

7 Free or Cheap Ways to Effectively Promote Your Business Online

As a business owner, sales person, or marketer, you should always be trying to find ways to drum up more business – especially with the current economic climate. Each dollar that you spend on [marketing and advertising](#) should show a [return on your investment](#) and produce results that can help [increase your bottom line](#). Easy enough right?

While recent times have made many businesses tighten their belts on their spending, it's extremely important to the success of your company to keep marketing your business in order to gain new customers and continue to generate revenue.

Luckily for marketers and business owners, there are several ways you can very affordably advertise your services and products online (many of which are free). Let's go through a handful of them.

Twitter, Facebook & Social Sites

Connecting with your customers or potential customers is more important than ever. Take part in the conversations people are having about your industry or business by interacting with them on social networks.

Where to start: [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [MySpace](#), [LinkedIn](#)

Tips & Resources:

- [50 Ideas on Using Twitter for Business](#)
- [32 Ways to Use Facebook for Business](#)
- [Using LinkedIn As a Small Business Owner](#)

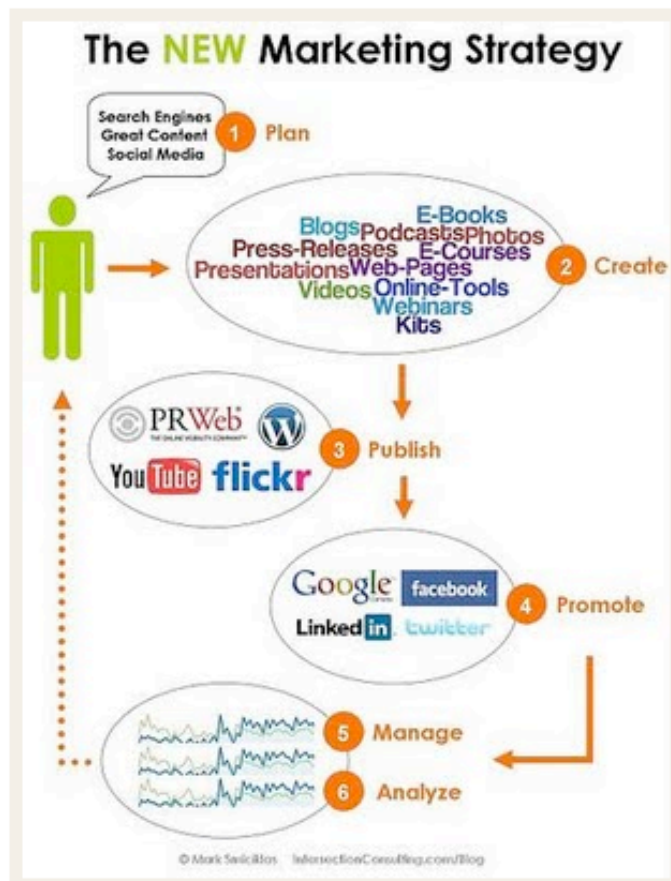
Video

Whether you're promoting products or offering your services, creating videos is an excellent way to attract new customers. Additionally, videos have a tendency to go viral and quickly reach a large audience.

Where to start: [YouTube](#)

Tips & Resources:

- [YouTube Marketing – 11 Terrific Ways to Promote Your Business on YouTube](#)
- [How to use video to promote your small business](#)
- [How to Produce "Business-Quality" Online Video on a Small Business Budget](#)



Bloggs & Forums

Similar to social networks, blogs and forums are a great place to take part in creating a dialogue. You want to be resourceful, really help people, and provide valuable information in order to gain the maximum benefits of these mediums.

Where to start: [Google Blog Search](#) & Forums Relevant to Your Business

Tips & Resources: [10 Rules For Driving Traffic Using Forums](#)

Press Releases

A great way to gain new customers is by creating press releases about your services, products, or business. Try and stay away from highly commercial press releases that simply show your company in a positive light. Instead, focus on a unique angle that will draw visitors' attention to something you are doing or an interesting aspect of your business.

