“How to” document

Marketing on a shoestring budget

Invigorating Business Results

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About this document

This “how to” document is brought to you by Ask Us How and was developed in conjunction with the marketing experts from Australian Business Marketing Services.

**Ask Us How** is Australia’s premier online source of practical business information, support and advice to help make running your business just a little easier.

About Us

Australian Business Marketing Services is a division of Australian Business Pty Ltd. Australian Business is a wholly owned subsidiary of NSW Business Chamber, which has represented the needs of business for over 120 years.

Our marketing consultancy offers you experienced marketers and designers who have come from a strong mix of corporate and SME business backgrounds. Australian Business Marketing Services is a “no bull” agency, determined to help businesses no matter what their budget. With a team of experts who can be your virtual marketing department, we can develop the right marketing strategies and execute activities for your business to get you results.

How we can help you

Since we began in 2007 our goal has always been to offer practical and affordable marketing help from people who understand business and clients. Our organisations share many of the same target clientele and Australian Business Marketing Services (ABMS) has a wealth of knowledge and experience in communicating with this audience, so you would have an added advantage to choose us as your marketing partner.

We offer the full suite of marketing and design services to help you meet your objectives:
- Marketing Strategy Development
- Design & branding
- Copywriting
- Website development
- Online and digital marketing campaigns
- Execution of marketing activities
How to market on a shoestring budget

Why is this important?

Marketing provides the fuel for your sales engine, boosting performance and helping you stand out in an increasingly competitive market. Instead of looking to cut your marketing, particularly during an economic downturn or when business is slow, look to maximise your returns.

Historically whenever times are tough for a business, marketing has been the first casualty in cost cutting. The justification behind this was that marketing was an expenditure; a nice to have, not a must have. The trouble with this strategy however, is that it can also lead to reducing productivity, the exact opposite of what you’re trying to achieve.

The message here is DON’T cut marketing, make it WORK for you.

Regardless of your budget, this article will give you some practical tips on how to invigorate your marketing and achieve a return on your investment.

What to do

Some of the cleverest ideas come from the simplest of methods. These 12 great tips will make your marketing dollar stretch further.

1. Planning is the key to smart marketing
Smart marketing is all about knowing where you’re going and how you’re going to get there. It’s essential to set clear goals based on sound knowledge, develop and implement clever strategies to help you achieve these, and put measures in place to ensure you are getting the most out of your marketing investment.

All too often you hear about a business that has wasted time and money on promotional activities that they didn’t need because they lost sight of the big picture.

Set clear goals
Your marketing goals should be aligned with your business objectives. A good way to establish your marketing goals is to ask yourself:

- What would you like your business to achieve?
• What would you like your marketing to achieve – build sales, market share, brand, or a combination of the three?

Apply the SMART principles

When setting goals, make sure they are SMART. That is they are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound. This will ensure you stay focussed and remain on track.

Know your magic number

Do you know the point at which you earn enough profit to achieve your business goals? Knowing this number will help in determining whether or not you’re ready for a marketing push.

More sales don’t always mean more cash or profit. Every sale costs you money and resources, so an increase in sales can actually decrease your margins. Instead, look at ways to increase your Return on Investment.

Example: Pools R Us had a marketing goal of increasing sales by 30 percent. It sounded like a reasonable goal but it didn’t take into account their sales conversion rate. On closer inspection, it was found that this objective would require 60 percent more leads, requiring more staff, training, overheads etc, cutting into their profit margin. They therefore needed to improve productivity and/or revise their business objectives before investing time, money and resources into marketing.

Write it down

Many business owners or managers have their plans in their heads but fail to write them down. Others choose to avoid this step altogether. Unfortunately, cutting corners in planning may save you time upfront but it will not save you in the long run. By taking the time to write your plan down, you will find it’s easier to be objective, identify any gaps or holes in your strategies and ultimately drive your business forward.
2. Know your marketplace

The environment in which you operate is constantly changing – affecting your customers, competitors, suppliers and distributors - leading to more change. This constant changing environment makes it impossible to know everything there is to know about your business.

