
HOW TO BUILD YOUR BRAND ON A BUDGET



Developing, building and promoting your business brand are essential steps in any small business' success. The good news: Building a strong brand doesn't have to drain your business bank account. Here are 17 ways to build your brand on a budget.



1 CHOOSE YOUR BUSINESS NAME WISELY

When you don't have a big budget for marketing, it's important that your business name be memorable and distinctive. Brainstorm to come up with a name that conveys what your business does, the benefit to customers and the emotions your business evokes. For branding purposes, you want your name to stand out in any visual format – whether that's a giant sign outside your store or a tiny thumbnail photo on your social media profile. Your name should also be one that's easy to remember and type when searching online, and your website domain name should be as close as possible to your business name.



2 DEVELOP A LOGO

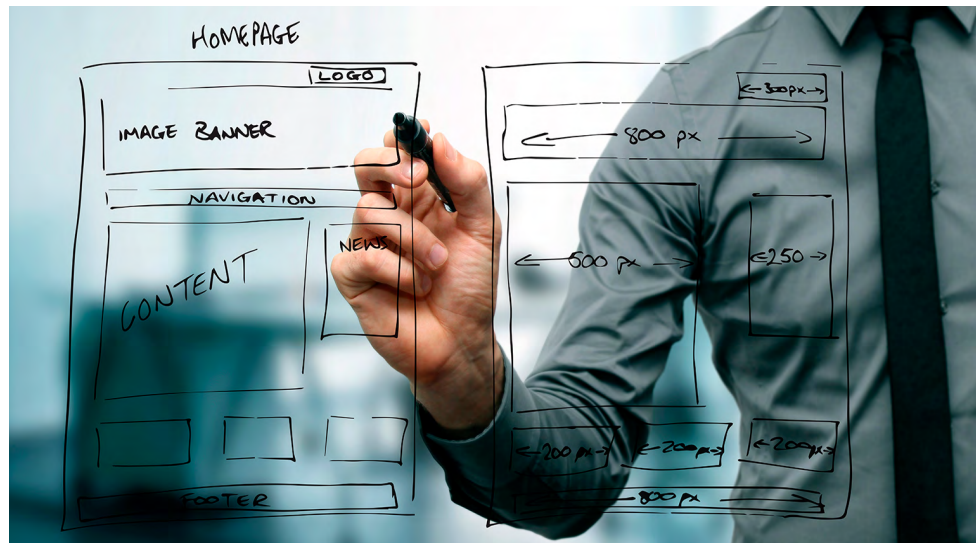
Once you're satisfied with your business name and have done a trademark search to make sure no one else owns it, the next step is developing a logo. If you have graphic design skills, consider creating your own logo. If you don't, investigate services that provide templates you can use to create your own logo. Remember, the logo will be the foundation of your brand's visual identity, so if you're not confident in your design choices, work with a graphic designer to get a [unique logo](#) designed – it can be quite affordable.

3 TRADEMARK YOUR LOGO

Before you start building your brand, protect it with a trademark. It's easy to do this yourself: Visit the [U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#) website, and you can search a database of trademarks, file a trademark application and get updates on your application status.

4 DEVELOP A CONSISTENT VISUAL IDENTITY

Your logo is the basis of your brand identity; now build on it. Carry the same design elements and colors into all the [visual aspects of your brand](#), including your business website, business cards, employee uniforms, business stationery, signage, print marketing materials and more. If needed, enlist the services of a graphic designer here.



5 BUILD A BUSINESS WEBSITE

Every business needs a website. Your requirements may range from a simple, one- or two-page website to a fully functional ecommerce site. Look for a [website design company](#) that provides the level of service you need—whether that's templates you can use to develop your own website, or custom design services if your needs are more complex.

6 MAKE YOUR MARK

Use your business logo everywhere you can — at the end of your email signature, on your invoices and product spec sheets, on your menu or shopping bags and, of course, on your business cards. Basically, any communication that potential customers see should have your logo on it.

7 CONNECT WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS

Stay in touch with your customers on a regular basis to get feedback about how well your business is meeting their needs, what new products or services they are interested in, and how you can serve them better. Talking to customers consistently, both in person and online, not only gives you valuable information that can help grow your business, but also keeps your brand top-of-mind.

