



How can you stand out from your competitors?

A guide for small businesses



 **vistacreate**™

We'll look at:

Introduction

With so many businesses competing for customers' attention, how do you get them to choose you?

How do you become that red apple in a barrel of green apples? That swan among ducks. That brown panda, pink dolphin, or white tiger of your niche.

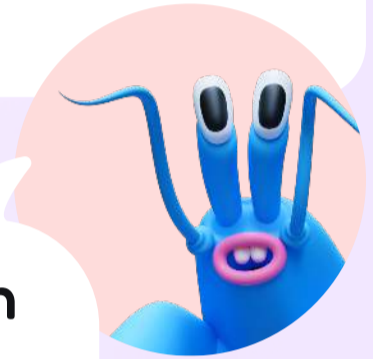
All businesses want to stand out. But it's a particular concern for small businesses swimming in a sea of bigger fish.

The good news is it's not as hard as it seems. You don't have to rethink your business or redo everything from scratch.

Instead, this guide will help you highlight what's remarkable about your brand. And help you embrace and enhance what's already unique about your small business.



How to make sure you're showing up on your customers' radar



How to strengthen your brand



How to stand out in a crowded space



And how to make your marketing stick

Let's dive in.

Getting the basics right

There might be many reasons for customers to choose you over the competition. But first, you have to get them to find you. And notice you.

So how do you make sure you're showing up on your customers' radar?



Have a strong online presence

According to [BrightLocal](#), 99% of consumers have used the internet to find information about a business in the last year. And 78% do so more than once a week.

[Templates from VistaCreate](#)



How can you build a strong online presence?

- Connect with your customers on social media — on the platforms where your audience hangs out.
- Manage your local listings — make sure you're present in all the top directories and that all your business information is up to date.
- Improve your website's on-page SEO. This [blog post](#) from VistaPrint walks you through how to add keywords to 5 different areas of your web page.



Use your website to give visitors an experience

It's easy to think of your website as an online brochure. Done well, it can be more than that.

An experience that nurtures trust and helps your visitors find the information they're looking for.



Here are a few boxes to tick. Make sure your site is:

1.

Easy to navigate

A survey conducted by Clutch found that [94% of consumers](#) say a website must be easy to navigate.

3.

Quick to load

[Load speed can make or break your website](#). No matter how beautifully designed it is, if a customer has to wait more than about 2–3 seconds, you risk losing them to a competitor.

2.

Mobile-friendly

According to a [report by Contentsquare](#), mobile accounted for 58% of all online visits in 2021.

4.

Clear

Visitors spend, on average, [15 seconds](#) on a website. Which means you need to include a clear call-to-action and a way to contact you. On every page.

Promote good customer reviews

No business can copy your customer reviews. They're unique to your brand. And nobody sells your business like a happy customer can.

Make a point of collecting customer reviews. Encourage people to leave reviews on your GoogleBusiness Profile, Tripadvisor, or whichever business directories are most relevant for your niche.

How to design excellent reviews for socials



And respond to all your reviews, whether positive or negative. By addressing a concern and suggesting a solution, you can win over negative reviewers — and potential new customers.

Provide legendary customer service

What's one of the most powerful yet cost-effective forms of marketing? Word of mouth. One way to get tongues wagging is to focus on providing stellar customer service. Surprisingly, a lot of businesses don't do this. So it's an area where you can really stand out.

Follow these best practices:

- Make a good first impression — smile, be positive, and show you're willing to help.
- Own up to your mistakes — if you apologize and rectify the situation, you stand a greater chance of being given another opportunity.
- Be willing to pick up the phone — email can be convenient but taking time out of your day for a more personal connection can reap rewards.
- Be proactive — create a lasting impression by going the extra mile.
- Follow up — show your customers you care by checking in with them after a purchase or visit.



Building a strong brand

A brand that stands strong is a brand that stands out. So how can you strengthen your brand?



Laser in on your target market

If you try to appeal to everyone, you risk appealing to no one. Rather than taking on a whole market, you can find more success by focusing your energies on being the top dog in a subsection of the market.

