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Build Awareness For Your Biz In Your Community

Posted By [Lisa Barone](#) On June 24, 2009 @ 9:00 am In [Social Entrepreneurship](#) | [19 Comments](#)



[1] As a small business owner, you have something going for you that larger businesses don't. You already know who your main audience is. You know because if you're running a brick and mortar, your main audience are very often the folks located 10, 20, maybe 30 miles from your storefront. Your challenge is to make sure you get on their radar. It's nice that you know who they are. But you need to make sure that **they** know who **you** are.

When you're a small business the burden falls on you to let people know that you exist. You need to become an active and visible part of your community. The same way you need to be where your customers are online, you need to be where they are in real life. And that means leaving your bubble and venturing out into the real world.

One of the best ways to build awareness is to find ways to volunteer and give back to your community. It feels good for the soul and it delivers a constant amount of valuable exposure.

Here are some great ways to give back:

Teach a local class: Teaching classes out in your community is a great way to establish your skill in a particular field. And they're fun! If you own a bakery, teach a basic cooking class one night a week. If you sell homemade goods, teach a local knitting class and make your teaching patterns freely available. The pay probably won't do much more than cover your gas (if at all), but it's an excellent way to get yourself in front of potential customers and help get people excited about what you love. If you sell knit goods and you can create a relationship with those who have a passion for knitting...well, you've just found your audience and now they know your name, the name of your business, and have put a friendly face on your Web site. Who do you think they're going to go to when they need another yarn fix?

Join the Chamber of Commerce: Every town has a Chamber of Commerce and every Chamber of Commerce needs more volunteers to help out and sponsor local events, workshops, and serve on different committees. Contact yours and ask how you can get involved. Associate your brand with the community you live in. It's a great way to support your town, while also building name recognition and possibly getting you a link from their Web site. Or, if you don't have the time to serve on a committee, volunteer your office space for their next meetup and supply food. It's the little gestures that people remember and that earn you great karma points.

Sponsor a local team: There's no better way to spread awareness and goodwill for your company than to sponsor a local sports team or club. Every child has a parent and every parent appreciates companies that help children. Look for opportunities to sponsor Little League teams, youth soccer, pee-wee football, Girl Scouts, etc. It's a great branding opportunity for you, but even more than that, you get to help kids and the youth living in your community. And don't just slap your logo on some jerseys and think you're done. Actually show up. Participate. There's nothing better than that.

Start a Meetup: Use [2] [Twitter](#) or sites like [2] [Meetup.com](#) to organize a meetup so that you can get together with the folks in your area. It can be industry-based, a group for local entrepreneurs,

for parents, etc. You don't have to stay within your little box, just form relationships with other people in your community. And when you're there and talking to people, don't worry about promoting your company. Just be a real person. What you do for a living will naturally come up in conversation and the next time anyone in that group needs what you do, they'll remember that they already know someone who does that. They have a friend they met at the last meetup.

Speak at local events: If there's a local seminar going on your area about your industry or about something you have some knowledge in, offer to speak. Or, if there isn't one happening, offer to help put one together and host it. Doing so establishes yourself as an expert and makes you the go-to person in your area for that subject. There may also be some great branding opportunities in the form of schwag for the event.

Donate your services: Are you a florist? The next time the school prom comes around, donate corsages to each senior. Or, if you're a photographer, volunteer to take the class photo. These types of things are typically fairly low cost and pack a lot of exposure. My friend Michael Dorausch is a [3] [San Diego chiropractor](#) who frequently [4] [donates his services to local events or causes](#) happening in his area. Doing so creates goodwill, alerts people in the area that he exists and often merits him mainstream media attention. The more you step outside your small bubble, the more visibility you can create for your brand.

Share your other interests: You paint houses for a living but your real passion is music? Participate in the local open mic night and share your other love with the community. Doing so will make you a happier person and will show the locals what you're really about and help them form a more personal relationship with you. You can also wear a branded T-shirt while you're up there on stage belting it out to reinforce your company name.

Use local vendors: As a local business, you should be supporting all the other local businesses in your town and using them whenever you can. You want to create synergistic relationships that will let you cross promote. For example, if you sell moving boxes, create relationships with local moving companies, rental car companies, storage companies, real estate companies, etc. Often a person in need of one service will need the whole package. Helping each other out means you create opportunities for cross promotion and makes sure certain jobs aren't outsourced to companies not within the community. Or even worse, a chain!

Growing your small business often means simply making the community know that you exist in the first place. Getting exposure doesn't have to be burdensome. In fact, it's often a lot of fun and a great reason to do some good in your community. What are some of your ways to get involved?

[Thanks to all my awesome Twitter followers who help me come up with such a great list! - [5] [@lisabarone](#)]

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[3] San Diego chiropractor: <http://www.adiola.com/>

[4] donates his services to local events or causes: <http://www.planetc1.com/search/x-games-14-shakes-up-los-angeles.html>

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