

13 Ways to Win Customers for Free

Proven Best Practices for Increasing Current Customer Frequency and Driving New Customers to Buy

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Introduction

Every business – no matter what the industry, product or service, online or offline – is sitting on countless opportunities to organically drive greater purchase frequency and significantly more new customers. These opportunities require no additional budget, and in most cases minimal additional work.

But both individually and together, they'll help promote your brand, keep your business top of mind with current and prospective customers, and bring more customers to transact.

These specific 13 ideas will apply to nearly every reader, and they represent the mere tip of the iceberg for other opportunities across your business to organically grow revenue. Use these first ideas as a starter pack, a launching pad to brainstorm more opportunities across your unique business to grow your customer base, and keep them coming back for more.

In the following pages we address:

1. Better Voicemails
2. Your Email Address
3. Freebies
4. Newsletters
5. Open Houses
6. Testimonials
7. Seminars and How-To Workshops
8. Trivia
9. Name Tags
10. Tell-a-Friend Incentives
11. Charities
12. Thank You Notes
13. Business Cards

Enjoy!

1. Better Voicemails

I'm struck by how many great marketing ideas exist for businesses big and small without requiring a penny of marketing budget.

If it's been awhile since you recorded your voicemail message, you might not even remember what it says. But my guess is it says something like this:

"Hi, you've reached Matt Heinz with Acme Products. I'm not available now, but leave me a message and I'll get back to you as soon as possible. Thanks for calling!"

It's clear and concise, but all that caller can do is leave you a message, then wait for you to call back.

Clearly, they wanted something from you. They had a question, or wanted to place an order, or wanted to schedule an appointment.

But what if they could get some of that done online, at your Web site? What if you could give those callers some instant gratification?

What if your voicemail said something like this:

"Hi, this is Matt from Acme Products. I'm currently helping another customer, but can't wait to help you too! Please leave me a short message with your number and I'll call back as soon as possible. In the meantime, please visit my Web site, at www.AcmeProducts.com, for a sneak preview of our new products and promotions."

It's a little longer, but it works so much harder. It gives your callers something to do right away, and gives them a reason to do it. The description of the Web site's value could easily have been replaced by an offer for a freebie online, an offer of a free newsletter, or anything else.

In fact, why not switch your voicemail around more regularly to see which message gets the best response?

Make your voicemail message work harder!

2. Your Email Address

It's often the very simple things that have the biggest impact. And over the years, one of the biggest traffic drivers I've seen is a well-selected email address. This tip particularly applies to small businesses, consultants, and others who may rely on and market an ISP or free email address as their primary email (Earthlink, Google, Hotmail, etc.).

Why so important? When people get an email from you, or anyone in your business, they will assume you also are available at the Web site attached to it. For example, if my email address is matt@heinzmarketing.com, they will assume they can learn more about my business at www.heinzmarketing.com. But if I'm using mattheinz@gmail.com, even though this email service is free from Google, I'm not helping people find more about my business.

This can sometimes be a scary step, especially if you've been associated with a particular email address for some time. But the sooner you make the leap to the right email address, the better you'll be.

What's more, most email services today offer a forwarding program that makes the transfer easy. It will not only forward emails sent to the old email address to your new email address, but will also send a notification back to the sender, telling them where to best contact you moving forward.

Getting a custom email address is also easier than you think. If you register your new Web site address with GoDaddy.com, for example, your account comes with a basic email service that automatically gives you up to five email addresses attached to your new URL. It's a package deal that gives you a great one-two punch.

Other Web hosting companies are also dying to give you email services with your Web site, and it's often beneficial to shop around for the best deals, and the email features that best match your business.

But no matter who you work with, make sure that your email address matches your business Web address. You'll be pleasantly surprised how much business comes back to your Web site, and quickly, as a result.

3. Freebies

Everybody loves free stuff, especially if it's directly tied to something we are passionate about. Freebies can be used to entice a prospective customer to take a next step, take a test drive, or learn more about your business.

