

Marketing guide to get you started

Increasingly, and especially during the current climate, the Business Support and Development team at South Cambridgeshire District Council are receiving requests to help businesses with their marketing. We have put together this free guide to help you.

If you need in depth and specific marketing advice, you will need to speak to a creative agency or one of the local publishing groups, who will also be able to help.

So, you need to change and adapt your business model and get your head around the wizardry of online marketing? It really is not as daunting as you may think. This guide is not exhaustive, merely a step on the ladder to help you out **now**.



Websites

Here's a surprise. You don't actually need to have a website to build a business presence online.

Of course, if you want an all singing and dancing e-commerce site where people can shop and place orders on line then that is another ball game... and can be pricey for a small business.

If you need to create a website there are a host of website build platforms out there that really do make the job easy for you and you can build a basic website for free, for example sites such as [Wix](#), [Yola](#) and of course Google website builder and many others you may come across during a web search.

If you want something a bit plush you might want to contact a local creative design agency (or one of the newspaper publishers) but always choose a creative agency carefully - check what work they have done for other businesses, ask for examples

and case studies and go for recommendations from other businesses you know who have a website.

If you already have a website you need to make sure that it loads fast, is optimised (fits the screen of device it is being viewed on) and any pictures do not take 'an age' to load. Users are really impatient in clicking on a website that takes longer than 3 seconds to load. They move on. You can check your website load time by either searching 'test my site speed' or googling 'thinkwithgoogle'. You will find a lot of helpful information there.

Google (and other well known search engines) and how they work

For the purposes of this guide we are going to talk about Google (other search engines are of course available!) Google is so well known that we now use it as a phrase a bit like calling a vacuum cleaner 'hoover' - which is a brand - Google is the same. We now say 'Google it' instead of 'let's search'.

One of the most effective ways of marketing your **local** business to your **local** audience is through social media channels and really pushing great content about your business and engaging with local audiences. After all, life is local, right?

However, if you don't have a website, you still need to ensure that Google/other search engines can find you when customers are searching for your business on line. That's where most people will go to look to find your services, for example 'cheese suppliers near me'.

Google will serve your Facebook page for example if they deem this to be 'good enough'. And Google needs to know you are out there in the big wide world if they are to return your business in a search query. They need to know you are 'there' in order to find you.

At the very least, make sure you have claimed your 'Google My Business' (GMB). Type 'google my business' in the search bar and hey presto, off you go. And it's free!

Just make sure you put as much information in there as possible - and make sure it is accurate. Include your business type, address, contact details, opening hours, links to social media, website if you have one. You can even manage reviews on GMB, and Google will always love a review especially if there is a response to that review from YOU: 'thank you for taking the time to review my service, we look forward to seeing you again soon'. This shows that you are engaging.

Google works by answering a 'query' (search term) by sending out little crawling bots to search the web for the most relevant content that the user is looking for.

Google will find the most relevant content in the shortest time and serve that back to the user. Especially if you are **local** (remember that GMB as mentioned above?). They will also make suggestions on what other search terms have been typed in by other users. Have you ever noticed when you search, say, 'how long will a headache last' Google will give you some other suggestions - 'what causes a headache', 'how to treat a headache', 'what does a headache mean' - and will then make suggestions to send you off on a wild journey around the world wide web to read all sorts of content on the subject you are researching.

Google wants to drive users to content that is **most** relevant to the search. This is their reputation at risk! And **local** comes first - after paid for ads. Those bots are really helpful little souls, but if they find inconsistencies in your information, guess what? You won't make it anywhere near the the top of the first page on search returns! Google doesn't like it! They push you right down the bottom and you could appear on pages 2, 3 or even 10 or beyond! That is, virtually invisible. No one really scrolls further than page one.

So Google checks to make sure information is consistent and not conflicting, so one piece of advice is to make sure that in any online activity you publish that all of your information is consistent, for example your business name, telephone numbers, address, postcode. Google really does not like it if, for example your business name

is 'bloggs **and** co', and in some instances, you are online as 'bloggs **&** co'. Those little bots really are fussy about grammar, addresses, even postcodes; all of the finer detail. If your information is not consistent it sends those little bots a bit wonky and they go off and look somewhere else.

Not only that, Google likes to see how often you use social media and how active you are online because they need to know that you are still operational and are active and provide useful content for it to send back as a suggestion to the user.

