

## **Marketing yourself as a small business**

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**By virtue of size and scale, small firms can have a competitive edge when it comes to quality, service and exclusivity. Discover how you can turn size to your advantage.**

Being a small business does not have to be a barrier to success – in fact, it can be a positive strength. Large organisations may seem to have many markets sewn up, but their approach to sales and marketing may not be ideal for everyone.

“Consumers associate good quality with small manufacturers,” asserts Dennis Palmer, senior client service manager at Business Link. “They picture businesses down the road, which gives a sense of product accountability and community.”

### **Stress your difference**

“Small businesses are at an advantage when it comes to finding and filling a niche,” stresses Palmer. “Differentiate your offering. This can be in terms of quality or product type, or offering something that isn’t available in the mass-market.”

Take every opportunity to stress the benefits to your customers of buying from a small operation, and include the message on all of your marketing materials – even the packaging. Concentrate on quality and exclusivity: you might be ‘family-owned’, for example, use a ‘handmade’ process or provide ‘bespoke’ goods and services to order.

Reinforcing your community ties is equally important. “The green agenda is very important for customers,” Palmer suggests. “Locally-sourced products have less environmental impact, because they have travelled fewer miles. Let consumers know if you are supporting the local community or being environmentally-friendly.”

### **Quality service**

Customer service is a vital selling point for small businesses, and an area where large manufacturers and retailers struggle to compete. “If you buy something anonymously in a shop and it goes wrong, the feeling is that you’re not going to be able to do anything about it,” Palmer explains.

“But if you buy from somebody local who you trust, you feel you can call them up and they’ll do something about it. Successful businesses tend to work intimately with their customers,” he continues. “Small firms can offer a friendly face, be trustworthy, flexible and approachable. You should focus on providing exceptional customer service.”

This, he suggests, should include making a list of your regular customers and keeping them up to date with your products, services, offers, and news about the business. You could do this via notices around your premises, a newsletter that accompanies deliveries or your website. Make an effort to attend local events, such as markets, as well.

### **Expanding your customer base**

Once you have established a strong presence in your local community, explore ways of breaking into larger markets. “Don’t underestimate your online presence,” advises Palmer. “Target it towards your local community, but remember it can help you reach more customers. I know of a fish smokery in Scotland that sells locally. But now they’re selling internationally, purely on the basis that it’s a local product you can trust.”

- *For more information on marketing, visit the ‘Marketing’ section of the Business Link website [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)*