Baby Store Marketing on a Shoestring Budget

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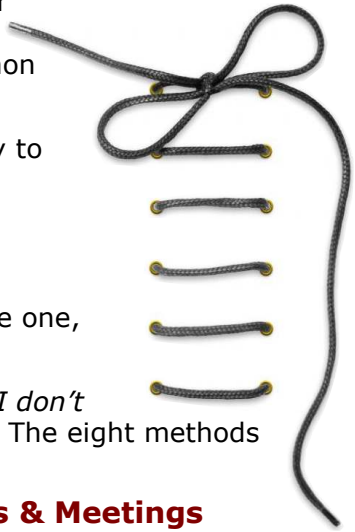
Marketing a Baby Store

If you sell baby products you have a unique challenge. Your customer base is constantly turning over and so you must always be searching for new customers.

How? Advertising. Marketing. Getting the word out to expectant parents that you exist.

The Shoestring

But advertising is expensive and your budget is tight. You're running on a shoestring. Don't fret. This is common with most specialty retailers.



Even if you don't have a lot of money to spend, you can still market yourself effectively.

How? **Spend TIME.**

Time equals money. If you don't have one, you have to spend the other.

Of course, right now you're saying, *"I don't have time, either."* That's okay, too. The eight methods we will cover in this eBook:

Word-of-Mouth	**Classes & Meetings**
Website Basics	**Social Media**
Networking	**Cause Marketing**
Fixed-Return Mktg.	**Community Baby Shower**

all require either just a little time each day, a small amount of your financial resources, or are something you're already doing, but here's a better way to do them.

The Message

Before you begin marketing you have to know what to say. **What is your message?** What makes you a worthy destination for customers?

The answer is simpler than you think. Just ask your current customer base why they shop with you. The reasons they give can be boiled down into one or two points. Just pick one of those points, preferably the one that speaks most to the heart, and that becomes your message.

Speak to the Heart

Why the heart? Because emotions are always stronger at getting people to act than logic or information. We use logic to justify what the heart has already decided. This is the essence of all persuasion (and branding).

Find that message, that emotional reason why customers already come to your business, and you'll have a message for your marketing. The cool thing is that for every customer who comes to you for that reason there are a dozen more who would act for the very same reason if they only knew you and your message.

#1 Word-of-Mouth

We all know word-of-mouth is the best form of advertising. But to get someone to talk about you, you have to give them something remarkable to talk about.

Every business thinks they have great customer service, a fabulous selection, and competitive prices. These things don't stir your customers into action.

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To garner WOM you have to do one of 4 things:

1. Have an **Over-the-Top Design** element in your store that everyone *has to see*
2. Have **Over-the-Top Interactions** so spectacular they *write books* about it.
3. Have **Over-the-Top Generosity** that brings them back, but this time *with their friends*.
4. Create **Stark Raving Fans** out of your regular customers by making them *feel special*

Over-the-Top Design: This is the toughest way to get word -of-mouth because it usually costs a lot of money.

What is Over-the-Top Design?

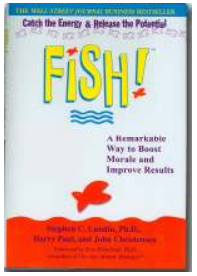
Think of the Ferris Wheel inside the Times Square Toys R Us. Or a store that doesn't have cash registers (like the Apple Stores). Or a giant store like Cabela's, FAO Schwarz or Ikea.

It is hard (but not impossible) to do Over-the-Top Design on a shoestring budget. The other three methods are much more affordable.

Over-the-Top Customer Service: Pikes Place Fish Market in Seattle has such an incredible level of customer service that it actually becomes a show. Not only do people stop by to shop for seafood, they come for the excitement of the lively interactions between employees and customers, employees and other employees, and employees and the fish.

No one leaves unhappy (and very few leave empty handed).

In fact, their service is so legendary that a best-selling book and training program was launched about it. If you haven't read the book **"FISH!"**, you should.



How can you change your policies, procedures or attitudes to create a new, fresh experience that customers won't ever find in a big-box discounter, department store or mall? How can you raise the bar so high they *have* to talk about you?