To keep ahead of the game, take advantage of any opportunities and manage potential risks. Your business needs to evolve with your market. Can you answer the following with confidence?

- What is your market share?
- Is your industry growing/shrinking? Where?
- What new markets are out there?
- What are the latest trends and opportunities?
- Who are your current customers?
- Who else could be a customer and why?
- If there are any events or factors that may affect their purchase decisions?

This type of knowledge is hard to keep up with, but it does pay to know your marketplace very well. The key here is to construct a regular system for feeding information about your market and marketplace into your sales and marketing functions, so that it’s not an onerous, once a year task.

Step 1: Ask the right questions

By asking the right questions, you can reduce your research time and start fuelling your sales engine sooner. For a list of all the right questions, ask us how to:

- get to know your customers
- get to know your market
- get to know your competitors
Step 2: Ask the right people

Some of the best sources of information are free. When gathering information:

- ask your staff
- talk to your customers
- conduct customer surveys
- talk to NSW Business Chamber
- utilise the library – access industry directories and journals
- network
- search online
- use the Yellow Pages and White Pages as a source of market information
- try the Australian Bureau of Statistics
- contact the relevant government organisations

3. Farm your own backyard first

It costs more money to attract new customers or enter new markets, than it does to sell more to your existing customers. Think about it, your customers already know you, like you and find value in your offering – that’s the hard part done.

So before looking further afield, make sure you’ve exhausted all opportunities with your current customers.

To help squeeze all these opportunities from your existing customer base, some good questions to ask include:

- What percentage of your customers buys more than one offering?
- Which of your customers are likely to take up another offering?
- How will you increase this percentage?
Once you’ve scored the quick and easy wins from mining your existing customer base, you can move on to the bigger (and more costly) challenge of creating new business.

For a more in-depth look at segmenting your customers just ask us how to prioritise your customers for easy wins.

4. Map your customer journey

What does your customer experience at each stage of the sale? By understanding your customer’s buying process and how you currently service their needs, you can identify gaps in both your current offering as well as your market’s offering as a whole, and then adjust your customer experience accordingly.

The best way to identify these gaps is to map your customer’s journey. Most customers, whether they are individuals or businesses, follow a similar buying process.

A customer’s buying process typically starts with awareness of a problem or the formation of an interest (problem recognition). They then look for options available to fulfil this need (information search), before assessing these options (alternative evaluation) and then deciding on one (purchase decision). After the purchase, people usually assess their purchase (post purchase evaluation).

Once you understand the buying journey your customers take, you can then develop a customer contact plan that assists your customers at every stage of the process.

In taking a walk in your customer’s shoes, ask yourself these questions:

- How will you get people to recognise that they need or want your offering?
- How will you ensure people have the information they need to make the right choice for them?
- How will you get them to choose your offering over alternatives?
Once the sale is made, how will you keep the customer happy?
How will you keep the customer happy once the sale is made?

After conducting this exercise, you may find that there is a more cost effective marketing and sales approach available that will yield a higher return.

5. Focus on benefits and value
People are time poor and therefore the sooner you address the 'What’s in it for me?' issue when marketing your business and offering, the better. It’s not enough to list the features of your offering; you need to spell out the advantages your customers gain from using your product ie the benefits and how these benefits appeal to their needs and wants.

Two great ways to highlight the value you can provide and add include:

Developing your Unique Selling Proposition

When times are tough and everyone is vying for your customer’s time and dollar, you need to stand out from your competitors by communicating your point of difference – also known as your Unique Selling Proposition (USP).

You can determine what your USP is by asking yourself some simple questions:

- What benefits or value do people get from your offering?
- Can they get this same benefit from an alternative? (For example to relax you could go on holidays or get a massage.)
- Why do customers buy from you and not a competitor?
- Why have you lost sales?
- What do your customers expect vs what will they pay extra for?