Freebies can also be used to build tighter relationships with your current customers, and give those customers reason to reach out to new prospective customers on your behalf (by giving them a copy of your freebie as well).

The best part of all? Freebies don't have to cost you a thing! Sure, you can print your company's logo, or even your photo and phone number, on just about anything these days. And if you match your business objective and target customers together with the right freebie, this can be a very successful strategy.

But knowing who your customers are, and what they want, will unlock your ability to brainstorm numerous different freebies - many of which will have a high perceived value to your customers, but not cost you a dime.

For example, you're a real estate agent. You want to work with sellers, and demonstrate to prospective new customers that you have a lot to offer, are knowledgeable about the market, and can help them sell their home fast, and for the highest price.

Why not create a series of free special reports that prospective customers can download from your Web site, or find available across the Web? With your expertise and customer insight, you could easily create such special reports as:

- Top Five Ways to Get Top Dollar For Your Home
- Ten Home Improvement Products That Pay Off BIG When You Sell
- The Secrets To A FAST Home Sale

The list could go on and on. And the best part? Once you write up these special reports, hire a designer to make them look pretty for you, and publish them in an easy to read and downloadable PDF format, you can hand them out all day long - with no incremental cost to you!

It's the kind of content that your target customers (people who want to sell their home) will love, and each special report features your name, photo and business contact information right on it.

These kinds of freebies are perfect for the Web, because they're full of valuable information that efficiently connects with your customer, and they're easily transferred to the customer.

Other freebie ideas for other businesses could include:

- Free recipe downloads from a bakery or restaurant
- Beauty tips from a new salon or massage shop
- A guide to choosing diamonds from a local jeweler

And don't forget coupons. Some of the best freebies organically get your customers to come back for more. For example, if you're a real estate agent, why not offer prospective customers a list of the 20 most sought-after features of homes in their neighborhood? Give them the first 10 as a freebie, and offer the other 10 (for free) when they call in or come visit your office.

Giving 10% off? Offering a free gift when they come to your retail location? Those count as freebies as well. If you understand your customer well enough, and know what motivates them, you can come up with freebie ideas all day long.

The Web is about content, but it's also about standing out from the clutter. It's about driving your audience to action. Freebies can become some of your most important content, and most valuable tools in driving more current and prospective customers from across the Web into your business.

4. Start a Newsletter

Many of your current and prospective customers will visit your business and/or your Web site often. Many won't. But that doesn't mean you need to lose touch with them.

Take your content, and put it in a newsletter! Email is an ideal medium to communicate with people you already have relationships with. It keeps you top of mind, and will generate new business on a regular basis. What's more, emails are easily transferable, meaning they'll quickly be passed along to friends & family if your content is good.

Even better, starting a newsletter doesn't mean writing new content. It just means repurposing the content you already have!

Take my newsletter, for example. You can check out a sample, and sign up directly, right at www.heinzmarketinginsights.com. This newsletter is populated largely with content I've already written on my blog. Each month, when I prepare a new issue of the newsletter, I simply go to my blog and choose the content I like best, then put it into my newsletter.

Sound hard? Not at all (if you have the right tools).

For your newsletter, I highly recommend a company called Constant Contact. There are many companies that will create and send newsletters for you, but for the price and impact, my money is with Constant Contact.

Constant Contact offers a wide variety of email and newsletter templates to choose from, and makes it very simple to cut and paste your content and links directly into their templates.

Once you send out a newsletter, you can see how many of your recipients read the newsletter, how many clicked (and what they clicked on), and much more.

Constant Contact even creates a newsletter sign-up form for you, so you can generate even more newsletter subscribers directly from your Web site and blog.

If you already have a database of customer email addresses, then you're ready to start creating and sending newsletters today.

