enough to convert is to provide good quality content. Blogs are ideal for this as they provide a way to keep adding fresh content that helps with getting your website picked up by search engines. If you don't have the resources to keep a blog updated, there's still content you can provide. It might be worth your

time writing/making a longer piece of content that you can offer as a free download on your website -- this could be a guide of some kind, helpful information that people would like to have relating to your expertise. Videos are also an excellent thing to include as they are easy to consume and a well-made video can add a lot of esteem to your business -- try offering some video tutorials, or even the story of your business in video format.

The Importance of Email Addresses

Even if visitors to your website aren't immediately converted into loyal clients, aim to at least find a way to collect their email address. There are a number of ways to do this: if you have a blog, you can have the option to sign up and receive updates by email. If you have downloadable content you can gather their email and send it to them that way. You can also simply give them the option of submitting their email to be informed about special offers and updates.

Emails are useful things to have because they are a gateway into your audience's attention. Once you have a way to contact potential customers you have more opportunities to convert them into an actual customer by sending them offers and promotions that will draw them in, as well as carefully curated marketing (more about this later).

Call to Action

This one is very important: your website is no use at all if it doesn't have a clear call to action. If you're not sure what that means, a call to action is a direct follow-on action that the visitor should be encouraged to take from any given page of your website. Seriously: every single page needs a call to action.

The idea is that someone on your website should never be left with nothing else to do, with only leaving the website as an option. Conversion is all about making it as easy as humanly possible for someone to become a customer. So, for example, the end of a blog post should offer a link to check out more blog posts, or to find out more about something in the article. Your contact page should include a way to

contact you. Your list of services should provide the opportunity to book those services, which brings us nicely to...

Online Booking

The best way to convert more web traffic into real paying custom is to turn your website into a conversion machine with online booking. Offering your customers a way to use your services quickly and easily, right at the second they're thinking about it, is far and away the most effective way to get those sales.

Just think about it -- if you're only offering a phone number to call you're at the mercy of so many possible obstacles. Like maybe they don't have time to call right at that moment, or maybe you're busy and can't answer the phone, or maybe it's the middle of the night and by the time your working hours come around again they've forgotten all about it, or, even worse, booked with a competitor. When you provide online booking, you can take bookings any time of the day or night, regardless of whether you're busy or not, and it's fast and convenient.

Harnessing the power of social media

Social media is a powerful tool for connecting with customers, potential customers, and useful connections. If you're not already using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, it may be worth your time trying it out. After all, it costs nothing, but if you do it right it can have impressive results.

Grow your following

When you first make your Twitter account and you're sitting there with five followers, it can be difficult to know where to start. [***Pauline Quigley, the founder of Cake Cetera***](#), has this advice about gaining a loyal following:

- Find out where your target customer is. Who are they following? What blogs do they read and who are their influencers?

- Don't be scared to follow people. By following them or liking their products it gets you noticed. Find a person/company/magazine/business profile you think is the “perfect” match for your desired customer. Look under their profile at all of their followers then get following!
- Use tools such as [ManageFlitter](#) and [Crowdfire](#) to follow and unfollow, or bulk engage with people on Twitter
- Participate in Twitter hours. Search for one that’s relevant to your target market. Get involved and search the hashtags to RT and follow everyone during the hour
- Approach a magazine or business in your market with lots of followers and offer them a prize to giveaway. Ensure that entrants have to follow and RT you to qualify. Facebook competitions also work well. Consider posting one on a Wednesday #WinItWednesday or Friday #FreebieFriday for even more reach

Give your followers something they can use

Just being on social media isn’t enough to gain a following. People are drawn to following certain twitter accounts or liking certain Facebook pages because of one thing: what they post and share. Drawing your audience in is all about providing them with something useful and/or entertaining, whether that be interesting and informative articles from around the web, or posts on your own blog, or even funny anecdotes or observations. The quality of what you’re offering is essential, and more important than being constantly active, because no one likes being spammed with bland media. Instead, seek out and share things that you know your followers will genuinely want to engage with, and they’ll be far more likely to stick around.

