

MARKETING

4 Tips to Successfully Market a Sensitive or 'Unsexy' Business

Marketing isn't just for the cool kids anymore.



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"But I'm not *cool enough* to do marketing." This is something I hear so often when I'm working with brands on developing a branded content strategy. So many brands think that telling brand stories or engaging with customers is something left for sneaker brands, coffee shops, and tech companies--and that they should quietly sit back to avoid an awkward interaction since their product is less accessible, deeply personal, not as relatable or pleasant. "Nobody wants to hear from a funeral home," they say, or "how can I possibly generate word of mouth when consumers are ashamed of needing my services?"

But **strategic marketing** is key to **growing your company**, not matter your industry or **audience**. Whether you're in a heavily regulated industry, have a highly technical product, or sell something most people don't *want* to need, there's a way to approach marketing that can work for you and your company.

Laura Spaulding-Koppel is the founder and CEO of **Spaulding Decon**, a company that offers cleanup services for everything from crime scenes, meth labs and hoarding aftermath, to mold remediation and biohazard decontamination. Understandably, many of her customers are not initially excited to need her services, and the sensitivities surrounding the events that lead up to that need are often sensitive.

But that didn't stop Spaulding-Koppel from marketing her business, and along the way she's learned some useful marketing tips that other "unsexy" or niche businesses can use.

1. Mass Marketing Isn't Always the Best Solution

"When I launched Spaulding Decon, I followed my competitors and made the mistake of marketing to the masses," Spaulding-Koppel says. "However, I quickly learned that people do not want to hear about topics like crime scene or drug lab cleanup continuously."

Having an "always-on" marketing strategy that pushes out a brand message to a massive audience is the common practice for new businesses and established businesses alike, but this often less effective when you have a niche service or something people are less receptive to seeing in their feed amongst updates from friends and family photos.

But Spaulding-Koppel also realized that staying quiet wasn't an option either: potential customers *did* want to know where to turn to when they were hit with an unexpected tragedy.

"My approach to marketing today is to be discreet, respectful and sensitive," Spaulding-Koppel says, "but not shy when a client is in need of one of my services." Finding the right audience for your services, and being cognizant of the context where it will show up, is a better approach for businesses like this, she says.

2. Think Outside of the Box

Traditional media--newspaper, magazine, television and billboard advertisements--is a great solution for most businesses. But when a business concept isn't as consumer-friendly, it's important to consider other avenues, mediums and tactics.

"When I started Spaulding Decon, I utilized an in-person marketing strategy and hit the streets of Tampa, Florida to network with homeowners and insurers face-to-face," Spaulding-Koppel says. "With environmental cleanup being circumstantial, I wanted to make sure people knew where to call for help if they ever needed it."

Google advertisements allow you to explain our services to those who might be searching for your exact service, and direct mail marketing allows you to reach out to your perfect target customer in a more personal way. Advertising on forums or in other niche communities where your service is needed may be another option for reaching your target audience.

3. Target Specific Markets Within Your Client Base

Spaulding Decon, like many other businesses, has an extremely diverse client base, Spaulding-Koppel says. "Because we offer a variety of cleanup services, every client also has a different need."

It's important that a business' marketing efforts reflect its target audience. For Spaulding Decon, that means reaching out to clients in a wide range of industries, including property managers, law enforcement, funeral homes and home healthcare, and using a different message that appeals to each market.

If your business, similarly, appeals to a range of distinct audience subsets, instead of listing all of your offered products and services in one advertisement or brochure, create separate marketing materials for each of your services.

"We want to make sure that each group within our target audience is only receiving information on services they might need," Spaulding-Koppel says.

4. Put Yourself In the Customers' Shoes

It's always important to step in the shoes of your target audience, but this need is amplified when your product is sensitive, divisive, intimate, deeply personal or otherwise touchy.

"When I formulated a marketing plan for Spaulding Decon," Spaulding-Koppel says, "I thought about how I, personally, would want to hear about our company's services. I thought about whether I would find a specific tactic to be offensive rather than informative."

While this approach sounds simple, it is necessary and effective in helping you understand whether a marketing strategy will actually help you positively spread the word about your business concept. By putting yourself in the customers' shoes, you can more easily determine the messages, contexts and imagery that will resonate with your audience, and strike the right tone.

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