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By Kimberly Stevens

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Although David has been a graphic designer for a decade, he's only been a business owner for a little over a year. He was becoming increasingly discouraged with his clientele. "I'm the only person in the business, and even though I've been in business for a whole year, I'm still having to spend a lot of time marketing to get new clients. And the ones I do get usually only have one small project for me for the entire year. To top it off, I don't even get to do the kind of work I really enjoy They all just want the basic logo, business card, letterhead job. I really want to work on full-scale marketing campaigns where I'm designing print ads, direct mailers & media kits. How do I get more of the right clients?"

As you are discovering, David, building a stable of long-term clients with needs that match your interests can be a time-consuming and ongoing effort, but it's worth it in the long run. It's up to you to build a company that attracts clients with higher-end needs. You can't blame the small businesses for whom you are likely working for having a small budget and basic needs. As a sole proprietor, you can certainly understand working on a restricted budget.

So the first thing you need to do is to focus on how you want to position your company in the marketplace. What types of work do you want to do for clients? Do you want to avoid business card layout all together or will you do it if it's for a client who does or will have larger needs in the future? Do you want to develop a niche in which you specialize in doing full-scale marketing campaigns within a specific industry, such as restaurants or high-tech companies? You get the idea – begin by determining what type of work you want. The world of graphic design is big and broad, so it's your job to narrow your focus which will make your company more attractive to potential clients in that field because you spend more time working on projects similar to theirs as compared to a jack-of-all-trades graphic designer.

Next, you need to make sure that everything you use to present your company to the marketplace reflects your new positioning. This may mean revising the content of your web site and brochures and re-wording the tagline on your business card. If you don't already have a tag line that you splatter on

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all of your collateral materials, create one. This is a terrific positioning tool. And, as a graphic designer, you know that you can impact the image someone gets of your company through the design of your company's materials. Do you want to present your company as high-tech, friendly and affordable, or hip and cutting edge? Create a consistent image across the board on everything a prospect would see when encountering your business. If you want to do full-scale marketing campaigns, start with your own. Enlist the help of a designer friend or marketing friend if you tend to have trouble applying your designer brilliance to your own company as many of us do.

Once you know how you want to position your company in the marketplace and you have updated all of your materials, the only thing left to do is present yourself to the people who want what you have to sell. This may be a very different group of people than the ones you've spent the last year with. Many of us cut our marketing teeth at the local chamber of commerce, but they can be full of small, one-person businesses that may not have the need for the services you want to provide.

The best thing to do is to identify what types of companies are going to be attracted to what you are providing. Are they of a certain size, a certain geographic location, a certain industry? Once you've identified the parameters, it's time to determine how you are going to reach them. What associations do they belong to? Can you write articles for that association's newsletter? What networking groups do they attend? Can you join? Do they usually find their vendors from advertisements, referrals, or direct mail? Who else already provides services to them that could potentially provide you an opening into the companies in exchange for a finder's fee or reciprocity (these are called Centers of Influence)? Develop contacts with marketing companies who could potentially bring you in as a subcontractor for their clients' marketing campaigns. Although, they will generally take a cut or mark up your services, perhaps, you'd enjoy focusing on building these relationships so in the future you could focus just on the graphic design aspect of your business, not the client-building part.

This may seem like you are starting from ground zero as you pull away from those groups that you've been networking with during the past year and begin again as a new member in new groups, but soon you will be reaping the rewards of a thriving business working with people you like and doing what you want to do. What could be better?

Once you've established yourself in these new communities, you can't continue to spend half of your week trolling for new clients or you'll cap your income in relatively short order. Your next line of attack should be meeting some Centers of Influence. Read more about how to do this at:

Kimberly Stevens is the author of the ebook series, **The Profitable Business Owner: A Step-by-Step System for Starting & Running a Successful Service Business**. Download Sample Chapters & get her free MiniCourse, **The 10 Most Common Mistakes Business Owners Make & How To Avoid Them** at:

Three Big Barriers To Small Business Marketing Success

By Kevin Dervin

When you feel like you're always busy working on your business, but not getting where you want to go,

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it can be frustrating trying to figure out how to get your marketing on track. It can easily become a "not seeing the forest for the trees" feeling.

Here are three big barriers I regularly come across with business owners and how you can avoid them.

1. No Clear Definition Of Success

For some, the word Success brings thoughts of fame and fortune to mind. But for small businesses, I'd caution against this definition being your guiding light. When clarifying your own definition of success, I suggest starting with success from your client's point of view.

What is it that you are trying to do for your clients? What is it that they'll have or be able to do as a result of buying your service from you? Match this up with what you are passionate about. What is it that you love doing for your clients? I'll know I'm successful when my clients no longer have to struggle with how to consistently attract more business.

2. Not Clarifying Who Your Ideal Clients Are

When you can clarify who your ideal clients are, you are better prepared to know where to find them and how to market to them. You can develop messages that will appeal directly to them.

What do you know about your best clients? Spend some time to put together as complete of a profile as you can on the clients you enjoy working with the most. What are the demographics and characteristics? How would you describe them to someone who has never met them?

Without clarity of your ideal clients, you're likely to waste time, effort, and money marketing to the wrong crowd(s) and/or not getting your message across.

3. Not Spelling Out Your Unique Value

You must be able to clearly define what differentiates you from your competitors. If your prospects can't differentiate you from all the competitive alternatives in the marketplace, then why would they come to buy from you?

Often for small businesses it's not that they're not unique, it's just that they haven't spent the time to evaluate and clearly describe how and why. What is it that you do better, faster, cheaper, or more effectively - whatever? Maybe it's a unique model you've developed or the unique niche of clients you serve. Maybe it's your satisfaction guarantee offered to clients.

Most important here is to spell out why your uniqueness is so important to your clients and prospects. Why should they care? What is it that they'll get by coming to you for services?

Spend some time critically looking at these items for your business. It will be time very well spent. If you find you can't see the forest for the trees, don't hesitate to get some outside help.

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Kevin is focused on helping businesses that are ready to grow, but struggle with how to consistently attract more clients. Visit

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