

## Be Different and Win

One of the main reasons why it's important for companies to have competitors is because it keeps businesses on their toes. Why are they on their toes? Because they're trying to set themselves apart from their competitors; and in their efforts to do so, services and offers improve, and standards are raised.

If you want to attract more customers and grow your business, you have to distinguish your business from others like yours. There are many ways to stand out above the competition using resources you already have. However, there are also some more proactive efforts you can take to set yourself even further apart from competitors. Here are 7 ways of doing just that.

### Proactive Ways to Distinguish Your Small Business from Competitors

#### *Focus on a Niche*

One effective way to separate yourself from your competition is through niche marketing. By specializing in a specific product, service, or type of audience, you can get a leg up over your competitors. You might serve a broader audience as well, but a specialization can help distinguish you.

In addition, those within your niche market will be more likely to turn to you. If they are in need of a product or service that you specialize in, knowing that you have concentrated practice in that specific area gives you an automatic advantage over your competitors who might be more broadly experienced.

#### *Support a Cause*

One of the simpler ways to stand out from your competition is to incorporate your own personal values into your business. Take it a step further by supporting a specific cause you care about. You could do this by donating a portion of your proceeds to an organization, directly providing goods or services to a population in need, or getting your team to volunteer at that organization once a month.

Supporting causes you care about can help to highlight the values of your company—not just the value of your business—and set you apart from competitors.

#### *Have Surprises*

Surprises are a fun and effective way to set yourself apart from your competitors. If you're feeling creative and have the ability, you can always take on a guerrilla marketing campaign.

If you're not quite ready for guerrilla marketing tactics, you can just keep it small and simple. Give a small gift to the nth customer of the day, stick a positive note or inspirational quote in your packaging, or send a random customer a coupon in the mail. If you're a construction company, surprise your clients by leaving behind a welcome mat or home sweet home sign. These small and simple yet memorable activities can build your reputation as a thoughtful business and distinguish you from others in your industry.

#### *Provide Extraordinary Service*

Every business strives to provide exceptional customer service. However, when times get crazy and unexpected occurrences happen, it can be easy to make exceptions and excuses. One strong but overlooked way to set yourself apart from competitors is by going out of your way to stick to this mantra —and doing it every time.

Sporadic moments of accommodating your customers will pick up no traction; and one negative experience or customer review can cancel everything out. By consistently going the extra mile to create the best experience for your customers, you will ensure that you—and not your competitors—stay in the forefront of their minds, no matter how good their offers get.

### **Focus on Your Key Features and Benefits**

It's not possible to be really good at everything, so if you claim to be just that, you will lose trust in customers fast. On the other hand, if you distill your value down into a few key points, you can earn the attention of your target audience and stand out from your competition.

Think about what you are really good at, the core features that set you apart, or what specific pain points do you eliminate with customers. Then narrow them down to what you perform, achieve or adhere to 100% of the time.

Some examples include:

- Using materials from a particularly special source.
- Using a new technology or trusted method.
- Being the first or only business to use it.
- Handcrafting or customization.
- Processes that support a social or environmental cause.
- Noteworthy characteristics about your idea formation or final product testing.

The key is to think in terms of extremes: what you do every time, what you always provide, or what you never do. These are the attributes that can truly distinguish your business from your competitors, and should be included in your messaging and marketing collateral.

### **Create a Powerful Offer**

Another approach in getting buyers to choose your business over your competitors is to reduce the risk or hesitation they face when it comes to making a purchase. Think about the immediate and long term concerns a potential customer might have when choosing the product or service you provide.

For example, for home heating issues, fast assistance may be a primary concern. For more technical products, it may be more about the personal customer service. For frequently needed services, it might be more about price.

Here are some examples of powerful offers to help you distinguish your business:

- A year-long return policy
- Return all customer service calls within 24 hours
- No automated answering services
- Money back guarantee
- Free trial
- Rewards for repeat customers

Be sure to promote your offer on your business website, with powerful call to action phrases and buttons.

## **Create Brand Evangelists**

Sometimes, your customers can be just as (if not more) effective as you in distinguishing your business from competitors. People trust what their fellow consumers have to say, even if they are complete strangers. This is why online customer reviews are so powerful.

If you have repeat customers, express your appreciation by giving them exclusive deals and offers, or by going the extra mile. Accommodate special orders, remember customers' names, or throw in an extra bonus every once in awhile. This will turn repeat customers into loyal customers, and loyal customers become brand evangelists. Brand evangelists are like mobile advertisements for your business. They will promote your business in their conversations, on social media channels, and on review sites—most likely reaching those in your target demographic. A business with a few brand evangelists will get distinguished from a business with many simply satisfied customers.

Your target audience may be a large group, but they have many small and specific wants and that make them a fit for your business. By matching your products, services, offers, and messaging to those wants and needs, you can distinguish your small business from your competitors and attract customers who will be happy they found you.

Source: Kristen McCormick, ThriveHive