Interact with customers

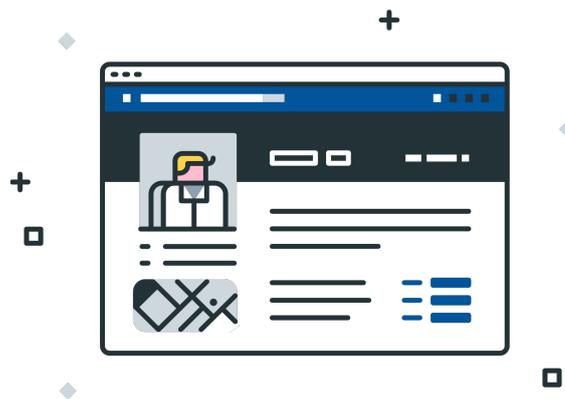
The great thing about social media is that it doesn’t just provide a platform for you to reach out to customers, it also lets customers reach out to you. When a customer

tweets you, or posts on your Facebook page, respond! Enthusiastically! Liking, retweeting, and sharing things from your customers will also give them a great boost and instantly forge a really positive association with your business.

Drive bookings from Facebook

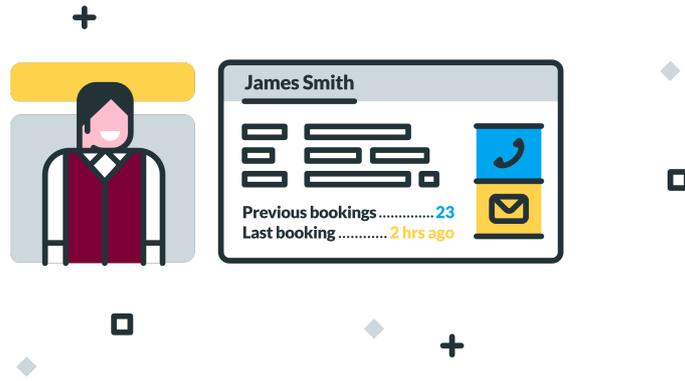
Social media isn't just a tool for connecting with customers, you can also use it to drive bookings by embedding an Appointeddd booking app directly onto your Facebook page. This, just like on your website, makes it easy for people to act on their impulse to use your services right there and then, without giving them time to forget about it or be distracted.

You might also be interested in downloading our free guide to [***Facebook for Business***](#), which includes a 10 day content plan to get you started.



Bringing customers back

By far the best kind of business is repeat business. If you can get to the point where a good portion of your customers return again and again then it means you don't have to expend as much time and energy on attracting a constant stream of brand new clients. Plus, establishing a base of loyal customers gives you a ready-made



team of evangelists who will spread the word, which further reduces the pressure on you.

Truly effective marketing

When it comes to marketing messages, we can sometimes feel like they're a necessary evil to be sent reluctantly and apologetically. We all know how annoying they can be when done badly.

But marketing doesn't have to be this way. This is how to make your marketing stand out and actually work, without driving your contacts to go on an unsubscribing frenzy.

Target portions of your contacts, not the whole list

Whenever you're sending out marketing messages, either by email or text, bear in mind the important truth that if your recipient isn't interested in your message then you might as well not have sent them anything at all. So before you get trigger-happy with the send button, decide which sector of your contacts is most likely to see the value in your communication. If you're informing people about an offer on dog grooming, for example, there's no point getting in touch with cat owners. Your message will be totally irrelevant and may even win you a long stay in their junk folder. Not to mention, the more closely you can tailor a marketing message to its audience, the more effective it will be.