Need more information? Read our step-by-step guide to developing a USP.
The value of exchange

When it comes to asking customers and your greater community for assistance, make sure you give them something for the time they’ve given you. For example, if your customers have completed a survey, reward them with a token of your appreciation.

This could be in the form of a discount offer or voucher to spend with your business, a copy of the report compiled from the survey findings or maybe a small gift or movie ticket.

6. Measure your results

Measuring the performance of your marketing initiatives not only assists in determining the effectiveness of a campaign and identifying areas of improvement, it’s also instrumental in validating your marketing spend. How can you justify your investment, without knowing the return it provides?

You don’t need expensive tracking systems, instead take a few extra minutes when planning your next marketing activity to work out how you can measure your results. It could be as simple as:

- creating lead tracking sheets for your sales and customer service teams to complete so you know where your leads are coming from
- asking ‘Where did you hear about us?’ on your order/warranty forms
- including coupons, vouchers, and tokens in your marketing activities
- count how many of these are redeemed to see how effective an ad, flyer, direct mail campaign, etc was
- monitoring competition entries. As with the coupon offers, competition entries can be measured against how many forms/promotions were sent out.
- surveys. Why not just ask people when and where they’ve heard of you? Do they recall receiving mail from you in the last 3 months? Did they see an ad? This can give you a good indication as to whether or not your promotions are working.
- promotional codes are a good way to track results. You will often see these on the bottom of ads where people are asked to quote a reference code or word to take advantage of a special offer
7. Harness the power of word-of-mouth

Word of mouth is the strongest form of marketing. With 86 percent of us asking our family and friends for an opinion before deciding to make a purchase, you literally can’t buy this type of advertising.

It’s also very difficult to refute and will take a lot of time, effort and many marketing dollars to turn your opinion around from a recommendation that your mother or good friend has given you.

To harness the power of word-of-mouth consider:

Creating a buzz

What can you offer that’s going to make you the focus of the water cooler discussion? Is it your exceptional product or service, unbeatable pricing (everyone loves a bargain), unusual promotion (the internet is increasingly being used to fill this space) or a newsworthy project.

Family and friends offers

People like to think they are well connected and are valuable sources of information for their loved ones. You can leverage this by letting your customers know that they have a special relationship with you, and because of this, they can offer their friends and family special discounts.

Example: an online swimsuit company included in each delivery a perforated discount coupon that said ‘one for you and one for a friend you care about’.

Use incentives to spread the word

Reward your customers for doing the promoting for you. Important tips here are:

- make your rewards obtainable – ie don’t make the criteria too hard
- reward frequently and consistently
- create rewards that people can accrue to encourage them to keep going, ie if you offer a MP3 player for 5 leads, then your customers are less likely to continue once you give them the gift. However, if it’s something like cash, you can keep accruing this
Customer testimonials

The opinion of peers will always be more highly regarded than what a business has to say about itself. The easiest way to collect testimonials is through feedback surveys and competitions (ie tell us in 25 words why you enjoy product 'X'). Make sure you get permission from your customer before using the testimonial and don’t publish too many personal details, eg only include first name and suburb.

Example: After having a fabulous meal at my local restaurant and completing their feedback survey, I was contacted and asked whether I would mind having my feedback placed on their website. Not only did I appreciate the call but I was flattered that they valued my opinion enough to use it for promotional purposes.

8. Public relations can work wonders

One of the most useful and yet underutilised, marketing tools for businesses is Public Relations (PR). It uses the media to amplify word-of-mouth, and although it can be time consuming, there is almost no money outlaid.

Create a reason for media to talk about you

For the media – newspapers, magazines, radio etc – to get excited about something you have done, it needs to be newsworthy; something that will make their readers/listeners stop and take notice. Achievements and initiatives to help the greater community are two topical areas that you can leverage. Try entering business awards or developing a charity fundraising idea.

Be topical

Search for any issues in the media that your business may be able to comment on or solve. Then write a press release relating back to that issue with subtle references back to your business.