Your pie might be smaller but you could end up eating more than you would with a tiny slice of a big pie.



Meet a need

A great way to stand out and win over new customers is to focus on an unmet need. What common problems do people experience? Find a way to address or solve those.

Discover what makes you unique

Pinpoint what makes you unique by carrying out a [SWOT analysis](#). Utilize competitive differentiators and spend some time identifying your business's Unique Value Proposition (UVP).

In this [helpful blog post](#), HelpScout outlines 3 different ways to arrive at your UVP. For a really in-depth approach, check out Strategyzer's [Value Proposition Design](#) book.

Make a strong visual impression

Speaking of design, make sure you stand out visually. That might be through a creative logo, an intriguing website design, or distinctive labels and packaging.



- With [99designs by Vista](#), you can collaborate with professional designers to transform your brand with powerful designs. From logo and identity, web and app design, and business and advertising to clothing and merchandising, art and illustration, and packaging and labeling.
- And with [VistaPrint](#), you can feel like a big brand with a range of expertly designed, customizable marketing products.

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Build strong customer relationships

Make an effort to keep in contact with your customers and prospects. Share valuable tips and advice. And run regular contests to encourage them to follow you on social media.

When your prospects know, like, and trust you, they're more likely to do business with you.

Reward customer loyalty

Are you familiar with the [80/20 rule](#)?

Also known as the Pareto Principle, it says that roughly 80% of outputs come from 20% of inputs.

It applies to your customers. According to [Customer Thermometer](#), 80% of your future profits will come from 20% of your existing customers.

That's why it makes sense to reward your loyal customers.

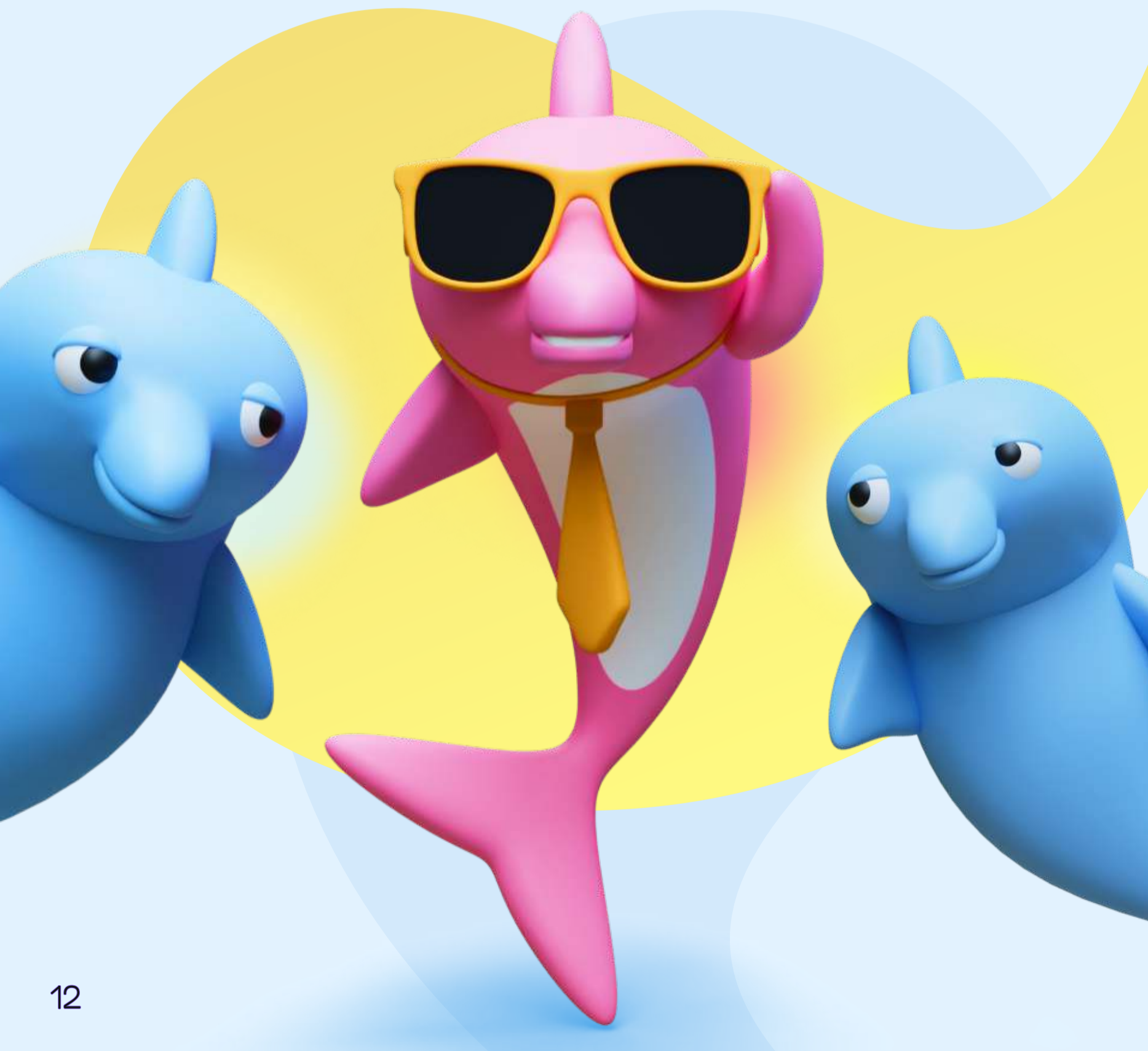
Give out special discounts and promotions. Offer special sales previews. Or set up a loyalty points program.