Tips & Resources:

- [The New Rules of PR](#) (PDF – 21 pages)
- [20+ Free Press Release Distribution Sites](#)
- [Online Press Release Checklist](#)

Local Resource Sites & Classifieds

If you're an offline business that is looking to promote your company, ensure that you are listed in all of the sites that relate to your local area. These can include newspaper sites, local portals or hubs, classifieds, and national sites that focus on local businesses like Yelp, CitySearch, or Yellow Page directories.

Where to start: [Yelp](#), [CitySearch](#), [SuperPages.com](#), [Google Local](#) & [Yahoo! Local](#), & [Craigslist](#)

Tips & Resources:

- [List your business](#) on Google Maps, Yahoo Local & More
- [GetListed.org](#)
- [Local Search Ranking Factors](#)
- [A Look at Important Local Business Listing Attributes](#)

Email Newsletters

Not only will building an email list help you connect more often with your customers, it is a great way to promote people who are extremely interested in your products or services. This can be one of your most powerful [online marketing tools](#) because you become less reliant on search engines and other ways of generating traffic to your site.

Where to start: [Constant Contact](#), [MailChimp](#), [Aweber](#), and [iContact](#)

Tips & Resources:

- [5 Common Newbie Mistakes](#)
- [Choosing An Email Newsletter Provider](#)
- [50 Ways to Get Email Newsletter Subscribers](#)

Contests & Giveaways

To be successful with contests and giveaways, you need to give people things that are valuable and relate to your business or industry. The great thing about contests is that you can give your own products away and your only out-of-pocket expense will be your hard costs for the product(s)

Where to start: Promote them on blogs, forums, press releases, video, and newsletters

Tips & Resources:

- [Anatomy of a Successful Blog Contest](#)
- [14 tips for Twitter contests that build followers and brand visibility](#)

+1 Bonus Tip: Start a Blog

One of the most beneficial and inexpensive ways to [promote your site](#) online is by creating a blog that compliments your business' services and products. Not only does it give a chance for you to talk about new happenings in your industry, but it allows you to start connecting with people on your site – where you can promote [your own business](#) as much as you want.

Where to start: [WordPress](#), [Blogger](#), [TypePad](#)

Tips & Resources:

- [Freelancers: Here's Why You Need a Blog](#)
- [Does Your Company Need a Blog?](#)



Business Example

Kogi – mobile Korean BBQ business

Website:
kogibbq.com

Kogi Truck Schedule MAR 9 - MAR 13

TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
ROJA Tuesday 12PM-3PM Universal City (Gate 2) 10600 Vallyheart and Lankershim 91604 Tuesday 6PM-9PM Eagle Rock 4372 Eagle Rock Blvd 90041 Tuesday 1030PM-1230AM Corbin Bowling Center Tarzana 19816 Ventura Blvd 91356	AZUL Tuesday 12PM-3PM K-1 Speed Gardens 19038 S. Vermont Ave 90248 Tuesday 630PM-830PM NoHo Arts District (NW corner) Weddington and Lankershim 91601 Tuesday 930PM-1230AM Monrovia 725 W. Huntington Dr 91016	VERDE Tuesday 12PM-3PM Brentwood (Lot Behind Bldg) 12301 Wilshire Blvd 90049 Tuesday 6PM-9PM Miracle Mile S. Cloverdale Ave and Wilshire Blvd 90036 Tuesday 10PM-1230AM Brig 1515 Abbot Kinney Blvd 90291	NARANJA Tuesday No ALmuerzo! Tuesday 630PM-9PM Irvine Office & Storage 8 Whatney 92618 Tuesday 1030PM-12AM Concourse Entertainment Center 3364 E. La Palma Ave. Anaheim 92806	

alibi 12226 Washington Blvd. You can always kogi at Alibi Room in Culver City Monday through Saturday, 6-midnight. (21+)