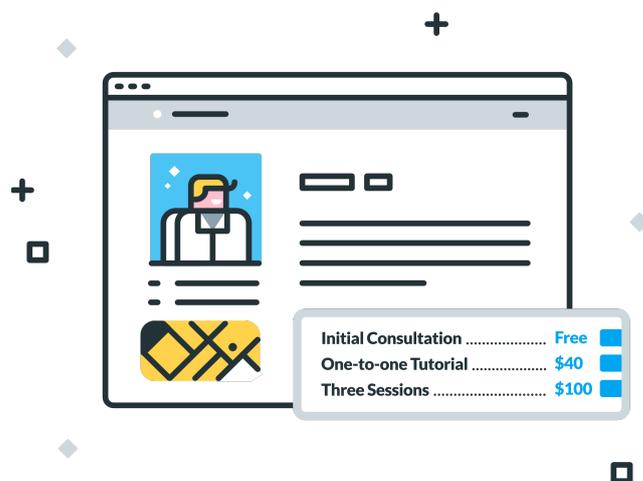
Offer something of value

The key to good marketing is providing value and usefulness. With that in mind, always ask yourself where the value is in your emails and texts before you send them out. Sure, you think your new hairdryers are the bee's knees, but how much is it really going to benefit your customers to hear about them? There are only really a few things that warrant contacting your customers, and the bulk of those can be grouped into two categories: special offers or inviting them to try new or improved services. Providing real value is the key thing that turns a bog-standard ignorable marketing message into something you're actually pleased to receive.

Get straight to the point

When you've got your valuable information to share, don't beat around the bush -- just share it! Nobody reads every word of a marketing email beginning to end, they only read enough to understand the gist and will rapidly lose interest if it isn't immediately obvious how they'll benefit from your message. So be clear, be concise, and don't worry too much about trying to dress up your announcement. In fact it's best to spell it out as early as the very first line of the email, which appears as a preview for many people.

(This is less of an issue with SMS marketing as texts are so concise anyway, but it's still worth remembering to be upfront about the reason for your communication.)



Don't be afraid to be characterful

When you hear the phrase 'marketing email' you probably don't immediately think of fun and delight. True, it's important to be clear and to-the-point, but there's also something to be said for being memorable, and just because you're being direct doesn't mean you can't put a bit of personality in your message. It depends on the nature of the business and clientele, of course, but don't necessarily think of it as unprofessional to be friendly or funny when marketing. If you can make the reader crack a smile when they get your message, they won't be bothered by getting updates from you. Plus, they'll be much more likely to engage with the message if they think of your business as a cheeky pal rather than an automated marketing machine.

Less is more

Spamming your contacts with marketing will only bug them and make them delete your messages on sight. This is particularly true of SMS marketing. Although it's been estimated that 98% of texts get read and 83% within the first three minutes (making it an amazing way to reach your audience) there's a reason for that high reach rate -- people check their texts quickly because they're expecting news from friends, and getting a marketing text instead is almost guaranteed to be disappointing. That's why SMS marketing should be used extremely sparingly, and only for special occasions, for it to be most effective. When you get a special offer by text, you want it to be a really great deal, like 50% off, or a free gift of some kind. It has to be worth it.

Pick your moment

You should also think about what time of day, and even which day of the week, you choose to contact your customers with marketing. Sending them a text when they're on their way to bed is a quick way to get your message totally forgotten. Schedule your communication to go out at optimal times when you know your client base will be most active online or have the time to really pay attention to what you have to say and act on it.

Signpost the way to follow-up action

Sending an aimless marketing message, like sending an irrelevant one, is as good as no marketing at all. So you've got a third off on window cleaning this week? So what? If there's no clear call-to-action, like a link to where they can book online, then once they leave the message 99% of people will forget all about it. It's all about making it easy to act on the information right then and there to get the most out of your marketing efforts.

The magic of automated marketing

As we all know, time is your most precious commodity when you're running a small to medium business, either single-handedly or with a small team. If you don't have the budget for a dedicated marketing team, you quickly discover that marketing is a full time job in itself, so it can really eat into all that time you don't have to spare. Unless, of course, you automate.