The key isn't giving away freebies. It's making your loyal customers feel special.



Standing out in a crowded space

You've found your niche and you've identified your target market with laser precision. But what if you still find yourself in a crowded market? How can you really stand out from your competitors?



Think outside of the box

Standing out from your competitors isn't just about being better. It's about being different.

This is a principle you can apply across the board. To your branding, your design, your marketing, and your social media content.



You can also apply it to your promotions and campaigns.

Many of your competitors will probably run 50% off or BOGO (buy one get one) promotions. But how many of them are likely to offer 57% off? Or run a sale to celebrate an unusual holiday?

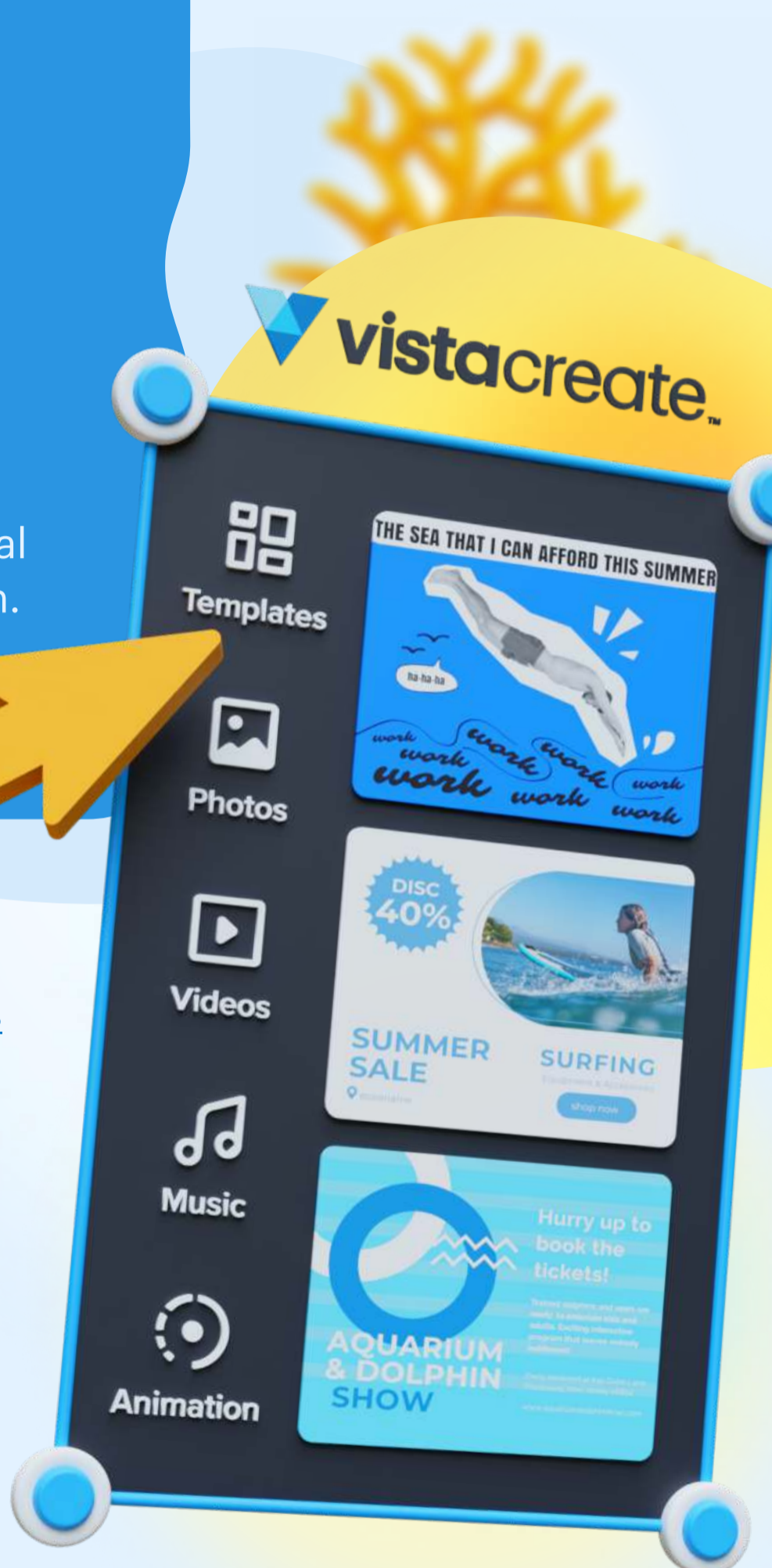
Be innovative and go against the crowd. Offer a guarantee or valuable item that others don't. Just remember, if you offer a guarantee, stick to what you claim.

Need some ideas? Check out our blog post, [An unconventional guide to generating unconventional ideas](#).

Create eye-catching designs with VistaCreate

We are visual beings living in a visual age. Easily the most visual society the world has ever seen.

As of 2019, [3.2 billion images](#) were being viewed on social media and [720,000 hours' worth](#) of video content was being uploaded to YouTube every single day. With the rise of TikTok and the ever growing popularity of Instagram, our acceleration towards a predominantly visual world shows no signs of slowing down.



But for businesses, standing out with eye-catching designs is a balancing act.

You need to create stunning visuals that both:

1.

Fit into current design trends

2.

Differ drastically from the ones your competitors are using

This is where [VistaCreate](#) can help you. It's easy to make one-of-a-kind visuals for your small business's social media content — without needing a big budget.

In just a few minutes, you can create designs that look like they took hours.

Position yourself as an expert

Want to really separate yourself from the pack and beat off the competition? Show you're an expert in your field. How?



1.

Write thought leadership pieces

Get as many eyes on your articles as you can. Share them by posting on LinkedIn, starting an email newsletter, or by launching a Telegram or Slack channel.

3.

Get hold of data your competitors don't have

Do this by surveying and talking to your customers.

2.

Guest-blog on websites where your target audience hangs out

To get started with guest-posting, check out this super-helpful [guide](#) from Neil Patel.

4.

Better still, actively use social proof

Publish reviews on social media and your website. Make use of user-generated content. And develop a section on your website with case studies showing how customers have benefited from your products—the more varied the better!



Build a community of fans

On social media, aim to do more than attract new customers. Focus on building a community of fans.

When your followers feel part of your brand and its journey, they're more likely to tell their friends and family about you.

How do you get really close to your target audience on social media? You need to do more than develop a content calendar and stick to it.