LATEST BLOG ENTRY Yo O.C.-Good Bye for ur O.G. manager! BRING YOUR LIPSTIX!
March 12th, 2010

KOGIBBQ ON TWITTER
follow us on twitter

twitter Home Profile Find People Settings Help Sign out

Kogi kogibbq
Follow Lists Settings

Pomona eta 7!!
about 1 hours ago via txt

Azul is broken and will be replaced by Blanca!
Hollywood@Amoeba eta 7!
about 2 hours ago via txt

@gerrbear haha take a friend! Eat the burrito urself and share the blackjack-!
about 4 hours ago via web in reply to gerrbear

New Location for NARANJA @1030PM-12AM: The Park at the Irvine Spectrum Center (18000 Spectrum 92618)
about 5 hours ago via web

NARANJA: 630PM-9PM Asian Garden Mall Westminster (9200 Bolsa Ave); 1030PM-12AM The Village at Irvine Spectrum Center (50 Prism 92618)
about 7 hours ago via web

VERDE: 630PM-9PM Pomona (Valley & Temple); 1030PM-1230AM Diamond Bar (Diamond Bar & Montelino, 1317 S. Diamond Bar Blvd)
about 7 hours ago via web

AZUL: 6PM-9PM Amoeba Music Hollywood (Sunset & Cahuenga); 10PM-1230AM IKEA Carson (Dominguez & Bonita)
about 7 hours ago via web

ROJA: 6PM-8PM Echo Parck (1487 W. Sunset Blvd); 9PM-12AM The Coffee Gallery Altadena (2029 N. Lake Ave)
about 7 hours ago via web

Name kogibbq
Location UT: 34.044817,-118.311893
Web http://www.kogibbq.com
Bio Korean BBQ Taco Truck

1,701 following 57,776 followers 2,169 listed

Tweets 4,738

Favorites

Actions
block kogibbq
report for spam

Following

View all...

RSS feed of kogibbq's tweets

Twitter: @KOGIBBQ

On-line 'real-time' information about ETA of truck at venues and twitters from customers.

50 Ideas on Using Twitter for Business

First Steps

Build an account and immediately start using **Twitter Search** to listen for your name, your competitor's names, words that relate to your space. (Listening always comes first.)

Add a picture. (**Shel** reminds us of this.) We want to see you.

Talk to people about THEIR interests, too. I know this doesn't sell more widgets, but it shows us you're human.

Point out interesting things in your space, not just about you.

Share links to neat things in your community. (**@wholefoods** does this well).

Don't get stuck in the apology loop. Be helpful instead. (**@jetblue** gives travel tips.)

Be wary of always pimping your stuff. Your fans will love it. Others will tune out.

Promote your employees' outside-of-work stories. (**@TheHomeDepot** does it well.)

Throw in a few humans, like **RichardAtDELL**, **LionelAtDELL**, etc.

Talk about non-business, too, like **@astrout** and **@jstorerj** from Mzinga.

Ideas About WHAT to Tweet

Instead of answering the question, "What are you doing?", answer the question, "What has your attention?"

Have more than one twitterer at the company. People can quit. People take vacations. It's nice to have a variety.

When promoting a blog post, ask a question or explain what's coming next, instead of just dumping a link.

Ask questions. Twitter is GREAT for getting opinions.

Follow interesting people. If you find someone who tweets interesting things, see who she follows, and follow her.

Tweet about other people's stuff. Again, doesn't directly impact your business, but makes us feel like you're not "**that guy**."

When you DO talk about your stuff, make it useful. Give advice, blog posts, pictures, etc.

Share the human side of your company. If you're bothering to tweet, it means you believe social media has value for human connections. Point us to pictures and other human things.

Don't toot your own horn too much. (Man, I can't believe I'm saying this. I do it all the time.