Example: if you run a recruitment company and headlining news is that unemployment is at an all time high, then write an article on the issue with your expert opinion and give tips on how job seekers could improve their chances.
Write your own press release

Once you have something newsworthy to talk about, then write about it! Inform your local media by sending them a press release. Make sure it’s limited to one page, conveys the essence of the story in the first few lines, informs rather than sells, and contains your contact information. For tips on writing a press release, just ask us how.

Contact TV shows

Email popular shows like Channel 7’s Sunrise or Channel 9’s A Current Affair. These shows love stories containing good news, how someone has overcome adversity or solutions to current issues.

Timing is critical

When planning a PR campaign, you need to be particularly mindful of what is gaining coverage in the media. On any given day, your story may be overlooked in favour of a more ‘newsworthy’ story. While you can’t always predict story trends, you can reduce the likelihood of this occurring by avoiding special event times such as elections etc.

9. Involve others in promoting your business

Sometimes it can feel like you’re battling on alone, but business owners rarely are. You can find support in all kinds of places – from your staff, friends and family to top customers and other businesses in your local area – all willing and happy to promote your business.

To prove this point, make a list of any businesses or people who could be of benefit to your business. In addition to the above, consider your suppliers, NSW Business Chamber, perhaps even your competitors etc.

Next brainstorm how you might work with these supporters for mutual benefit. For example a retail store in the Central Coast approached each of the businesses on the same street to provide their customers with a discount to her store and vice versa.

Finally, when looking at involving others in promoting your business, don’t forget to mine your employees’ ideas. Your employees are the eyes and ears of your business and may be able to identify meaningful linkages between you and your support partners.
10. Embrace social media

As more and more Australians (currently 84%) search for and share information online, there’s no better time to stop fence sitting and embrace social media. Consider utilising one or more of the free web applications to build your brand awareness and enhance your customer experience.

Youtube

Have you ever watched the 'Will it blend' campaign by blender manufacturer Blendtec? What started as an internal procedure to test the strength of their blenders has become a global phenomenon. Video posts of some of the more unusual objects power tools, iPhones etc are getting staggering Youtube hits. A multi-million dollar ad campaign couldn’t get you this level of exposure!

You can also use Youtube to post video instructions of how to set up/install your product or take people for a tour around your business.

Networking

Networking sites such as Facebook, Bebo, Myspace and Twitter are becoming increasingly popular ways for business to keep in touch with their customers and greater community. To leverage the networking sites try:

- gathering people for a reason or cause – don’t just start up the ABC Pty Ltd group, no one will care enough to join
- inviting your group members to contribute content – for instance if you own a nursery, you may want to start an 'I love roses group' where members can post problems or answer questions relating to issues with growing roses
- making your social network feel special by giving them exclusive information and promotional offers.
- using your existing communications channels - brochures, websites, email sign offs - to promote traffic to your social networking page
- checking it regularly so that you can respond to queries or comments that others post immediately

An example of a Facebook group setup by NSW Business Chamber’s International Trade division is the Women Going Global networking group.
Online forums

There are a growing number of online business directories that include a forum for people to rate and review businesses. Have a look at hotfrog, eatability and truelocal.

These sites provide you with a great word-of-mouth platform for customers to promote your business for you. Be sure to regularly check and respond to the comments posted, reporting back to the forum on how you have utilised constructive feedback.

Blogs

Did you know that 7.1 million Australians regularly read blogs? Blogs give you an exclusive audience with people who are interested in your topic of conversation. They’re also a great way to raise your business profile and enhance your customer service, and what’s more you can start one for free. For more information on blogging, ask us how.

11. Work wonders with the World Wide Web

97 percent of consumers surf the web for information on products and services. If you don’t have a website or if you don’t know how your website is performing, then you’re not reaching this 97 percent of consumers.

Search engine optimisation

One of the most cost effective ways to increase traffic to your website is through Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). SEO refers to the ranking your website receives when a search word or phrase is typed into Google and how you can increase this rating.