Here are a few tips (and get ready for another 80/20 rule):

- Start by putting an effective [social listening strategy](#) in place — so you can better understand what your target audience wants.
- Create a welcoming, engaged environment. Encourage your followers to share their own stories.
- Be responsive and engage with your followers. Welcome the opportunity to have personalized conversations in your direct messages.
- Share content strategically. Aim for 80% of your content to be helpful. Use the remaining 20% to promote your business.

Be active in your local community

This is one of the best ways for you to stand out from the competition —particularly from big brands. If you can't enter an international market with a bang, tone down your ambitions and focus on the local market instead.



By engaging in your local community, you can show your customers you care.

That could be by:

- Taking part in local events
- Sponsoring a local team, initiative, show, or school project
- Volunteering with a local non-profit

But you can also make your connection to your local community part of your branding. One of your main USPs (Unique Selling Points).

For instance, why not incorporate local expressions or local urban legends into your naming strategies? Then build marketing campaigns around this.

Making your marketing “sticky”

In their New York Times’ bestselling book [Made To Stick](#), educators Chip and Dan Heath examine why some ideas survive while others die — why some messages take hold and others come unstuck.





They identify 6 different ways to make your message more memorable.

Principles that you can apply to your small business's marketing and make a success — or "**SUCCESS**" — of standing out from your competitors.

S

Keep things **simple**

U

Do something **unexpected**

C

Appeal to the senses with **concrete** examples

C

Make your product seem **credible**

E

Appeal to people's **emotional** side

S

Inspire people with powerful **stories**

Keep things simple

If you say 3 things, you don't say anything.

What happens if we're presented with too much information or too many ideas at once?

We get confused. And if we're confused, we're more likely to look elsewhere. So how do you keep your marketing simple and avoid confusing your audience?



Follow these 2 steps:

1.

Find and share the core of your idea

Strip your message down to its single essential ingredient. That means weeding out other ideas that might be really important — just not the most important idea. As a journalist would say, it means not “burying the lead.”

2.

Make it super easy for people to understand

Use familiar schemas and evocative analogies. Get rid of jargon and communicate in concise, clear, concrete language.

What are good examples of a core and compact idea?

- A proverb such as “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush”
- High-concept pitches for Hollywood movies, like Alien = “Jaws on a spaceship” and Speed = “Die Hard on a bus”
- Or a generative metaphor like Disney’s employees being “cast members in a theatrical production”

Example

Ministry of Supply’s kick-starter campaign for its ATLAS coffee-infused socks explained that they “keep your feet fresh — like a Brita filter in your shoe.”

Do something unexpected

When you do something people don’t expect, you stop your audience in their tracks. By breaking a pattern, you jolt them into paying attention. And you become instantly memorable.

So how do you seize the power of big surprises in your marketing?



There are good ways and bad ways to do that:

- Avoid gimmicks.
- Avoid common sense.
- And avoid ideas that are only about the shock factor.

How can you tell if you're on the right track?

Imagine your marketing was a movie plot twist. We want it to be something satisfying like the ending in *The Sixth Sense*. Not something lame like being told "It was all just a dream."

Instead:

- Use surprise to reinforce your core message.
- Go against what your customers would normally expect.
- Do something unpredictable but which makes sense after the event.

Example

You normally buy socks in pairs, with matching designs.

But [LittleMissMatched](#) sells its socks in threes. With completely different designs. Who needs to find a matching pair anymore?



Appeal to the senses with concrete examples

The Tortoise and the Hare ...
The Boy Who Cried Wolf ...
The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing ...

Just some of Aesop's greatest hits you've probably heard.

Aesop's fables were written over 2,500 years ago. Odds are they'll still be circulating in another 2,500 years. They're some of the stickiest stories the world has ever heard.



Why?

Not because they reflect profound truths about human nature. No, it's because of how Aesop's life lessons are *encoded*. They're grounded in something concrete.

Concrete ideas are tangible. They're specific. Usually, they involve specific people taking specific actions.

By contrast, abstract ideas are hard for people to grasp. Even harder to remember.

But in the world of business, abstract concepts abound. So if you want to stand out — if you want people to understand and remember your message — you need to avoid the trap of slipping into abstract speak.

“Industry-leading service” or “best-in-class performance” are abstract.