– Side note: I've gotta stop tooting my own horn).

Or, if you do, try to balance it out by promoting the heck out of others, too.

Some Sanity For You

You don't have to read every tweet.

You don't have to reply to every @ tweet directed to you (try to reply to some, but don't feel guilty).

Use direct messages for 1-to-1 conversations if you feel there's no value to Twitter at large

to hear the conversation (got this from [@pistachio](#)).

Use services like [Twitter Search](#) to make sure you see if someone's talking about you. Try to participate where it makes sense.

3rd party clients like [Tweetdeck](#) and [Twhirl](#) make it a lot easier to manage Twitter.

If you tweet all day while your coworkers are busy, you're going to hear about it.

If you're representing clients and billing hours, and tweeting all the time, you might hear about it.

Learn quickly to use the URL shortening tools like [TinyURL](#) and all the variants. It helps tidy up your tweets.

If someone says you're using twitter wrong, forget it. It's an opt out society. They can unfollow if they don't like how you use it.

Commenting on others' tweets, and retweeting what others have posted is a great way to Build community.

The Negatives People Will Throw At You

Twitter takes up time.

Twitter takes you away from other productive work.

Without a strategy, it's just typing.

There are other ways to do this.

As Frank hears often, Twitter doesn't replace customer service (Frank is [@comcastcares](#) and is a superhero for what he's started.)

Twitter is buggy and not enterprise-ready.

Twitter is just for technonerd.

Twitter's only a few million people. (only)

Twitter doesn't replace direct email marketing.

Twitter opens the company up to more criticism and griping.

Some Positives to Throw Back

Twitter helps one organize great, instant meetups (tweetups).

Twitter works swell as an opinion poll.

Twitter can help direct people's attention to good things.

Twitter at events helps people build an instant "backchannel."

Twitter breaks news faster than other sources, often (especially if the news impacts online denizens).

Twitter gives businesses a glimpse at what status messaging can do for an organization.

Remember presence in the 1990s?

Twitter brings great minds together, and gives you daily opportunities to learn (if you look for it, and/or if you follow the right folks).

Twitter gives your critics a forum, but that means you can study them.

32 Ways to Use Facebook for Business

Facebook's not just for keeping tabs on friends and filling out quizzes — it can also be used as a highly effective business tool. It's great for marketing your products, landing gigs and connecting with your customers.

Here are 32 ways to use Facebook in your business.

Manage Your Profile

Establish a **business account** if you don't already have one.

Stay out of trouble by reading the **Facebook rules** regarding business accounts.

Keep any personal parts of your profile private through **Settings**.

Post a professional or business casual photos of yourself to **reinforce your brand**.

Limit business contacts' access to personal photos.

Post your newsletter subscription information and archives somewhere in your profile.

Connect and share with others

Obtain a Facebook **vanity URL** so that people can find you easily.

Add your Facebook URL to your email signature and any marketing collateral (business cards, etc.) so prospects can learn more about you.

Post business updates on your wall. Focus on business activities, such as "Working with ABC Company on web site redesign."

Share useful articles and links to presentation and valuable resources that interest customers and prospects on your wall, to establish credibility.

Combine Facebook with other social media tools like Twitter. For example, when someone asks question on Twitter, you can respond in detail in a blog post and link to it from Facebook.

Research prospects before meeting or contacting them.

Use **Find Friends** for suggestions of other people you may know to expand your network even further.

Look for mutual contacts on your contacts' friends lists.

Find experts in your field and invite them as a guest blogger on your blog or speaker at your event.

Market your products by posting discounts and package deals.

Share survey or research data to gain credibility.

Use **Facebook Connect** to add social networking features to your web site.

Suggest Friends to clients and colleagues — by helping them, you establish trust.

Buy **Facebook ads** to target your exact audience.

Read up on **Facebook Beacon** to see if it might be useful for you.