So, what have you put on Facebook? Have you written any blogs? Recorded any vlogs? Active on Instagram? Twitter? LinkedIn? And so on. They are looking for your content all about your business that matches what the user is looking for.

If you have a website, you may have heard of SEO. Search engine optimisation. This is a swish way of saying that the wording used on your website (onsite) and any other content you push on other platforms (offsite) needs to tie up. You do this by using key words and phrases. And you can have hundreds of them. If you sell cheese, it goes without saying that you need to make sure you use the word 'cheese' in the content on your website and also on your social media pages/posts. If you sell 'cheese in Linton', say that on your website and in your content.

Even better, if you sell speciality cheeses, make sure you name those too. Users actually will type in bizarre names to find exactly what they are looking for, for example Timberdoodle Cheese (yes – that actually does exist) so if you sell Timberdoodle cheese make sure you say so on your website. You can bet that some of the high-end supermarkets or delis will mention that they sell this particular cheese - especially if they have an e-commerce site where you can order the product on line. Not only that – they will more than likely have a picture of the Timberdoodle cheese too with the 'background links' naming what is in the picture. Google loves this; 'great, this business sells this cheese and also has a picture of it' but **you** need the customer to come to **you** as a local business so get this right. Use keyword phrases such as 'Timberdoodle cheese in Linton Cambridge Cambridgeshire'. Make sure you use lots of combinations: 'organic cheese', 'organic cheese in Cambridgeshire', 'specialist cheese'.

So, blogs and vlogs. Well, if you sell cheese you must know an awful lot about it, right? So go the extra mile, maybe share a recipe idea using Timberdoodle cheese, because, guess what? Someone may have this cheese and not know what to do with it? Hence they will search 'recipes using Timberdoodle cheese'. If you have posted a recipe Google will serve this content.

Google absolutely loves video content. Video is the best thing ever, and it is the highest growing social media content because **we** all love a video too.

So if you feel brave and want to make a short video using your mobile phone, include the links on your social media and on your website and upload it to youtube.

Google will serve video content pretty much near the top of the search results, after the 'paid' results and 'other suggestions'. Make sure you name your video 'recipe using Timberdoodle cheese' for example.

There are a lot of savvy businesses who make videos or upload content showing customers what to do 'for free', for example plumbers on cold and frosty winter nights who get many calls from customers saying their boiler has broken, when in fact it could just be a frozen pipe and the plumber has uploaded some advice on what you need to do. Saves everyone time and money (well, maybe not money for the plumber in the short term!)

This may not gain a customer **now**, but when that customer needs a plumber for a proper job who are they going to call? That's right – the local one who gave free advice on the local Facebook page. Falls into the bracket of 'creating awareness'.

Creating awareness is crucial, not only for your existing customers – to let them know of offers, that you are still trading, how they can continue to use your services - but it also plants the seed for tomorrow's customers. They may not need your services now but they might in the future, so always make sure you are generating content and respond to inquiries on line. More often on local Facebook groups, people will ask for recommendations and if you are active on Facebook, engage with

comments, and have served a customer well they will recommend you and will quite likely post a link to your page.



Facebook

You can create a Facebook business page for free. You need to have a Facebook account for this to link back to, but you can keep it separate. Create a page, share it with your network.

Facebook business will also allow you to create ads and will help you to get your messages out there. 1-2 posts a day is good. It doesn't have to be a 'sales message' just anything engaging with your audience that will create likes and shares, especially if you can run a competition or ask people to share pictures of their cheesy bakes. If you have a current Facebook account, you will know what this looks like.

If your business is forced to close, due to local restrictions, you can still market your businesses and sell on line and deliver. Here are some ideas for Facebook promotions -

Consider offering vouchers as Christmas gift ideas. We need to encourage 'shop local'. Maybe offer to gift wrap these.

Florist

Beautiful floral table centre pieces and wreaths for Christmas available for ordering now, Covid safe delivery to your door or pm (private message) for details.

Cheer your loved one up with a beautiful bouquet delivered to their door.

Maybe consider connecting with a local business that is classed as essential to remain open; speak to garden centres about selling your bouquets (use pictures).