One of the easiest ways to set up automatic marketing is with Appointedd's notifications, which allows you to set up messages that are triggered automatically by events such as a customer's birthday or after their third appointment with you. The beauty of these 'come back' notifications is that once you've created them you can all but forget about them, and just let them give your customers a nudge to return when the time is right without you having to lift a finger. Automating makes it easy to keep on top of marketing, and compete with bigger companies with fewer resources and a smaller budget!

Better customer service equals better customers

There's no quick fix or cheat for cultivating loyalty; it all comes down to providing an excellent service. Here are some top tips for doing that.

The 'servicescape'

If your business is one with a physical presence, i.e. a salon, a studio, an office etc. then elements of that environment will have a huge impact on how customers respond to your business. You could have the best, friendliest staff on the planet, but if the environment is unpleasant in some way -- too cold, too dark, even dirty -- then that's probably what they'll remember most.

So what should you pay attention to when it comes to your 'servicescape'?

Cleanliness

If you've ever felt the unwelcome sensation of touching a hardened glob of chewing gum on the underside of a café table, or used sub-par toilets in an establishment, you'll know how important cleanliness is to creating a good impression. You want your clients to feel like they're in safe hands when they're with you, and that's never going to happen if they're worried about their shoes sticking to the floor.

Temperature

The temperature has a big effect on how people feel, as anyone who has experienced a Scottish winter will tell you. Studies have found that the optimal temperature for productivity in a workspace is around 18-20°C (65-70°F), but for certain kinds of businesses the ideal temperature will be different (a spa, for instance, will need to be warm enough for people to be comfortable wearing nothing but a towel).

Sound

The sound, or lack of, that your customers are exposed to will affect them in obvious ways. Upbeat, poppy tunes will create a much livelier mood than some tranquil Spanish guitar, for example. You'll know from experience and common sense what kind of music your customers respond to best, or if they prefer none, but it's worth paying a bit of attention to the volume too, as loud music can have a stressing effect.

Smell

This is obviously linked to cleanliness in a way, and as long as everything is clean then you should keep a naturally pleasant smell about the place. If you want to get a bit more in-depth about the psychology of different smells and how they affect our mood, there's lots of information available on aromatherapy that can help you pick the perfect scent to send your customers to cloud nine. To get you started: lemon, lavender, and jasmine all have a calming, and even an anti-depressing, effect.

Colors

Some colors just look nicer to our eyes than others. As with music choices, the colors and lighting you decide on will encourage people to feel a certain way in their surroundings -- bright colors will make them feel cheerful and energetic, while muted pastels will make them feel soothed. Darker tones will bring a bit of drama. As a starting point, [this guide to the 'science of colours'](#) can point you in the right direction.

No customer is the same

Businesses can sometimes forget this simple yet powerful thing. It's understandable that staff can get into a routine and repeat a process or script when working, but this can make customers feel like part of a 'machine' rather than valued as an individual. Every customer is different and the trick is to quickly learn about them. What are their needs? Then match this to the features of the service you provide. Your

customers will also change over time -- as will service -- so remember to keep it fresh by reviewing your style every now and again.

Face-to-face service isn't the only way

Speaking with your customer face-to-face is powerful, yes. To interact with them in person is great for building and maintaining those important business relationships. But it's not the only way. Since every customer is different, they all prefer different methods of communication too. Some may lead busy lives and may not have the time to pop in or make a call to book your service. Some may prefer to have you send confirmations via text or email. Your customer should be able to choose which method of communication suits them best -- and having a range of channels on offer helps put you above the competition.

Get personal but stay professional

Giving excellent service requires a non-stop positive attitude, no matter what's thrown at you. And when it's going well, you can sometimes get comfortable and over familiar. Friendliness is key to making guests feel welcome and relaxed. Equally, you are a business and there always should be an element of that professional attitude evident in the service you (and your staff) give. This doesn't mean holding your customers at arm's length or being cold with them -- on the contrary, you're aiming to make them feel that they're in good hands, with someone who knows their industry and knows what they're doing.

