**MARKETING MATTERS**

The most important aspect in any business is its customers. But how do you get customers to walk through the door?

A marketing plan is comprised of three parts — promotion and reach, online and digital, and advertising. Start by writing down your goals and plan how you will measure the successes and failures of your marketing

campaigns. Before you set up a marketing plan, research what your competitors do, not only locally but globally. This can give you a good starting point for developing your own strategy.

**START WITH THE BASICS**

Do you have or need the basic print materials like business cards, flyers, or brochures. Your marketing materials should always convey a clear, uniform message about your brand — from your business cards to your window signage to your pictures on social media. The most important thing is to be consistent across all channels with your brand.

**THINKING LIKE YOUR CUSTOMER**

Putting yourself in your customers’ shoes is a great way to do market research. Figure out where they are spending their time and then be there when they are looking for you. If you are targeting millennials, you may consider social media and email, since a majority of people in this age group are online daily. Facebook or Twitter are great ways to interact with customers without having to have a huge budget. But make sure you keep your page ‘social.’ Think about what you like seeing on your own feed — is it news and events or personal photos? Strategize your business page the same way. Don’t spread yourselves too thin on social media or online marketing. Start with one and do it really well. Then, you can expand to the others when you have an established presence. What if your customers are not using online and digital media? Consider using traditional advertising avenues, such as newspaper ads, radio, or television. This may work for some, but can be a budget breaker for others. Be very specific and think of making radio, TV, and print part of the whole marketing package. Make sure you are presenting a consistent message on all platforms so that time and money are not lost in translation.

Small business owners have so much to think about that it is easy to put off establishing and maintaining your marketing plan. But you can’t assume that your customer knows what you do, and you can’t let your competitors gain an advantage over you through their marketing. You have to advertise your product or service and let people know what you do, so you are the first business they think of when they need your products or services.