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10 Tips to Help Grow Your Small Business

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BY CHER MURPHY

Research shows that small businesses make up the majority of companies in this country. The key to success regarding a small business is not only keeping it going, but also keeping it growing. There are many things that can be done to grow a small business, and these tips are a good place to start.

1. Networking.

Running a small business means it is essential for the business owner to network with others. Networking will enable them to make helpful contacts in various areas of their business, and word-of-mouth referrals may come their way, as well.

2. Conferencing.

Every year, business conferences are held in cities around the country. By attending at least one or two of them, a company can put its business on the map and gain the opportunity to network and learn from others in its field.

3. Mingling.

Business owners should take a look at Meetup.com or Yahoo Groups to see if there are groups, either geographical or related to field, that can be helpful. Small business groups can be found in most major cities, and individuals attending can learn a lot from each other. If no such group exists in their area, they should take the opportunity to start one.

4. Returning.

It's important to keep customers coming back. That's much more cost-effective than continuously seeking new ones. Keeping them satisfied and offering something useful, along with good customer service will work.

5. Surfing.

Research shows that many people go online to research a company prior to making a purchase. Every small business, regardless of what they are selling, should have a professional Web site that tells about the company and offers contact information.

6. Contacting.

It's important to stay on the radar screen of current customers. Having a way to contact them, whether by postcard, e-mail, newsletter, or some other form will help to keep them coming back. Whether sending a coupon or a list of what is new, it will keep your business in their mind.

7. Teaming.

Sometimes, teaming up with another business makes sense, especially if they sell or provide a service that is complementary. For example, a dog-walking or -sitting service may want to team up with a grooming business so they can each refer customers to the other.

8. Teaching.

Being a small-business owner means possessing expert knowledge about a particular item or service. Offering classes and seminars, or being a guest speaker, can help get a business noticed and increase networking opportunities.

9. Acquiring.

Growing a small business is going to mean acquiring new customers, even if all of the old ones stick around. Each

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year, or even several times per year, business owners should go over their goals, to see what efforts they can put forth to help grow the business.

10. Harnessing.

Most small businesses spend their money on advertising, rather than on publicity. Yet, dollar for dollar, they will almost always gain more return on their investment when they spend that money on publicity. Business owners quickly understand this when they realize that they tend to read the articles and listen to the news stories, while ignoring the display ads and changing the channel on commercials. Publicity is a powerful tool that should not be overlooked.

Cher Murphy is the owner of Virginia-based Cher Murphy PR (www.chermurphypr.com), a full-service public relations and communications firm. Cher Murphy PR has helped numerous small businesses gain publicity by providing press release services, copywriting, online media, article placement, and much more.

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