“We respond to all enquiries within 1 hour, 24/7” and *“The only electric car that can do 0–60 mph in under 2 seconds”* are concrete.

Example

[Knock](#) lets you unlock your Mac without a password. You simply knock twice on your iPhone, as if you were knocking on a door.

A concrete idea that latches on to a familiar mental image.

Make your product seem credible

One of the best ways to get people to believe in your brand is to use the external validation of an authority figure. An expert. An influencer. An esteemed publication.

But what can you do if you can't rely on an expert or a celebrity to endorse your product or service?



Chip and Dan Heath present 5 ways to add credibility to your marketing:

1.

Use an anti-authority

Tap into the honesty and trustworthiness of real people. Use their stories as “living proof” that your product/service works.

3.

Use statistics to illustrate a relationship

Find statistics that illustrate your point. Then bring them to life by humanizing the context or scale. An everyday analogy will give your argument more oomph.

5.

Present testable credentials

Let your customers test your product for themselves. With a falsifiable claim, you implicitly challenge your customers to verify what you’ve said.

2.

Include vivid details

Give your message internal credibility. Concrete, sensory details that support your core idea make your marketing claims more tangible and more believable.

4.

Give an example that passes the “Sinatra Test”

Overcome a mountain of skepticism with a compelling story that makes people think “If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere.”

Example

[Fit2Fat2Fit](#) draws its credibility from an anti-authority —its founder’s own success story. Drew Manning understands how difficult it can be for some of his clients to lose weight. Because he decided to become obese himself.

Appeal to people's emotional side

For people to take action, they need to care. So how can you make people care about your marketing message?

Get them to take off their analytical hats. Get them to think emotionally.



Here are 4 ways you can do that:

1.

Focus on individuals

Many charities understand the power of this technique. People respond better to individuals than to abstract causes.

2.

Form an association with something people already care about

Piggyback onto emotions that already exist. Establish a link between something people don't yet care about and something they do. Ideally, an association that's distinctive —one that hasn't been overused.

3.

Appeal to self-interest

What's the most obvious thing that matters to your audience? Themselves. You'll know already to focus on benefits, not features. But you can take this up a level by helping your audience to imagine themselves enjoying tangible benefits. Harness the power of imagination. And make the most of that most powerful of words: you.

4.

Appeal to self-identity

Relate to your audience's sense of themselves. What they value. Who they are. And who they would like to become. Appeal to the higher levels of [Maslow's hierarchy of needs](#).

Example

In 2004, [Dove](#) launched its "[Campaign for Real Beauty](#)." It challenged the conventional standards of beauty in society, inviting all women to experience beauty on their own terms.