If you don't yet have customer email addresses, you're still closer to starting a newsletter than you think! Here are a few tips for getting more email addresses:

- **ASK:** Simply ask every customer, every prospective customer, even suppliers and vendors for your business, for their email address. Tell them you'd like to send them a new newsletter you're starting up. A handful may decline the offer, but most will say yes - especially if they already have a relationship with you. Ask as many people as possible. Even if they themselves aren't direct prospective customers, they may have friends and family that are!
- **New Customers:** Every time you get a new customer, complete a transaction or service, ask for their email address. Include a sign-up form at your point of sale. Even if their first visit is simply browsing, ask for their email address to keep in touch. Again, some will say no, but more will say yes!
- **Giveaways:** Remember those freebies you created earlier? Offer them in exchange for an email address. Attend a local farmer's market, and do a drawing for a large prize in exchange for email addresses. Be creative!

For each of these tactics, it's important that you get the person's permission to send them email. If you're just collecting emails without permission, then you're only spamming people - no way to build a business. But if you get permission, you also get anticipation - anticipation for the information you're about to send via email, and better readership and action on that email as well.

Despite changes in email laws and consumer behavior in recent years, email can be one of your most powerful marketing and publishing channels back to consumers. Make sure you're using it to its full advantage to get a wider audience for your content, and driving more traffic back to your business.

5. Open Houses

There are plenty of “old school” marketing strategies that still work exceedingly well. By adding integration with your Web marketing strategy, you can make those efforts deliver far more and longer-lasting value to your business.

Open houses is a great example of this. Inviting customers and prospective customers to come visit you is great. Giving and receiving information that keeps them coming back again and again is priceless, and exceedingly easy.

When I think of open houses, I first think about real estate agents. Most real estate agents hold open houses to try and find buyers for the homes they are representing. Problem is, most visitors to an open house walk through the front door, take a very quick tour, then walk out. At the end of the day, the agent’s met quite a few people – but gathered very few names, let alone email addresses, let alone sent those prospective customers off with information then can use to “come back again” in the future.

But what if, at an agent’s next weekend open house, they did the following:

- Put their Web site’s URL in big, block letters underneath the “open house” signs both in front of the house, and the myriad signs placed within blocks of the open house
- Offered a drawing for sports or theater tickets to every open house visitor who stopped by and subscribed to the agent’s email newsletter (this offer would be made on site, and in all of the pre-event advertising for the open house to drive even more foot traffic)
- Placed several free copies of strategic reports on the kitchen counter, making sure to offer a copy to every open house visitor
- Offered each visitor a free CMA of their own home, even if they weren’t thinking about selling anytime soon, just to have an excuse to contact them in the near future

Few of these strategies would take long to set up and execute, but they could exponentially increase the value of the agent’s time on a Saturday afternoon in an empty house.

If you operate a retail location, these same strategies can be adjusted for you as well. Even better, you can host this open house in your existing retail location, thereby increasing the chances that visitors will transact right away. For retail, you could:

- Offer free samples of new products to everyone who comes by
- Advertise the open house to all store visitors at least a month in advance, ensuring that they all visit again soon in the near future
- Offer free food and/or drinks (this always draws a crowd)
- Offer similar giveaways (it could simply be items from your discount rack) in exchange for newsletter subscriptions
- Tell customers they can download a coupon good for their next visit from your Web site

But wait a minute. If I already have customers coming into my retail shop, why would I worry about getting them to my Web site? Or getting their email? They’re already here!

Yes, there’s here today, but your job is to make sure they come back tomorrow. By helping even your most loyal customers develop a relationship with you through your Web site, or even your blog or podcast, you’re increasing the frequency and volume of touchpoints you have with each and every customer (current and prospective). You’re increasing the intimacy you have with those customers. You’re building a better relationship with them – which will keep them coming back, and keep them telling their friends and family about you as well.

The best Web marketing strategies meld seamlessly together with your offline experience. When a customer sees your Web site, or reads your newsletter, it reminds them of how they feel when they work from you, or buy products from you. It makes them feel good, and reminds them to come back in, and buy more from you in the very near future.

6. Testimonials

Whether you run a bakery, sell exercise equipment, or help people with their finances, customer testimonials are going to be among your absolute best marketing materials.

Testimonials demonstrate to new customers that they're not first in line. That others have tested your products and services, and walked away satisfied. Testimonials give new customers peace of mind that they're working with someone who knows what they're doing.

