



Independent Guide
to Customer Relationship
Management software

**How technology
can help market your
business in a recession**

Introduction

The internet has changed everything. And no more so than in marketing. The basics remain the same - creating a strategy to deliver the right messages to the right people at the right time. What has changed is the number of options you have. Though businesses will continue to make use of traditional marketing methods, such as advertising, direct mail and PR, e-marketing adds a whole new element to the marketing mix.

Its flexible and cost-effective nature makes it particularly suitable when budgets are tight, particularly in a recession. This guide describes how to create a successful e-marketing plan during tough economic times, and show how technology can help.

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The benefits of e-marketing

E-marketing gives businesses of any size access to the mass market at an affordable price and, unlike print advertising, it allows truly personalised and measurable marketing. Specific benefits of e-marketing include:

- **Global reach** - an e-mail or e-newsletter, or a website can reach anyone in the world who has internet access. This allows you to find new markets and compete globally for only a small investment.
- **Lower cost** - a properly planned and effectively targeted e-marketing campaign can reach the right customers at a much lower cost than traditional marketing methods.
- **Trackable, measurable results** - marketing by e-mail or e-advertising makes it easier to establish how effective your campaign has been. You can obtain detailed information about customers' responses to your marketing.
- **24-hour self-service marketing** - your customers can find out about your products or services on your website when your office is closed.
- **Personalised one-to-one marketing** - send truly personalised communications, and if your customer database is linked to your website, then whenever someone visits the site, you can greet them with targeted offers.
- **More interesting campaigns** - e-marketing lets you create interactive campaigns using music, graphics and videos. Easily digestible messages are more memorable and drive interaction.
- **Better conversion rate** - your website ensures your customers are only ever a few clicks away from completing a purchase. Unlike other media, e-marketing is seamless.

Together, all of these aspects of e-marketing have the potential to add up to more sales, even in harsh economic conditions.

Stop wasting money on brand or untrackable marketing

You probably can't afford to throw money away on just getting your name out there. 'Brand' advertising is a waste of money for most businesses. Every marketing campaign must give people a reason to respond. You must be offering something they want or need, something that's going to interest them enough to respond to YOU.

And if you're advertising or mailing stuff out but you can't tell beyond all doubt it's making you money, then stop doing it now! Start using the latest technology via emails and website to track visitors and prove a ROI.

Understanding your customers

Your current customers are your most precious asset. They not only provide your most immediate revenue-generating opportunities, they are also the gateway to new business. By understanding your customers better, you can make your business more attractive to both existing and new customers and be positioned to successfully market through good and bad times.

Profile your customers

When your customers make a purchase, or when they sign up for your mailing list, are you asking them for useful information, like their postcode or marital status? You can use information like this to create a profile of their characteristics, buying habits, and interests. See sidebar for more details.

Segment your customers

Use the information you've gathered about your customers to segment them into groups with similar characteristics. Segmenting your customer list in this way will help you to identify those customers with the greatest potential for generating revenue and for referring new business. It will also help you to prioritise the most effective ways to market to each customer group.

Get feedback from customers

Asking for feedback from your customers is key to building closer relationships with them. Customers will appreciate your interest in their concerns. They will see you as someone who cares about their needs and who wants to know what they think. The better your relationship with your customers, the more likely they will turn to you when they need the product or service you offer.

Online surveys are an excellent way to get feedback from your customers, especially during a down economy. These are the times when it really pays to know what's on their minds. With an online survey, you can ask your customers their opinion about the quality of your products or customer service, what they'd like your business to offer in the future, and even how you can help them weather these challenging times. By gathering this information on a regular basis, you will have your finger on the pulse of their needs and be able to quickly turn your unique skills into customer benefits.

Profile your best customers

Think of your best customers. What do they have in common? Is it an industry or role? A similar problem or challenge? A quality of temperament, habit, or attitude? The answers form a profile of the kind of prospects you should pursue.

Then think about how you attracted your top customers. Did they come to your website first? Or respond to a direct mail campaign? Or meet you at an exhibition? Again, whatever worked, do more of. And consider trimming back the rest.

Be prepared for surprises. You may have started your business with the intent of serving one kind of customer with one kind of need, but in retrospect you may find that your best business comes from an entirely different kind of client with a different need.

Building relationships with your customers

Your website provides an ongoing point of contact with your customers and can be a useful way of collecting information about them for e-marketing purposes and for building successful relationships with them.

Answering common queries

Answering the common queries customers ask on your website - perhaps in the form of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) - demonstrates you're ready to help. It may also save you time and money by reducing the number of basic phone queries.

Provide an email facility for queries and customer feedback - but ensure someone checks them regularly. Respond to queries promptly and let people know their comments are appreciated, even if it is automated with standard messages. Provide full contact details, particularly phone numbers, for people in need of an immediate answer or they may look elsewhere.

Asking visitors to register

You should ask first-time visitors to your website to register. This can be useful for gathering statistics and email addresses for direct mailings.

But asking people to register straight away may put them off. Most people will not sign up unless there is an incentive for doing so, such as an e-newsletter, special offer or access to further information that is not available to non-subscribers. Make sure they've got far enough into your site to want to find out more and tell them how they can benefit by registering. Ask for the minimum details possible, which could be as little as just their email address and name.

If you intend to collect personal data, there are a number of legal requirements you will need to be aware of.

Consider Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC) advertising

As you read this, someone, somewhere is almost certainly on a search engine such as Google looking for what you have to offer. SEO and PPC are powerful new tools, and account for nearly 60% of all online marketing spend.