To improve the likelihood of your website rating highly, try rewriting your web content so that it frequently refers to key search words, include keywords in your title tags and increase the number of links from other sites to your websites.

Search engine marketing

Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is another way to increase traffic to your website – this time you pay for the privilege of appearing at the top of the list (in Google’s case you become a 'sponsored link'). Through tools such as Google’s Adwords, you can select the keywords you want to pay for and set the amount you wish to spend.
Unlike SEO, where it can take a few months for the search engines to re-calculate your ranking, SEM is instantaneous. The downside to SEM is that customers generally place higher value in the organic search listings rather than the paid listings.

Online advertising

Online advertising is a good way of directing people to your site. It’s a lot cheaper than traditional advertising, reaches more people and your ad can stay up for longer. You can also choose the pay per click pricing model, which means you only have to pay for the number of clicks your advertisement receives.

Online directories

Why not promote your business in a free online directory. These sites usually attract a lot of people and, by promoting your business on them with links to your site, you’re actually increasing your search engine optimisation. Try Gumtree, dLook, Leapfrog and aussiepages.

12. Have you tried mobile technology?

The mobile phone network is a communication channel which is still largely underutilised in Australia. With a staggering 98 percent open rate for SMS, the highest open rate for any communication channel, it makes sense to include it in part of your customer service and marketing mix.

Consider using SMS to lift your customer service levels; notifying customers when there order is ready or confirming an appointment time, or to notify customers of special offers and discounts.

If you’re starting out, look at the business services your mobile phone provider has on offer. Alternatively, there are many highly reputable mobile marketing agencies out there, including Vision 6 and 5th Finger, that can help.
See how it’s done

Case Study One: Billie Goat soaps

Leanne Faulkner refused to give up when she first tried and tested her soap recipe – based on goat’s milk - to help her son Liam. Eczema is widespread amongst young children in Australia and parents are desperate to try something new to ease their child’s pain.

As word of mouth spread, concerned parents started to buy her unique goat’s milk soap.

**Sustainable alternative**

Commercial trading began in 2004. As soap sales have grown so have the smiles on mums’ and dads’ faces – encouraging Faulkner to become Australia’s number one goat’s milk skin care company aptly named Billie Goat.

The skin care industry is a tough market dominated by some well known brands. It hasn’t fazed Faulkner.

She maintains a healthy outlook caring for staff and customers as she does her family and the environment. She offers customers a choice – either a soap from their standard range or one made from a sustainable palm oil as she’s aware of the destruction of rain forests and animal habitats as a consequence of palm oil harvesting.

“We’re proud to be able to offer our customers a more sustainable soap alternative.”

**Acknowledging the team**

Faulkner also likes to acknowledge the work of her team. Employees are treated to a lunch each month with a special lunch every quarter.

“When my budget allows it, I offer impromptu rewards like shopping vouchers and so on.”

She pays above award wages and offers conditions above industry standards.

“When we offer flexible working hours, we’re only a small business. When one person is not at work we all feel it, so it’s a challenge to find the balance between employee and business needs but I think we have achieved it.”

**Clever marketing**

Faulkner believes business owners need to return to basic service values.

When she receives a new order, each employee of that company receives a bar of soap.
With a small budget, it’s clever marketing that’s also helping to educate the public about the benefits of goat’s milk soap.

“We believe the salesperson receiving the bar of soap is our greatest advocate."

Staff also respond regularly to customer’ queries: “We have automated replies but they are complemented by our personal touch to ensure customers enjoy the Billie Goat experience.”

At a marketing level, Vanessa Tsui from NSW Business Chamber’s marketing services arm, Australian Business Marketing Services (ABMS), recommended that Faulkner explored gaps in the skin care marketplace.

“We assessed the needs of the business, analysing its operations and competitors before suggesting she target the baby and men’s marketplace.”