Yet, surprisingly, very few businesses capture and leverage testimonials from their existing happy customers.

The first step here is to get in the habit of asking happy customers for a testimonial. Depending on how you publish online, you might ask for a short written testimonial, or you might ask them to record something over the phone. Or, if you're ambitious, capture them on video.

Think about developing a special place on your Web site or blog for testimonials. But also integrate these testimonials into several touch points of your business, both online and offline.

Several places to use testimonials include:

- On the front page of your Web site
- In promotional flyers
- On postcards and coupons
- In press releases
- In product displays

Don't be shy about asking customers for testimonials. Most will be honored that you want them to participate in this way. What's more, when you publish their testimonial in print or online form, they'll want to share that with their friends and family – which means even more people learning about your business.

7. Host a seminar or how-to workshop

Here's a great opportunity to start a conversation offline, and continue it indefinitely online.

Think through not only what your customers buy from you, but what they're broadly interested in. What can you teach them that they don't already know? What can you share that will help heighten their enjoyment of what you sell, or get them even more interested in your industry or category?

If you're thinking of hosting a seminar, remember that the speaker doesn't have to be you.

For example, if you're a real estate agent specializing in first-time home buyers, you have a vested interest in helping renters understand that they can probably afford far more house than they think.

So, why not hire a financial planner for a day to conduct a seminar teaching renters how to manage their finances, and built up enough savings for a down payment on a house?

Most content from a seminar can also be repurposed online. For example, every live event can be translated into:

- A document summarizing the main points of the seminar
- A podcast of the audio feed
- An online video of the entire seminar
- A blog post & discussion on related topics (including testimonials from those who attended the live seminar)

By hosting a great seminar, you'll have tons of content you can repurpose and leverage online for weeks and months to come.

I believe that a "how-to" workshop is very different from a seminar.

When I think seminar, I think about someone speaking to me, lecturing, teaching me something interesting in a largely one-way format.

When I think "how-to" workshop, I think about something far more interactive, hands-on, and with more two-way interaction between speaker/presenter and participants.

If you run a small business, and have loyal customers already, then clearly you have a skill that others need. In most cases, your customers would probably love to hear you teach them a little of your own knowledge.

And chances are, you aren't even thinking about the knowledge you have, and how others could be drawn to it (both current and prospective customers).

The opportunities here are endless. Some "how-to" workshop possibilities include:

- Cooking classes for bakers, restaurant owners and caterers
- Home improvement workshops conducted by general contractors, or even plumbers, roofers and other home services providers
- Woodworking classes by the local hardware store

For every one of these workshop opportunities, there are countless ways to leverage the content to drive traffic and business directly to your Web site. These include:

- Downloadable course outlines or workbooks
- Ongoing instruction or Q&A available online from the instructors afterward
- Sharing of customer projects completed after the class (in video or photo format)
- An ongoing series of podcasts related to the initial workshop

8. Trivia contests

Many businesses already use this as an awareness and traffic-building tactic, primarily because trivia contests never seem to get old.

A coffee stand next to my home offers a daily trivia question. I've talked to many coffee drinkers who typically use the nearby Starbucks, but occasionally visit this specific coffee stand because they know the answer to the trivia question. The fact that they get 50 cents off their latte is secondary; what's most important is that the question itself got their attention, and made them stop for a purchase.

Many pubs and restaurants use this tactic as well, sponsoring a regular "trivia night" for teams to come in and compete against each other. It's a great way to get patrons to stay for awhile, order more drinks and food, etc.

How could trivia work in your business? Many, many ways. Here are a few examples:

- Post a trivia question on your Web site, and tell visitors that they'll get a discount (or a freebie!) when they come into the store with the answer
- Focus trivia questions on your product line, something that requires customers to learn more about products you sell to find the answer, and redeem the answer for a prize (a discount, a freebie, etc.)
- Create a progressive trivia content, with a new question posted each week. After a period of time, the customers with the most correct answers get a prize. This will keep customers engaged with your business, plus encourage repeat visitations and purchases

Every business is unique, including the application of trivia contests to drive intrigue, engagement and retention of customers – both online and offline.