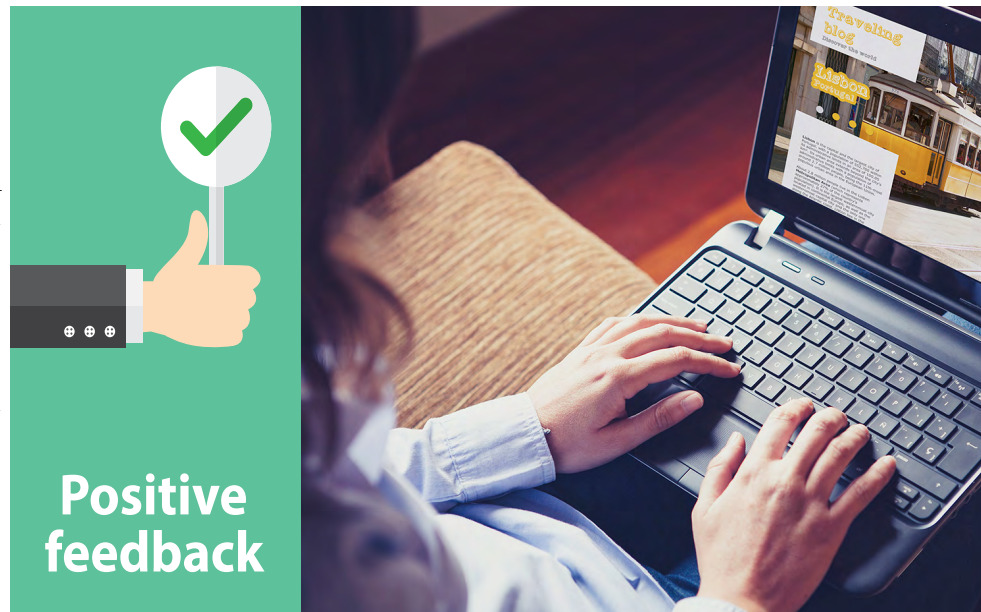


8 USE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an affordable, easy way to build a brand on a budget. First, do some research to find out where on social media your prospective and current customers spend the most time. For example, if you're selling B2B, you'll probably find most of your customers are on LinkedIn. If you own a women's clothing boutique, Pinterest or Instagram is likely your best bet. When in doubt, know that most U.S. adults are on Facebook, making that a good place to begin. Create a social media profile for your business that reflects your brand — using your business logo, photos of your business or representing your business, and describing your products or services and their benefits. Share your own content, like and share others' content and interact with followers, and your brand will build a positive image.

9 GET LISTED ON LOCAL SEARCH DIRECTORIES

If your business relies on a local customer base, local search directories are essential to building your brand. Visit local search directories to find your business and "claim" its listing. Then complete the profile of your business by adding the basics, such as your business's address, hours and phone number. Brand your listing by adding your logo, tagline and photos of your business, if appropriate. Want to make it even simpler? Look for a [service](#) that claims and optimizes your listing on dozens of local search directories.



10 GET LISTED ON REVIEW AND RATING SITES

Similar to local search directories, rating and review sites are where customers turn when looking for businesses. Yelp is the best-known review site, but depending on your industry, you may want to be listed on others. Basic listings on most of these sites are free. Include detailed information and encourage your customers to review in order to raise your business's profile. Many [services](#) that get your business listed on local search directories will also handle rating and review sites.

11 START A BUSINESS BLOG

A business blog gives you a platform for sharing your content and extending your brand. Before you launch one, however, make sure you or someone on your staff has the time and energy to maintain a consistent schedule of posting new content. That doesn't always mean writing a blog post: Posts can also consist of photos, videos or links to interesting content elsewhere. [Movable Type](#), [TypePad](#) and [WordPress.com](#) are popular blogging platforms that make it easy to set up a blog and post content. Host your blog on your business website, and link to it in all of your online marketing materials to help build your brand.



12 GET CUSTOMERS TO BUILD YOUR BRAND

Happy customers can become brand advocates, spreading the word about your business brand to others. Encourage satisfied customers to tell others about your company via social media, in person, and on online rating and review sites. For example, you could ask B2B clients if they are willing to write a LinkedIn recommendation for you. You can even ask your best customers to provide testimonials about your business that you can use on your website and in other marketing materials.

13 HARNESS THE POWER OF INFLUENCERS

Influencers are people whose opinions carry weight in your industry or with your target market. They might include bloggers, journalists, or people with large followings on the social media sites where your target customers spend a lot of time. Find these influencers by searching on hashtags or keywords related to your business, product, service or industry. [Buzzsumo](#), [Klout](#) and [SumAll](#) are tools you can use to quantify someone's social media influence. Interact with them on social media until you have built a relationship where you feel comfortable reaching out. Then suggest ways they could promote your business, such as reviewing your products, using your products in a contest or giveaway for their followers, or doing a joint promotion.



14 MARKET WITH EMAIL

Email marketing is highly effective at building a brand, because just about everyone has email and regularly checks it. You can send customers promotional emails, announcements or a regular email newsletter. Look for an [email marketing service](#) that helps you create professional-looking emails, deliver them and analyze their effectiveness. All of your emails should reflect your brand's visual identity and be clearly labeled in the subject line as coming from your business. Encourage recipients to forward your emails to a friend or colleague, and you'll quickly boost brand awareness among your target market.

15 NETWORK

In-person networking is a powerful way of building brand awareness at minimal cost. Look for relevant events or conferences (many are free or low-cost) where potential customers or partners gather. If your business draws from a local clientele, local networking events are important too: They're an ideal place to meet other business owners with whom you can partner to market your business. When you participate in networking events, raise your profile and that of your brand even further by taking an active role. For example, volunteer to lead a panel, organize an event or even make a speech.



16 GET INVOLVED IN THE COMMUNITY

For consumer-oriented businesses, community involvement helps familiarize prospective customers with your business and build a brand identity and "personality." From local fairs and 5K races to charitable organizations and schools, there are hundreds of ways to get involved in your community. Build brand awareness by choosing events and groups that are relevant to your business brand, and make sure your business name and logo are part of the event.

17 CREATE A CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CONSISTENT WITH YOUR BRAND

It doesn't cost anything to train your employees in your brand message and values. For example, if your restaurant's brand is family friendliness, your greeters and wait staff should genuinely enjoy interacting with children. Your menu should include foods children like, and your décor and serving ware should be sturdy enough for young children. On the other hand, white tablecloths, formal service and good china could all help to build the elite brand of an expensive fine-dining establishment.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, there are many ways to build a brand on a budget. The secret to all of them is being consistent in your brand message, brand identity and brand image. By doing so, you'll help make your brand unforgettable.