Place greater emphasis on your organic SEO rather than simply dumping money into Google AdWords. It's not only cheaper, it can be more productive.

Continued...

Understanding new customer opportunities

Now that you've developed a solid understanding of your customers, the benefits you and your business offer, and the importance of a good communication plan, it's time to leverage that knowledge and use your customers to develop new customer relationships. Through referrals, testimonials, partnerships with other organisations, charity sponsorships, and networking, you can find many potential customers willing and eager to give your business a try.

Customer relationship management

To understand and build relationships with your customers and develop your e-marketing capabilities you need to invest in a customer relationship management (CRM) system. The CRM system brings information like customer data, sales patterns, marketing data and future trends together with the aim of identifying new sales opportunities, delivering improved customer service, and offering personalised services and deals.

But in addition to improving sales and profitability, the CRM system is very effective in handling customer complaints and can have a tremendous effect on your reputation. Which is particularly important with e-marketing as most interactions are impersonal.

Keep in contact and deliver content

If you're e-mailing your customers less than once a fortnight you're not doing enough to keep your business 'top of mind'.

Make it a habit to e-mail your customers and prospects with useful, topical content they can use. They'll love advice guides, time-limited savings and news, and it will help you develop closer relationships.

Which in turn will generate more sales for you.

Getting the technology right

There are several elements that you could include in your e-marketing mix including email, online advertising (such as banner adverts and sponsored links), SMS messaging or your website. The technology you will require to deliver your e-marketing messages will depend on which elements you decide to employ. In reality it is likely to be a mixture of all elements.

Make sure the technology you choose is right not only for the message but for your customers. As revealed earlier, the solution is to profile your customers and understand what the best format for them is.

Monitoring the effectiveness of your e-marketing campaigns

Prospects are very expensive to acquire. Giving them straight to sales teams without pre-qualification will create frustration for sales teams and customers alike, and end in broken relationships, both internal and external.

CRM software can really help unlock the wealth of information in your database by nurturing leads, turning your database into a significant asset and improving the ROI of your sales and marketing activities.

Make your marketing spend go further

Money spent on marketing is likely to shrink during a recession. But that doesn't mean the impact of your marketing effort needs to shrink with it.

Get the most use out of every marketing effort possible but re-using it as much as possible.

One case study, for example, can serve as:

- Meaningful content on your website that boosts SEO
- A direct mail insert in lieu of the traditional product brochure
- A tradeshow handout to jump start conversations
- A leave-behind for sales calls
- A way of building stronger relationships through promoting particular customers

Summary

Business success is all about customers - and how you market to them. It's about generating more leads, making more sales, and retaining more customers, at the lowest cost - i.e. using e-marketing.

But most small businesses see e-marketing as a necessary but unpleasant chore - because they don't understand it well enough. And they're not allocating enough time to it.

Every business owner should become outstanding at e-marketing, or employ/contract someone who is, to ensure your business survives.

About Essential Business Guides

This guide is the third in a series of essential guides on how technology can help organisations put customers at the heart of their businesses to generate more leads, make more sales and retain more customers.

- 1. How to make every single person in your business a sales person?** - This advice guide will help owner managers of SMEs put customers at the very heart of your business and show you how technology can help.
- 2. How to turn prospects into leads?** - This advice guide will show anyone involved in sales and marketing how to unlock the potential of your database by turning more prospects into leads - by building relationships and lead nurturing, and show you how technology can help.
- 3. How to market your business in a recession?** - This advice guide will help marketing managers in SMEs create an emarketing plan and show you how technology can help.
- 4. Ten things you need to consider choosing the right sales database or contact management solution for your business.** - This advice guide will help owner managers in SMEs plan wisely when deciding to implement a contact management or CRM strategy and show you how technology can help.

Showcase - ACT! CRM software

ACT! by Sage has been the number 1 selling entry-level CRM solution for over 20 years, and continues to bring the latest, most intuitive technology to businesses across the globe. ACT! has more than 2.8 million individual users in every type of SME in 26 countries.

Because ACT! supports an “anywhere” workforce with seamless online, offline, and mobile access solutions, it works for any business environment. With ACT! you and your team can achieve maximum productivity so you have time to focus your attention on better customer experience.

We understand that each business is unique; therefore we offer a range of CRM applications to suit businesses of all types and requirements.

Our portfolio of market-leading applications consists of:

- ACT! by Sage
- Sage CRM
- Sage SalesLogix

For further
information about ACT!
call **0800 694 0569** or
visit **www.sage.co.uk/act**
or **www.act2009.co.uk**

About Sage

Sage is a leading supplier of business management software and services to 5.8 million customers worldwide. From small start-ups to larger organisations, we make it easier for companies to manage their finances, people and customers. Our purpose is to help our customers run their businesses more effectively, helping them to gain greater insight into their business activities and providing them with lasting benefits by automating their business processes.

We have global strength and local focus. Our direct coverage in 26 countries and global network of over 30,000 Sage-certified business partners provides unparalleled business software and services expertise.

For further information
about Sage call **0800 44 77 77**
or visit **www.sage.co.uk**
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'How technology can help market your business in a recession' is written by bm-bm, an e-marketing consultancy specialising in generating CRM leads for B2B clients.

For more information visit **www.bm-bm.co.uk**

The Sage logo, featuring the word "sage" in a stylized, lowercase, teal font.