Use Network, Group and Fan Pages

Start a **group or fan page** for product, brand or business. Unless you or your business is already a household name, a group is usually the better choice.

Add basic information to the group or fan page such as links to company site, newsletter subscription

information and newsletter archives.

Post upcoming events including webinars, conferences and other programs where you or someone from your company will be present.

Update your group or fan page on a regular basis with helpful information and answers to questions.

Join **network**, industry and alumni groups related to your business.

Use search to find groups and fan pages related to your business by industry, location and career.

YouTube Marketing – 11 Terrific Ways to Promote Your Business on YouTube

Millions and millions of people visit YouTube every month. Some of the most popular videos on YouTube have more views than Oprah's show.

If you are not promoting your business on YouTube yet, what are you waiting for?

Anyway, here is the list:

Copy the Top Performers

Look for the three videos with more views in your category and get ideas from them. Copy their video title, tags, and descriptions. Don't copy anything verbatim, change things up a little.

Create Your Own Channel

Create a channel and customize to feature your best videos. This alone will drastically boost your views.

Use the Bulletin Board

This is a great feature that lets you start a conversation around your own videos. But don't limit yourself to your own bulletin boards; use others' too.

Add Friends

People often forget that YouTube is a social network. Add friends to your list and engage with them.

Use Video Responses

Search for popular videos related to yours and post your video as a response to them. Leverage the views that other videos get.

Create Something Worth Spreading the Word About

If your video is boring, all these tactics won't do much for you. The videos that work best on YouTube are either hilarious, controversial, unique, or very useful.

Complete Your Profile

YouTube allows you to fill out your profile; do it. And by all means include a link to your website here.

Link the Videos to Your Profile

You can link your videos to any page within YouTube. Set it up so when people click on your video they go to your profile. And from your profile they can click on the link to your website.

Create Playlists

Create a playlist of related videos. Include a lot of popular ones on a certain topic and, of course, your own video.

Join Some Groups and Start Your Own

Join some groups and post both text and video comments. You can also start your own group.

Encourage Viewers to Subscribe

End each video asking viewers to subscribe. Many people don't know they can subscribe or they will forget unless you remind them to.

These are some of the techniques that we have used for our best clients. Most of them got over 500,000 views in less than one year. How would you like to get your business in front of half a million potential new clients?

How much social media can \$200 buy?

14 tips for Twitter contests that build followers and brand visibility

Today, we're launching Social Signal's first Twitter contest, inspired by another great contest that ran today on Twitter.

Twitscoop is a service that tracks the hottest topics on Twitter. This morning, one topic jumped out as the super-hot discussion of the morning: 200k. It turns out that hipster T-shirt company threadless had made the following offer:

*@threadless In celebration of passing 200k followers, we're giving away \$200 in Gift Cards today!
RT this to be eligible to win 1 of 8 \$25 GCs*

Let me translate:

@threadless [the Threadless company's Twitter account] now has 200,000 "followers" on Twitter (people who get their Twitter updates). To celebrate, they are offering \$200 in gift cards. To enter a contest to win one of eight \$25 gift cards, you must "retweet" the offer. That means you copy & paste the threadless message into your Twitter update field, and click "update" (or more likely, hit the "retweet" button in a Twitter client like TweetDeck).

When I first pulled up the collection of ensuing tweets, it had been an hour since threadless posted this offer; in that hour, about 950 people had retweeted the message. In the time it's taken me to write this blog post and eat breakfast (roughly two hours) another 500 people have twittered it. When did YOU last get 1500 of your customers all shilling for you on a single morning, at a cost of \$200?

Threadless has some particular strengths that positioned it to do this kind of marketing. But those strengths are within your reach, and so are the benefits of this kind of promotion. Here's how you can learn from Threadless' example.