We keep no secrets

Once a week staff present a report detailing sales, production and customer accounts. It’s a transparent business, says Faulkner, with all staff having a say on new products or workplace changes.

“My team has come up with some great ideas for the company and if I ever want to change something, I need a very good reason to present to them!”

Her magnificent team of seven get flexible working hours and generous leave arrangements.

“Such close relations ensure consistency in production and an opportunity to have work practices standardised which is necessary with such a specialised craft.”
Case Study Two: Pet Porpoise Pool

It’s not hard to be ‘touched by the magic’ in any interaction with this beautiful marine park, in Coffs Harbor NSW. This park provides visitors with an educational, hands-on experience connecting with a variety of marine animals. A multi award winning tourist destination since 2006, its most recent accolades include winner of the 2008 National Tourism Award for Best Tourist Attraction; winner of the 2008 Mid North Coast Tourism Award for Significant Attraction (for the third year in a row); 2008 Coffs Coast Business Award for Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation; a 2008 Finalist in the Employer of the Year in the NSW Training Awards; and 2008 Winner of the Mid North Coast Training Awards. Paige Sinclair, CEO, shares her insights.....

Do you believe that a business needs to look at new sales and marketing strategies when we are going through an economic downturn?

It’s not just in tough times that companies need to look at new strategies - the saying ‘nothing stays the same’ is very true in marketing your business. I am of the opinion that the ‘doom and gloom’ supported by many people is an opportunity to do things differently, which is why we are developing youtube videos, Facebook identities of our animals, and we will even be looking at Twitter. My 28 year old niece, who resides in the United States, uses this as a marketing tool. It’s free, many professionals use it, and she has met some great business contacts through the site.

Just how tough is it in the NSW regional tourist industry?

This year (2009), to date we have had no growth, after a year of high interest rates and high petrol prices. In our region there has been an estimated downturn of 5.5% (to December 2008 NSW Tourism Figures) in visitation to the area. Many tourism operators have had a difficult year so I consider our results are fantastic for the economic climate and the future uncertainty of economic conditions. However, there is always good news for regional tourism markets and that is many people are staying closer to home and holidaying in their back yards, which positions the Pet Porpoise Pool perfectly. The larger attractions in capital cities are having difficult times and they are discounting heavily, trimming expenses including staff, because inbound visitation is their major market.

What new marketing strategies are you implementing to help boost your ‘sales’?

While we are developing new initiatives to boost sales, I must mention that the tried and true ones are still working for us. There is one strategy that doesn’t cost big dollars, but if you get it wrong, it can cost you dearly, and that is ‘word of mouth’. For the Pet Porpoise Pool this is by far the best strategy! We promise every person a money back guarantee and should any customer feel that they haven’t received value for money when they visit, we will give them their money back. It’s simple strategy but it works.

One of the sales techniques we use very successfully is partnering with accommodation houses and other tourism operators. We ask them to sell entry tickets on our behalf. In return we offer them free entry passes for their personal or business use. By business use I mean they can use the free entry
passes for things like staff rewards and incentives. Additionally, we sell entry tickets to these partners which are discounted so that there is a profit margin in it for them. Essentially, these partners act as a powerful sales team or ambassadors, recommending their customers visit the park.

We also use Google Ad words for our ‘Animal Encounters’ (in the water Dolphin encounters). This marketing tool delivers qualified, potential customers straight to our website for more information. I particularly like this initiative because it can be measured and monitored so closely.

Bundling and packaging products and services is a powerful strategy. Many of the operators we partner up with on entry tickets also include us in their own marketing initiatives as a ‘hook’ because we have such a Unique Selling Proposition. For example in the ‘couples’ market, one of the 4-5 star properties markets our Animal Encounters in conjunction with accommodation, meals, etc. The offer usually has one as a prize to giveaway. The details of the entrants are kept by the accommodation house which they can then direct market the entrants. This effectively only costs the Pet Porpoise Pool one Senior Dolphin Encounter – and it raises awareness of our products and services without major costs. Those people who are motivated to experience what we offer may directly book services.

