



## Make Every Dollar Count

By

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Small businesses planning their 2009 budgets will need to make every dollar count, this year. The current economic conditions are forcing all businesses to revisit their spending model to get the most bang for their buck. The good news is that there are several effective ways to decide where to spend and where to cut back.

"Small businesses will still need to get their name out there, to sustain and grow their business in 2009," says Cher Murphy, president of Cher Murphy PR, a public relations firm with offices in Miami and Virginia. "But they must be cautious about where that money is being spent, and they will need to look for the best possible value."

To get started, businesses should set goals. The plan can be re-evaluated and updated as needed, but having a road map makes for a smoother ride. To determine where dollars should be spent, this year, first examine what was done last year.

"This is the time to be investigative and honest about where last year's dollars were spent," says Murphy. "If you don't know whether you got any return on your investment from an expenditure, last year, then it shouldn't make your list for this year. Right now, it's crucial that small businesses make smart choices and put their money where they will get a return."

Instead of opting for high-cost budget items, opt for thinking creatively about how to meet the same goals with less money. Here are some low-cost ways that small businesses can promote their service or product, without breaking the bank:

- **Get online.** Every business should have a Web presence. If your company does not have a site, now is the time to create one. GoDaddy.com offers a site-builder service that makes it cheap and easy to set up a site, with no experience required.
- **Blog.** People love to read blogs. Use one to showcase your business. There are sites that offer free blogging accounts, and others that only charge a few dollars.
- **Keep in contact.** Set up an e-mail newsletter through a place like ConstantContact.com. Sending out a monthly e-mail blast to your customers will keep you on the radar, as well announcing specials and what's new.
- **Create videos.** This is a YouTube generation; people love watching videos. Creating some low-cost, informative videos and posting them online can generate traffic to your site.
- **Seek press.** Make it a goal to send out at least one press release per month. They are an extremely valuable tool in helping to promote your company.
- **Start writing.** Write an article that is associated with your area of expertise. Send it to local newspapers and trade papers, or post it on free online article sites like associatedcontent.com.
- **Grow.** Make it a goal to read a book, this year, to learn more about public relations, marketing or advertising. Also, try to attend at least one seminar in your field or one that covers business in general. Investing in yourself will

generate long-term positive returns.

"There are many low-cost ways for people to get the word out about their business. They just need to give them some thought, make a plan, and put it into action," adds Murphy. "Pay attention, to see what gets results. Then you know what you want to keep doing."