



GROW YOUR BUSINESS

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Alternative Lending

The buzzword in business trends the last few years certainly seems to be “alternative”. From remote work options to lending sources, breaking away from the traditional models and exploring new terrain has small business owners shunning convention and embracing fresh takes in all niches.

Even banking, arguably one of the most traditional tenants in business models is experiencing a renaissance, with small businesses everywhere exploring alternative options when it comes to finance.

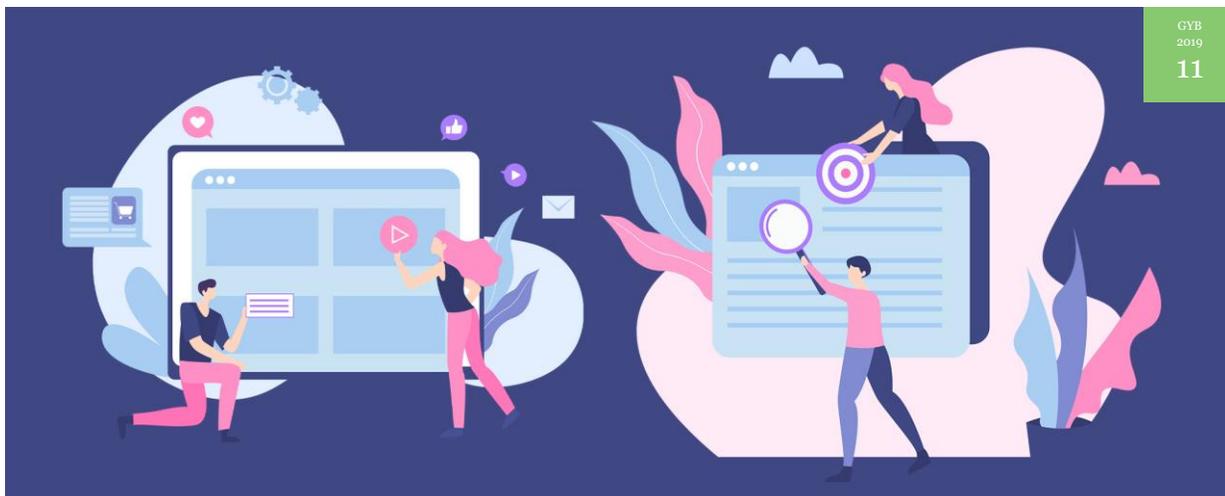
Most popularly, SME’s are adapting a hybrid approach, combining traditional working capital funding sources with alternative methods.

A few perks to alternatives include faster turnaround, easy application processes, increased flexibility, looser requirements and higher approval rates.

So what are a few of these options?

1. Merchant Funding: most simply, think transactional tools that also offer cash advances for product, and simple low cost ways to payback loans once products have been paid for. Best examples are PayPal and Square Capital. These are great options for small service based businesses that may only get paid upon completion, but require the upfront cash to get the job done.
2. Cash tied up in unpaid invoices? If you are more of a B2B, factoring is a great option (also known as invoice funding or invoice advance loans.). Seek out financial companies like Blueline, Fundbox or Seway for such services.
3. Online Loans: with looser requirements to a traditional model of cash lending, you typically will need to have at least 2 years of business in the books. These are great for establishing/building business credit, borrowing small amounts of cash or fast cash needs.
4. Microloans through microlenders. Established as nonprofits, microlenders have max loan sizes of typically \$50,000 or less, though average loans are more like \$6,000. These are targeting start-ups, super small businesses with 5 employees or less and typically include heavy documentation requirements and training and mentorships.
5. Term or equipment loans offer targeted dollars with specific, time-sensitive payback plans. Again, think fast cash options that can help a small business get up and running.

Some of the biggest disadvantages to alternative funding include higher interest rates and shorter lending terms. Though these may seem like big cons, the pros of being innovative, flexible and willing to take risks make alternative lending an appealing prospect to new business owners and small business managers.



Personalizing your Marketing Strategies

Small businesses may lack big, beefed up marketing budgets, but with less dollars to spend, it's more important to get creative, customized and personal with your strategies.

Personalize your messaging (including names whenever possible, streamline your marketing copy to all lead to the same conclusions/call to actions, and segment your audiences to funnel direct messaging based one wants and needs.

Personalize your merchandise to strengthen your brand and if you do in person or trade show appearances make sure to personalize those experiences as well. Ask yourself if your business was a person, how would you describe its 'personality'?

Using adjectives we would typically assign to people, give your business an identity and use it as a platform across all strategies to create a cohesive and clear brand.