Food delivery

Put your feet up this Sunday. We may be closed for lockdown, but we can deliver your Sunday lunch. This week's special is tender, melt in the mouth roast beef and all the delicious trimmings, piping hot and delivered to your door (include a picture... pictures sell)

Missing your favourite pub lunch? Phone us to order now and you can collect in 45 minutes. You can still 'takeaway' your favourite meal.

Treat your family to an indoor picnic - delicious hampers with a selection of sandwiches, pastries and cakes delivered to your door. Perfect for a 'feet up in front of the tv afternoon'.

Still having to work in an office? We can deliver your lunch. Treat the team to a delicious afternoon tea. Call us or pm us to discuss your requirements.

Order a Christmas hamper full of goodies for your loved one this Christmas.

Gift shops, Artisan crafts and specialist food

Put a smile on someone's face this Christmas. Unique and personalised beautiful presented gift boxes made to order. Choose candles, jewellery, bath bombs, or cheese, chutneys, home made cakes. Order now for someone special. Contact us to discuss.

Clothing

We have these amazing xxxx in stock for just £xxx browse our website. We can deliver.

The bottom line is you need to get creative with promoting what you sell. Think about 'what would entice me to buy this?', 'Who is my target audience?', 'Where would my customers normally come from?', 'How can I reach them?' and more importantly 'How can I tell them I am still trading and how they can buy from me now?'

Make the content right for the people you are talking to. Facebook was set up for students, now most of them have moved on to other platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp and Tiktok. It is middle aged and mature audiences who are the greater users of the Facebook platform now , often the ones with the money to spend!



LinkedIn

It's just a jobs board, right? Full of people looking for jobs and those hiring?

Wrong!

LinkedIn is a key networking platform now that will also help you see what your competition is doing, what's new, and will also allow you to connect and build customer relationships, both with individuals and businesses. Again – be visible, share posts, like content that other people have written. Even better, share content and add a comment. Spark a good debate. Get yourself 'seen'. Get connected.



Twitter

Same principle – share your news, videos, blogs and vlogs and use links if need be. Especially if it is a long piece of content. Follow other businesses similar to yours so you can see what they are doing effectively. Obvs don't copy them, but it should set a chain of thought going and help create ideas for your own content.



Instagram

Use this to 'show off'. If you create a special gift box, share it on Instagram. People will love it and engage and talk about it... and you could get more orders.



Email marketing

If you are lucky enough to have a database of customers, who have agreed that you can market and communicate on line, and adhere to GDPR rules, you can contact your customers through email. You might want to simply drop them a line, or create a newsletter using a programme such as Microsoft Sway. When you have created a newsletter, you can share a link to this through your social media channels.



So, what can you do now to trade online?

Remember...if you use social media channels the right way, and respond to customers quickly and effectively, this will help you with Google. A lot of channels check business activity and will now include 'usually responds within an hour', 'a day'. Check this when you next look at a business page on Facebook, for example. It all presents a great impression of your business and promotes confidence as one that would be good to do business with.

For businesses that are 'personal touch', like hairdressers, nail bars, gyms, you don't have to completely disappear during lockdown. Be clever with social media and advise your customers how they can 'cover up those roots' short term, push voucher sales for Christmas gift ideas. Gyms – maybe some exercises online for people staying at home. Use channels such as zoom for classes. This is all positive activity to help your existing customers and may grow a few more 'tomorrow' customers. Afterall, your customers need to know that you are still there... and you will be back – properly. They will miss you so keep engaging with them for when you can open again.

We hope this helps

Whilst this is not an exhaustive list of what you can and should be doing to actively promote your business on line, we hope that it goes some way to helping you to establish an online presence and gives you the considerations you need to make in order to get your business name and messages out there.

As mentioned previously, there are many local creative agencies and newspaper groups that can help you further with this if you want to go for 'paid for' on line advertising. Some will help you build websites for a fee, and they will help you promote content online to specific targeted audiences.

You can buy online advertising space on newspaper websites for example. Don't forget if you have news to share - especially good news - contact your local newspaper/magazine publisher as they are all about supporting local businesses, especially in these testing times. It supports them too.

If you need further business support or advice, please do not hesitate to contact the Business Support and Development team at South Cambridgeshire District Council. You can email us at: openforbusiness@scambs.gov.uk or visit our website business pages at www.scambs.gov.uk. We are here to help you and our service is free.