9. Name tags

Mormon missionaries always wear name tags. Very smart. Doctors used to. Too bad they don't much anymore. How often do you attend a function locally, or even a conference across the country, where you literally don't know anyone? Your job is to mingle and meet people, which is often hard enough as it is.

When attendees are wearing name tags, ideally with at least their first name but maybe with some other identifying information (where they're from, the company they work for, maybe also something like a favorite hobby or musical group), getting a conversation going is much easier.

If you're in your bakery, or in your retail store, maybe a name tag doesn't make sense. Then again, how many of your visitors today really know you?

How would you like them all to know you by your first name?

There's a level of intimacy and relationship acceleration that goes with knowing someone's first name, and telling a customer – from square one – that you want to get to know them better.

Is a name tag the best place to promote your Web site? Probably not. Your customers aren't looking at your name tag long enough to read a long Web address, and name tags themselves are often small enough that Web addresses would have to be printed in fonts that are too small to read anyway.

But I bring up name tags here not because of their value in directly promoting your Web address, but in their value in directly promoting YOU!

If a current or prospective customer feels comfortable with you, they'll be more likely to do business with you again.

And that means all of your Web marketing will work even harder.

People want to do business with other people they like. They want to help people they like.

Be someone people like. Give them a reason, right off the bat, to have a first-name-basis relationship with you.

It will make them visit your Web site, sign up for your email newsletters, and deepen their profitable relationship with you – online and offline – far more quickly.

10. Tell-a-friend incentives

Sometimes the most effective marketing strategies are also the simplest. And that's exactly why many of them are unfortunately overlooked.

We've talked already about word-of-mouth in this e-book, but most of the examples have been enabled by more formal marketing strategies – testimonials, coupons, PR and the like.

But at its essence, word-of-mouth is simply one person talking to another, an activity that cascades and multiplies with each additional conversation. And the simplest way to start word-of-mouth is to simply talk.

Pick ten friends, and have an explicit conversation with them about your business. Tell them something interesting, something new, something remarkable that they'll want to tell their friends as well. Some examples include:

- Stop by the store for a freebie
- I'm celebrating three years in business!
- We're giving free cookies to kids on Saturday
- I just launched a new Web site (or blog, or podcast...)
- We just received our summer product line
- We just introduced a senior discount!

Think about what's new and interesting in your business, and tell people about it. Pick ten friends, and call them today to talk about your business. Share something remarkable, something they'll want to pass along to their friends as well.

Simply talking more about your business may seem fundamental, but by the time you're halfway through those phone calls and conversations, I guarantee you'll be surprised by some of the reactions you receive, and opportunities that present themselves.

I've asked several small business owners to do this basic activity over the past few years, and here are some of the specific stories I've heard back:

- "A friend is now president of the local PTA, and invited me to come talk at the next meeting about my business."
- "My friend was delighted to hear from me, and had just spoken with a neighbor who needed major remodel work done. What an opportune phone call!"
- "My friend's hosting a wedding shower in a couple weeks, and asked me to cater it!"

Once you start doing this, you won't want to stop. Getting out and talking to people about your business – even the people you are already familiar with on an everyday basis – is the best way to generate new business. And I guarantee that those initial phone calls will result in pass-along conversations to other audiences.

Plan on doing this regularly for awhile, and you'll notice a difference quickly.

11. Charities

People like supporting charities, and also feel good about supporting businesses that support charities.

If you have a genuine interest in supporting others, and helping your customers do the same, you can use this to your advantage.

As with most ideas in this e-book, there are countless ways this can take shape. Some possibilities include:

- During a certain promotional period, you'll donate a percentage from all sales to a particular needy charity
- Partner with a local charity to help them out (with money, time or talents) in exchange for their promotion of your business and Web site in their own marketing materials and mailers
- Tell Web site visitors that you'll donate a dollar to a favorite charity for every customer who signs up for your new email newsletter
- Volunteer yourself and your employees to spend time helping a local charity, and encourage your customers to do the same (better yet, do it together! An example of this could be a Habitat for Humanity home-building projects that you and your customers do together)

Find the charity that fits you best, and the opportunity in your business that you feel most comfortable with. I can't stress enough how important authenticity is in working with charities in your marketing plan.