Nail down your content strategy (based on the identity you've shaped) and identify your strengths and weaknesses in the plan. Next, visually map it out-give it a beginning, middle and end, linked together through your intended strategies.

Overall, marketing is made up of content and generic content is boring, dull and ineffective. Still unsure how to personalize?

Some ideas to get you started:

1. Targeted emails. The idea is simple- don't be seen as spam. You have to stand out, and being personal is the only way to do this. No, just inserting a first name into the intro is not what we mean here. You must find a way to speak directly to the audience, each and every person individually.
2. Product Recommendations. Key word here: applicable. You need data in order to define who is looking for what, and use that

data to craft a catered message that addresses that exact need, and allows you to seamlessly insert your very product or service that fills that need, at the precise moment its needed.

3. Videos, "Stories" (social media). A strong social media presence is about engagement. Again, these tools are used for data collection and when done right, provide both a base to consumer connection as well as information on how to target and address said consumer.
4. Location-based targeting. Personalization at its simplest-find the customers who are literally the closest to your products/services.

Things to consider when building personalization into the mix: demographics, psychographics, and transactional and behavioral data. Basically the who, what, when, where, why, how of your customer's interactions with your products and services.



Corporate Social Responsibilities in Small Businesses

Don't be put off by the terminology- ALL businesses need to pay attention to and demonstrate social responsibility, not just big corporations. Showing public awareness and concern goes beyond legal and ethical obligations.

Social responsibility is linked directly to customer loyalty, employee productivity and increased sales.

So as a small business owner, what can you do to ensure that your business is socially responsible?

Two of the basic tenants of socially responsible business are honesty and transparency. In a world increasingly chaotic and deceitful, consumers yearn for trust in their business relationships. Whenever and wherever employ strategies of openness, honesty and transparency.

Less theoretical but equally important is involvement. If you are

not part of the community you serve, how are you going to become a source of trust? Join business groups, chambers, boards, put on or sign up for local events, sponsor fun runs or fundraisers, support local nonprofits or youth organizations. Just get involved.

Linked closely to involvement is the concept of giving back. Attach your business to a nonprofit or cause and make it a part of your communication strategy to engage with others who identify with your cause. Donating to charities is great; getting involved with one is better.

Join the environmental fight. Climate change or not, wastefulness is one of the biggest turn offs for consumers who are feeling the effects of our product-reliant lives more than ever. Reduce, reuse and recycle are easy ways to show you care.

With a more knowledgeable and discerning buyer, vendors need to adapt. Read the room. Consumers care

more than ever about reduced environmental impact, clean business practices, ethical obligations and human rights.

Take a moment to review your products or services and how they align with these initiatives and what you are doing to discuss that alignment in your marketing message. Don't forget that second part- if you are taking steps to be part of the solution, make sure your audience is able to recognize your efforts.

Another perk to social responsibility is personnel. Better people want to work for better companies. Social awareness is often tied to work life balance and the desire to make things better. If your company is offering purpose and passion, your workforce will reflect the same.



Off Season Strategies to see a boost in sales

No matter your product or service, if you are in the business of selling, you are subject to seasons. They may not be as obvious as seasonal business or holiday shopping months, but these cycles drive the nature of your bottom line.

While it may be a struggle to find streams of revenue during these slow cycles, the work you put in here is critical to peaking on top of the uptick.

Take this time to:

1. Revamp your website, social media platforms, email communication systems.
2. Update, upgrade, and clean up your CRM or management system.
3. Reconnect with old leads, new customers and or long-term vendors and clients.
4. Craft off season promotions and specials.
5. Engage locally with your community.
6. Segment and connect with new and niche markets that may seem to small to tackle during the busy season.
7. Beef up on content, keep engagement high and collect reviews and testimonials.
8. Develop, review and/or update your customer loyalty program.
9. Identify your obstacles and brainstorm ways to remove them from your upcoming busy season.
10. Run testing on your products, services and communications.
11. Tackle the tiny to-do's; the things that always get bumped to the bottom of your list- you have time now!
12. Make sure your website has lots of call-to- action, even during the slow season (join email list, sign up for promotions, etc.)
13. Switch from consumer to corporate, or vice-versa. Tap into the opposite of your usual client pool.
14. Partner with other local businesses.
15. Focus on educating your customers, keeping them informed and creating a role for yourself as an industry leader.
16. Invest time in the low-cost strategies like social media, public relations and email marketing- save your dollars for when people are ready to buy.
17. Research for gaps in the market, niches to be filled and spend some time on product development.
18. Get creative with generating off – season excitement.
19. Develop a seasonal pricing strategy and stick to it.
20. Add complimentary services or products to sales during slow seasons.



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