Over-the-Top Generosity: Here are two examples of over-the-top generosity to show you what I mean.

Free Dessert: You're out to eat at a fancy restaurant. All night you see beautiful desserts roll by. The dessert menu is on the table, but the prices are high. Your dinner guests suggest maybe splitting one among the table.

Just then the waiter approaches and says...

> *"You guys have been a great table tonight. I'd like to buy all of you your own dessert. What would you like?"*

Not only will it be one of the best desserts you ever had, you'll be talking about it for years.

Months later when your friends say, "Where do you want to eat?" You'll say...

> *"How about so-and-so's? The last three times I got a free dessert!"*

For the price of sugar and flour, the restaurant is buying loyalty and creating stark raving fans who talk about them.

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Free Watch Battery: Your watch has died. You take it to the local jewelry shop to get a new battery. The shop keeper takes your watch into the back room while you stare at all the shiny, beautiful rings, earrings, and necklaces in front of you.

A few minutes later he returns with your watch.

You ask, *"How much?"*

"It's on the house," he replies with a smile.

For the price of a battery (which he probably bought in bulk) and two minutes of time, he just bought a whole bunch of praise and word-of-mouth. Plus, he got you to stand there looking at his merchandise for a few minutes with nothing else to do—a jeweler's dream!

Is there something you could do that would be over-the-top, unexpected generosity? The key here is ***unexpected.*** Don't announce it. Just do it. Then let your customers announce it for you.

How about a free bib embroidered with your store logo on it that you give to every customer after they register at your store?

Or maybe free installation of the car seat they just bought?

Or maybe a free helium balloon for every kid that came in with mommy & daddy?

Or maybe offer free delivery even though your sign says delivery has a hefty fee. Just make sure you do it unannounced and from the heart and people will talk about it.

Make Them Feel Special: You need to cultivate the relationship you have with your customers the same way you would with your BFF's.

How? By making them feel **Important** and **Special**.

Think about your circle of friends. What makes them your friends? How do you treat them differently than other people you know?

You probably know more about them. You know their likes and dislikes. You share your inner most secrets with them. You know how to make them feel better.

Have you tried to get to know your customers this way?

Insider Information: One way to make your customers feel special is to share your secrets with them. Draw them into the inner circle of your business by telling them a little bit more than you would tell a complete stranger.

Give them news or info that no one else has such as the "why" behind the products you sell, the decision process you made to bring in a certain line of products, the history behind your business and your suppliers.

Secrets make us feel special. When someone shares something with us we feel a closer bond with them.

Best of all, most of us are lousy at keeping secrets. We want to share them because it feeds our ego and helps us draw people into our *own* inner circles.

Telling "secrets" is an especially effective way to empower your best customers to feel closer to you and be more likely to talk about you to others. So get talking and sharing!

#2 Classes & Meetings

You're already an expert in your field. Otherwise you wouldn't be trying to make it as an independent baby store retailer. Without passion for the product, you probably won't be in business long.

Why not take advantage of your expertise to drive traffic into the store?

In Store Classes: You do that by **offering classes in your store.**

The baby product business is perfect for this form of marketing. Most expectant parents are clueless when it comes to knowing and understanding the products they are about to buy. So educate them.

Teach them why your products are so much better than what they might find elsewhere. Or simply give them enough information so that they can figure it out for themselves.

Host the class in your store for free. Sit your customers down in your glider rockers and tell them how to pick out a stroller, or why certain cribs cost more than others, or the safety behind a crib mattress, or how to know if a dresser is built to last.

Not only do you give people a compelling reason to come to your store, you make them comfortable in your store and you build trust—two things that will get them to return.

Plus, you turn those people into insiders, you give them something remarkable to talk about, and when they return, they'll bring others with them.

Brand yourself as the expert and people will come to you first for advice *and* products.

If you don't feel comfortable teaching, bring in outside teachers. Host birthing classes, breastfeeding classes, new dad classes.

Mom Groups: Or offer to host a Mother's Club. Find an activity for the little kids to do and let the moms sit in your gliders and talk. Bring in experts to talk to them. Show off your new products every other week.

One thing new moms know is a lot of expectant moms, too.

Make your store the place to be and people will want to be there.