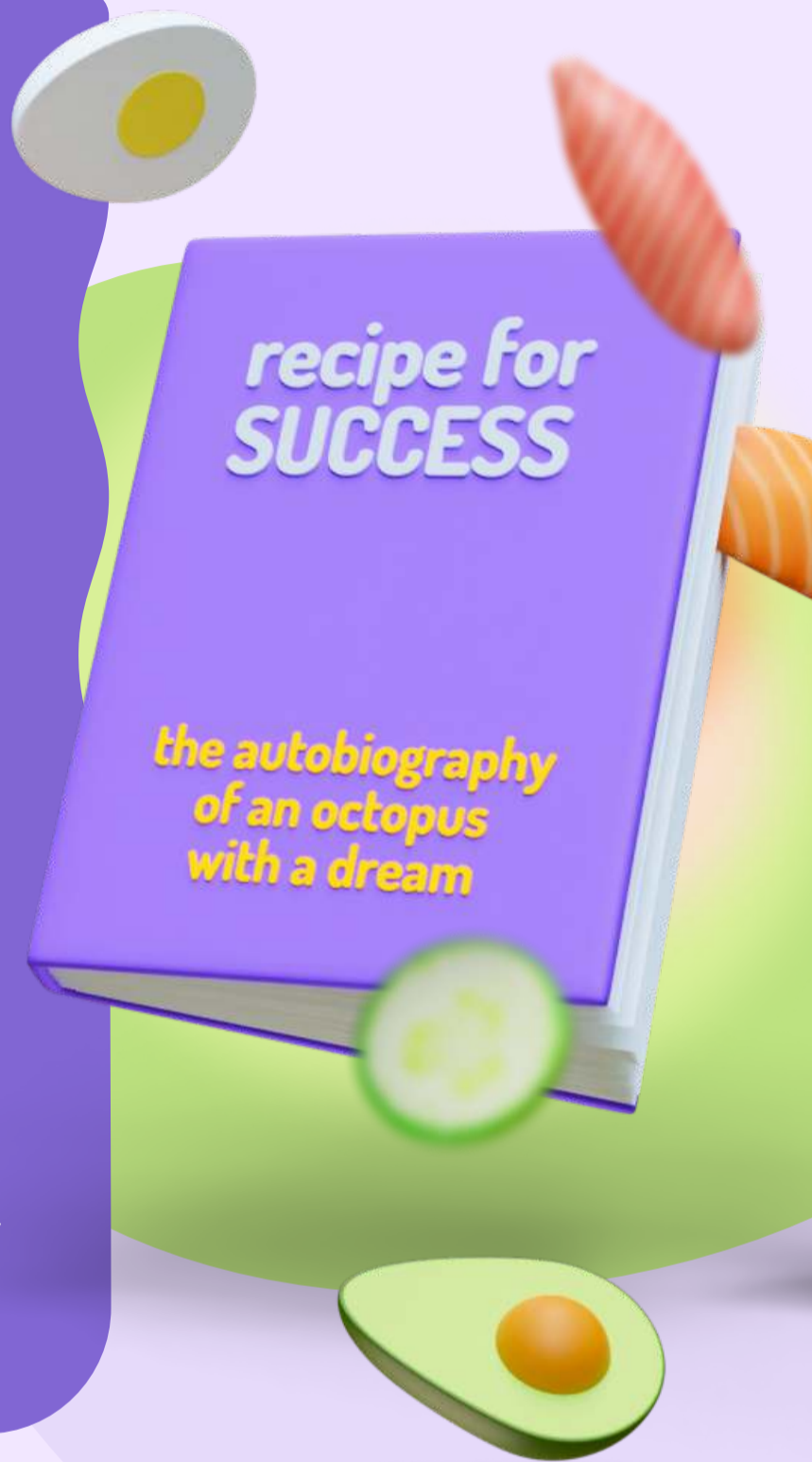


Inspire people with powerful stories

Stories can be inspiring, and they can provide us with contextual simulation. Both drive action.

What gives stories their power is the fact that they provide the context that's missing from abstract ideas. They help us put knowledge into a framework that's more lifelike.

If you think of your product or service as a flight, then a good story acts as a flight simulator.



What makes a good story?

The good news is you don't always have to come up with sticky ideas. But you do need to be able to spot a story with great potential.

There are many different formulas for great stories. But Chip and Dan Heath say the majority of inspirational stories can be categorized into 3 basic plot types.

The 3 basic plot types:

1.

The Challenge Plot

Whether it's a rags-to-riches tale or an underdog story, challenge plots are all about overcoming obstacles. We're inspired by the protagonist's perseverance and courage.

2.

The Connection Plot

These stories are about bridging a gap. Developing a relationship with others from different backgrounds.

3.

The Creativity Plot

The eureka moment. Solving long-standing puzzles or tackling a problem in a novel way.

Example

[Moleskine's](#) origin story uses a Creativity Plot. It inspires us to feel part of a tradition that captures our imaginations.

It describes itself as the heir and successor to the legendary notebook used by some of the world's greatest artists and thinkers, such as Van Gogh, Picasso, and Hemingway.



Final thoughts

There are many different ways to be different.

But there's one thing they all have in common:
They're grounded in understanding and prioritizing
the needs of your customers.

To make your small business stand out, you don't need
to be better than anyone else. You simply need to show
your customers you're the clear best choice for them.

But remember, competition is a good thing.

It's a sign there's demand for
your product or service.
And it gives you the drive to
improve.



**Lastly...
if you loved
it, share it!**