If you are truly genuine about your interest, and that shows to your customers, this can be an incredibly powerful driver of new customers, as well as current customer loyalty.

12. Thank you notes

Most of what we receive these days – at work and at home – is type-written. We get plenty of electronic messages and emails, and most of our postage-mail is even type-written.

When we receive a hand-written note, it stands out.

Make your business stand out with the occasional hand-written note. It can be a thank you, a quick congratulations, or just a “thinking about you” to a special customer.

Try sending just 1-2 notes a day. Include a coupon, or business card, or even a hand-written invitation to visit your Web site.

I guarantee you’ll be amazed by the response.

Not enough people write notes by hand anymore. Take advantage of that scarcity to make your business stand out.

13. Empowering your business cards

This may seem basic, but it's far more than just ensuring that your Web address is on your business card.

Because everybody has a Web address on their business card now. Too often, however, it blends in with the other contact information on the card. It doesn't give people a reason to visit.

What if you could change that? What if you applied the same strategies you earlier implemented for your email signature, right on your business card as well?

For example, don't just include your Web address. Include a link to your blog. A link to where customers can find your podcast (if you're not sure, just tell them to find it on iTunes).

Are you using the back of your business card? If so, what for? Is it simply a picture of you, or your company logo? Or could it be better served with a call to action?

What if the back of your business card offered one of the following:

- An invitation to subscribe to your email newsletter, with a link to the sign-up page
- An invitation to visit your blog, with a couple sample topics
- An offer for one of your new freebies, with a link to your Web site to redeem the offer

Simply listing a Web address on your business card is passive. Giving customers and prospects a reason to visit is active, and will generate far better response, traffic and business back to you!

About Matt Heinz

Matt brings more than 12 years of marketing, business development and sales experience from a variety of organizations, vertical industries and company sizes. His career has focused on delivering measurable results for his employers and clients in the way of greater sales, revenue growth, product success and customer loyalty.

Matt has held various positions at companies such as Microsoft, Weber Shandwick, Boeing, The Seattle Mariners, Market Leader and Verdiem. In 2007, Matt began Heinz Marketing to help clients focus their business on market and customer opportunities, then execute a plan to scale revenue and customer growth.

Matt lives in Kirkland, Washington with his wife, daughter, and a menagerie of animals (a dog, two cats, and six chickens).

Read more from Matt at his blog, www.mattonmarketingblog.com. Follow Matt on Twitter at www.twitter.com/heinzmarketing.

About Heinz Marketing

Heinz Marketing is a marketing agency focused on helping its clients quickly and consistently grow customers and revenue. It does this by helping to create market clarity and deep customer insight, then developing and executing a custom go-to-market strategy that quickly and cost-effectively helps scale growth and revenue from both new and existing customers.

Heinz Marketing prioritizes three things for each client:

- **Passion:** Your business becomes our business. We make your objectives our own, and are passionate about finding and executing the strategies that will help you achieve your goals.
- **Focus:** Quality over quantity. We will find and focus on strategies that make an impact and drive growth. We will help you get more done with less - maximizing your investment for the highest possible return.
- **Results:** Nothing matters unless you're selling product, growing revenue and making customers happy. Everything we do is measured not on activity, but on results for your business.

Founded in 2007, Heinz Marketing has helped dozens of organizations with their sales, marketing and go-to-market strategies, including:

- Microsoft
- PayScale
- Verdiem Corp
- Market Leader
- River Forest Financial
- ABC Legal Services
- Moose Construction
- Jones Advertising
- Katie Esser Architects
- National Baseball Hall of Fame
- The Vernon Company
- Kirkland Downtown Association

To learn more, please visit www.heinzmarketing.com or email matt@heinzmarketing.com.