And as mentioned earlier, we are developing youtube videos with one of the local caravan and camping parks, we have facebook pages for some of our animals, and we will even be looking at using Twitter.

But one of the emerging markets is ozmobi a mobile internet provider which we are listed on like a mobile Google. While this is a new marketing initiative, I feel that it has great potential.

We are also listed on a number of other people’s websites, particularly those businesses who specialise in childrens’ activities.

We also use an internet media company - TravMedia - to post media releases that have potential to attract media attention, for things like a birth of a seal.

How important is your marketing collateral to ‘sales’ and how often do you review it?

Our brochures are a very important marketing tool, they account for nearly 25% of how people found out about what we do. We have two different brochures – one is the general park information and the other is the Animal Encounters brochure.

When we order marketing and sales collateral we try to buy only one year’s supply at the very most. This allows flexibility for us to change or modify products and services. It also forces us to reassess the effectiveness of the collateral and the information in that collateral.

As customer visits are the lifeblood of the business how do you get customer feedback?

We use two surveys; the first one we give to every individual, family, couple or small group that comes to the park. This outlines the rules for interaction with our amazing animals – on the reverse side we ask a number of questions: post code, where they found out about us, and a rating out of 5 on a number of key services points.
The other survey is a major 25 question survey which asks considerably more, including would they recommend us to family and friends. We score over 98% on this one question. We also have a ‘guest comment book’ which allows guests to write any comment they wish. I use these comments as a motivational tool for myself.

You were Winner of the 2008 National Tourism Award for Best Tourist Attraction so am I right in suggesting that it’s not just the unique experience but that you must be doing something right in the way of providing good customer service?

Customer service can make or break a business, and I am happy to say that today it is one of our strengths. However, this hasn’t always been the case. For many years some of the staff felt that guests were an inconvenience. Today, all our staff demonstrate excellent customer service values. Another of our Unique Sales Propositions is that our staff take the time to answer guests’ questions, and give the guests the extra special experience they can’t get anywhere else, particularly from the bigger animal parks like our competitors. This alone, gives us great repeat business and fantastic referrals to family and friends.

I think customers are looking for more value for their dollar, these days. As I said earlier, meeting and exceeding customer expectations are vital components in positioning your services and/or products. What I have noticed recently, is more and more people writing comments in our ‘Guest Comment Book’ about what great value the park is.

For our customers I think it is important to offer something they can’t get at other bigger marine parks, like ‘free’ dolphin and seal kisses which is one of our unique selling points. Having the opportunity for all visitors to interact with our animals is another one, by guaranteeing or promising this people feel comfortable spending their dollars.

Do you have any risk strategies in place around ‘sales’, to better prepare you should there be a downturn in visitors?

We like to reward our locals who refer visitors to us. In the winter months when tourists are a wee bit scarce, we offer local people a half price special on weekends when it suits them most. This does two things, rewards our local market, but more importantly reminds them of just how good we are, therefore they send more business our way. Sometime they even come again at full price or buy the annual passes.

Another strategy is when numbers or predictions are looking to be lower than budgeted; we spend more on advertising, usually a Television or radio campaign. We have yet to be disappointed with the visitor numbers, even this past summer and Easter breaks when we have had poor weather for most of our school holidays. In both these peak time visitation was markedly up.
Are there any other sales related insights or experiences you would like to share with other members?

I don’t like to discount, but I do recognise that sometimes you just have to. We discount to our local market, simply because they act as referral agents for their family and friends who then visit at full price.

However, ‘Value adding’ is an option that doesn’t erode your average spend figures. We have coupons for a free photo with the purchase of one and cups of coffee when buying a meal again. The cost of the ‘value add’ is always less than the discount. For example the cost of sales on one of our photos is under a $1.00 but to discount an adult by 10% we lose $2.70. We take two photos of each person - one is a dolphin kiss the other a seal kiss. If we give them a complimentary one they usually buy the other.