Undivided attention

During a [2005 study at King's College, London](#), a psychiatrist gave IQ tests to three groups: the first control group did nothing but take the IQ test; the second was asked to take it while being distracted by email and phones ringing; the last group was asked to perform the test while smoking marijuana.

It won't surprise anyone to hear that the first group did better than the others by an average of 10 points. What might be surprising is that the email and phone group did

worse than the stoners by an average of 6 points. Which means that, if your work is constantly interrupted by having to pick up the phone to take bookings, or you're aware of emails pinging through every few minutes, your customer service might actually be less focused and attentive than if you were high.

Just to clarify: our conclusion from this is not that you need to be stoned to give better customer service -- the conclusion is to make like the control group and get rid of distractions!

This was a problem that Gavin at [Links Barbers](#), Edinburgh, used to have:

"The reason I wanted to use Appointeddd was that I never wanted to be leaving my customers to go and answer the phone. I think it's quite irritating, to be going off every ten minutes like 'Sorry again!' So now they can see what's available online and I let Appointeddd sort it all for me."

Some people worry that taking bookings online means removing some essential personal touch from their business, but our users have actually found that the opposite is true. When you take away the distraction of answering the phone or replying to emails, it gives you the time and space to really pay attention to the clients you have there with you. And they notice!

No more no-shows

There are two types of person in this world. On the one hand, there are those who make an appointment and then immediately note it in their diary, circle it on their calendar, put an alert in their phone, and tattoo the date and time on their forearm in block capitals.

Then, on the other hand, there are those who... don't do any of that.

But there are ways to avoid the major pain in the neck that is the no-show client:

Confirm

If you've been relying solely on the recollection abilities of your customers up to now, it's time for a new tactic. We're none of us perfect, and we all have leaky minds on occasion, so help your customers out. When they make an appointment, send them a confirmation email or text that gives them all the details. Appointment cards are fine, but they have a habit of getting lost or used to scrape chewing gum off your shoe and then into the bin they go, never to be seen again. Digital messages are far easier to keep hold of and find again when you need them.

When you use Appointedd to manage your bookings, **[confirmations are sent out automatically](#)** either when someone books with you online or you enter the appointment directly into your calendar. So easy, you can cut down on no-shows without even thinking about it.

Remind

Your customer remembered the details of their booking three weeks ago when they made it, but life has happened between then and now. So remind them! Send them an email or, better yet, a text telling them again when their appointment is. Texts have a 97% read rate compared to a much lower read rate for emails, so texts are ideal for this. The likelihood is they'll be happy to receive it as it saves them going back and searching for their confirmation message. Plus, if this reminder makes them realize they can't make the appointment, they now have no excuse for not cancelling and giving you a chance to refill their slot.

Reminders can also be sent automatically with Appointedd, plus you can send out mass notifications to help you fill cancelled appointments. Appointedd customers **[Escape Spa](#)** made an extra £300 in the first month of using Appointedd just by using this function to fill last minute slots!

Insurance

For pricey services that would be a major loss if the customer didn't show, you should consider taking a deposit, or even full payment, at the time of the booking. The advantage of this is twofold -- first, it dramatically reduces the chance that the customer will just pull a vanishing act, and second, even if they do, your time will still be compensated.

Dr Caroline Whymark of [***Lose The Tattoo***](#) uses Appointedd's integration with Stripe to take deposits along with bookings and now says that having a no-show client is essentially like a 'paid tea break'!

We hope you enjoyed this free ebook from [***Appointedd!***](#) If you haven't already, download the second in the series:

My Business Ate My Evenings

How to make running your own business as rewarding and empowering as you always thought it would be

Why not take a free trial for 14 days to explore what the system has to offer: there's no credit card required, and if you sign up during the trial period you get 10% off the price of your subscription forever!

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