Participatory brand/site + Twitter contest = Tweet-o-rama. Part of the reason that Threadless was able to get this kind of uptake -- and get 200,000 followers in the first place -- is that it is an intrinsically participatory brand. Threadless is a t-shirt company that invites user-submitted designs, and then sells the most popular designs online. It invites high-intensity, expressive participation with tangible rewards (submitting t-shirt designs in return for exposure and the prospect of winning \$2,500) and low-intensity, still expressive participation (scoring and optionally commenting on designs). That participatory edge makes it a darling of the Twitterati, and gives it real credibility when it invites customers to engage in another form of participation (like retweeting).

Chicken/egg? Big contests = more followers. Part of the reason this got so big, so fast is that Threadless is building on a base of 200,000 Twitter followers. That's a lot of people receiving their offer. It's a great example of why it pays to build your Twitter audience: many follower >> big impact from online promotions >> more followers.

For Twitter juice, frequent \$100 prizes beats one \$500 prize. Unlike a blog post, a tweet is evanescent. If I happen to be on Twitter when you post your update, I'll see it; otherwise it's unlikely I'll hear about your contest. Threadless is able to get around that because its high volume of followers translates into a high enough surge of tweets that it shows up in Twitscoop; but the best way to build up to that base of followers is by offering contests, discounts or limited-time-only stock on a regular (even daily) basis. That said, \$25 is a bit low -- you'll probably get more action in the \$50-100 zone.

Great contest + short deadline = Twitscoop love. The Threadless contest unfolded over just a few hours. That encourages a high density of participation in a short time, which is what pushed it to the top of Twitscoop, making the Threadless account visible to far more people.

Unique phrase + retweeting contest = Twitscoop visibility. Make sure there's a unique phrase you're asking people to retweet, so that it can emerge as a Twitscoop trend.

Intriguing context + retweeting contest = mentions = visibility. The key metric you're after is Twitter "mentions": people posting updates on their account that reference your account name. Ideally, it will be in an intriguing context that makes their followers curious about who this @account belongs to, and they'll click through to find you.

Twitter contest + boring Twitter account = wasted effort. For a contest or promotion to pay off, you want to capture new followers. If someone sees a contest-related tweet and clicks through to your Twitter feed, you need to grab their attention. A list of your latest blog post URLs won't do it. So make sure you have some funny, intriguing or informative tweets, and possibly other recent offers that make you worth following.

Twitter contest + 1-click participation = big results. It takes literally a single mouseclick (on the "RT"

button) to participate in this offer and forward threadless' mention. With such a low participation threshold, it's easy to get big numbers.

Twitter contest + your product as prize = great showcase. The threadless prize is threadless product; not only does it save them a hard cost on prizing, but it showcases their product as a desirable incentive.

Short tweet + retweeting contest = room to spread retweets. Make sure your offer or promotion doesn't take all 140 characters of your Twitter update. When people retweet, the "RT @accountname" will be counted against their 140-character count, and your offer will get cut off.

Retweetable offer + reason to retweet = viral. Each person who tweets the threadless offer "spread" it to their friends, who were likewise motivated to retweet it. This has exponential growth potential, particularly given the low barrier to participation.

And three guidelines that threadless didn't follow

Retweeting contest + actual content in tweet = retweets with value. If you're asking people to retweet something, give those retweets some value. Twitter is going to suck big if it gets cluttered up with a thousand people retweeting contest offers every hour. (If your Twitter feed is full of RTs of this morning's threadless offer, you know what I'm talking about!) So think of a way for those retweets to offer something more: a smile, an insight, a user-contributed tidbit.

Contest + request for follows = more followers. Until you get to at least your first 10,000 followers, you need people to follow you as much as (or more than) you need to Twitter you. So don't just ask for retweets, ask for follows.

Sucky Twitter feed + relaunch + contest = redemption. If your site, brand or Twitter feed fall short on any of the criteria above, successful contests are still within your grasp. Use a contest to turn lemons into proverbial lemonade: announce a (re)launch of your Twitter presence with a great contest that speaks to your new, compelling Twitter strategy.