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Don't forget to check out our current issue and consider placing your ad for your product or service.

on marketing, know where your sales are going to come from. Who is your target demographic?

One of the biggest mistakes business owners make is not knowing who is going to buy from them. Why? Because if you don't know who your customers are, you can't market to them. And if you can't market to them, your business will go out of business.

For instance, if you are starting a business selling athletic gear online, find out not only who wants your products, but who actually buys your products. If your products are meant for kids, you have to market to them as well as their parents. Find out where they spend their time online; what sites they are likely to visit.

Once you get prospects to your site or autoresponder, grab their email address and get permission to send them updates or newsletters from time to time. That repeat exposure over weeks and months is what keeps customers coming back year after year. And nothing lets you do this as cheaply as email.

I own a side business that markets mainly to teens. When a young entrepreneur started a high school discussion site and asked if I wanted to put my banner on every page for just \$10 per month, I jumped at the opportunity.

Always consider what problems your target market has and how you can help to solve some of those problems with your products or services.

2. Find Mentors - You aren't the first person to start your own business. Hundreds of thousands of people before you have walked the same path you are about to walk. Take advantage of their experience. Try to talk to a few small business owners who have been in business between 6 months and 5 years. They have been in business long enough to have acquired some substantial wisdom.

Over the years there have been dozens of newcomers who weren't at all shy about asking me questions via email. I was happy to answer them. It's interesting that many of these folks have become the biggest names on the Internet. I'm sure they were sending their email questions to every "guru" they could find. And it paid off in a big way.

One man I knew started his own business with that traditionally

masculine, "I'm not going to stop and ask directions" attitude. After he had made some mistakes that almost cost him his business, he decided to talk to some other business owners about their experience. He quickly discovered that his mistakes could have been avoided if he had just stopped to ask directions.

3. Do Your Market Research - Don't just ask your family and friends if they think your business idea is doable. Of course they are going to be more positive than realistic.

Get out and conduct your research with a pen, paper and your legs. You can even call potential buyers and find out their views. This is a great opportunity to make contacts and pre-sell your products or services, as well as find out about your target market.

Again, you will rarely if ever get in trouble for sending personalized emails that ask questions or opinions. Send your questions to every one you can find.

4. Promote Like a Pro - Whether you are starting an online business or a regular business, you have to find the methods of promotion that work for you.

Now, just because your business is online doesn't mean you shouldn't promote offline. You can use anything from billboards to T-shirts, brochures to cable television commercials. Much of your best traffic will come from offline promotion. Many websites are lost in the vast reaches of cyber space, but if you put your URL in front of people's faces, they will seek you out.

If you are starting an offline business, the same idea holds true in reverse. You should combine both on and offline advertising and promotion. Why? Because, even if your business does not exist solely online, you should still have a website. A lot of times, people are curious about your business, but they don't want to call or drop by. That takes time out of their busy schedules. But most people do have time to check out your website to help them decide whether or not they should stop by.

Your website can be one of your best methods of promotion. Include your website address on all print advertising, as well as any other media you use to advertise.

5. Expect a Battle - Put yourself in your competitor's position. What would you do if a new business opened up and started

When perusing newspapers, memos or other documents, most of us start by looking for headlines or titles that look important, informative, or fun. Titles should flow from the lips easily, and inform readers of what they'll learn from what they're about to read. At the same time, they should be short enough to be memorable, and quit before they become boring or complicated.

Ironically, pumping up a limp title can be as easy as A-B-C if you'll just think back to grade school. Remember when you learned how to rhyme? Believe it or not, rhyming is an essential tool in the world of headlines and titles. A title that rhymes is catchy and fun, so give it a try. As long as it makes sense and goes along with what you're going to say, it can never hurt.

Rhyme isn't the only useful titling tool. Alliteration is a fantastic, fun, fabulous way to dress up a plain title. Alliteration involves the repetition of a particular consonant sound at the beginning, end, or middle of two or more words (i.e. fantastic, fun, fabulous). An alliterative title is easier to say, easier to remember, and just plain fun to read.

Any title that speaks the same language your audience does, or responds to a question that's been on their minds is also likely to get attention. If I had titled this article, "Make People Read the Things You Write," would you have very excited to see what else I had to say? A title like that might not have even grabbed your attention in the first place. Who wants to read 500-word article when even the title sounds boring? Yuck!

Once you've grabbed your readers' attention, how do you keep it? Sometimes, the answer lies in form of a question. Asking the reader questions is a great way to provoke thought, introduce a new topic, or break the monotony of simple sentence after sentence. Chances are, if you're getting bored writing your article, it's time to shake things up with a question. Try posing a question every paragraph or two, but make sure you also provide the answer.

The problem many of us have with writing is that we try to sound too formal, too scientific, or simply throw out a lot of information without having any fun with it. Most people, no matter what they're reading, like to be entertained. If your article sounds like a textbook, your entertainment value is going to be a big fat zero. Even in the most official of documents, it's almost always possible to write as if you were speaking,

using words that flow easily and are sure to be understood. If you use a word that needs explaining, do so, but do it concisely (even in parentheses). Using rhyme and alliteration in the body of your document will also add to your entertainment value, keeping readers on their toes.

While writing, stop every few minutes and read what you've written. Is it easy to read, or do you have to stop and re-read parts of it? Do you have commas in the natural breaking places? Are your readers going to have to look up words as they go along? Most importantly, is your copy boring? If you're having a hard time getting through what you've written and enjoying it, chances are, so will your readers.

If your goal is to make an impact and create a name for yourself as a writer or business person, there's no greater asset than engaging writing. Attention-grabbing titles and informative, yet entertaining copy will give your articles, stories, web copy, and other documents a much greater chance of being widely read... and remembered.

Meredith Pond is the editor of Kevin Nunley's Artice Service Newsletter and editor of <http://www.CheapWriting.com>

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