#3 Website Basics

You don't need a fancy website with ecommerce, videos and a bazillion products to successfully market yourself.

But you do need a website!

Potential customers are online every day looking at products and doing research.

One of the things they are doing is researching where to shop. They want to *see* your store before they commit to driving to your store.

There are three basics your website has to have:

1. **Home Page:** All about you. Your hours, your location, your phone and email address, and most importantly, your message.
2. **Products Page:** What categories do you carry? What brands do you offer? List 'em!
3. **Services Page:** What special services do you offer? Do you do car seat installation? Do you deliver and assemble furniture? Do you have a gift registry? Do you giftwrap?

It doesn't cost much to put up a basic site like that. If you can afford to do more, great! If not, get the basics up right away. **Make sure to also include a picture of your store and the address, phone & hours on every single page.**

Think of your website as a silent salesman, someone willing to work 24/7 to tell potential customers your story.

People only do that which they feel comfortable doing. Your website should be designed to give them some comfort of what to expect when they come to your store.

#4 Using Social Media

Facebook is FREE. Twitter is FREE. LinkedIn is FREE. Most Social Media platforms are free for you to use, at least in terms of *money*.

The truth is that everything in life costs either time or money. Social Media costs you time.

It takes time to gather a huge following of people interested in your business. It takes time to build a relationship with your fan base. It takes time to learn how to post, where to post, what to post. It takes time because you have to post daily if not more often.

But if you don't have the money, spend the time and you will get results. Not right away – that takes time, too. But to paraphrase a Chinese Proverb… The best time to start using Social Media is five years ago. The next best time is today.

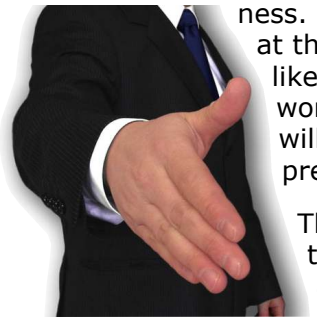
Just remember that it is called *"social"* media, not *"scream-at-them"* media. For your social media to be effective you have to use it as a tool for creating relationships, those same BFF kind of relationships you use to get word-of-mouth.

Use your social media for sharing secrets, for getting to know your customers better. Ask and listen to your customers. It is all about the conversation, and mostly about what **they** say, not what you say. You should make it a goal to ask more questions about your customers than you make statements about yourself.

#5 Network Your Way to Increased Traffic

Attend Chamber of Commerce functions, Service Group luncheons, open board meetings, any place that has movers and shakers in your town.

Yes, this is a legitimate way to get leads for your baby business. Not because there are tons of people at these events having babies. More than likely you'll rarely ever meet a pregnant woman at a networking event. But you will meet plenty of people who do know pregnant women.



The only problem with networking is that most people at a networking event are there to sell. No one is there to

buy. If you want to meet and get to know people, don't take a seller's attitude to the event. Go with a buyer mentality and you'll be surprised with how many wonderful people you will connect who may be able to help you down the road.

Here are some simple tips to make your networking more effective:

- Practice ***people's names*** by using them as often as possible in conversation. People love being known.
- Practice ***listening skills*** by asking questions about other people's businesses more than you talk about your own.
- Try to make only ***one or two good contacts*** per event. Don't spread yourself too thin, or you won't have time to make a worthwhile connection.
- Write ***Thank You Notes*** to everyone with whom you exchange a business card.

The goal is to make solid contacts with people who will remember you positively. Don't sell. Just connect.

#6 Cause Marketing

You probably get dozens of requests for donations every month. And every charity promises you big exposure.

Yeah, right. The only exposure your logo on a t-shirt gives you is to other charities looking for sponsors.

You've already learned that the only benefit to you is if you give away a gift certificate. At least you get one person inside your door.

But what if you got 30% of that group's fan base to give you their business even if only for one night? It's easy to do.

The next time a non-profit or charity approaches you for money, tell them that you'll set up one special day just for them *(or night or whatever works best for you)*.

All they have to do is promote to their members that for every dollar they spend, you'll donate 5% to their organization.

This way you get the exposure and traffic first. Then they get their money in proportion to the business they gave you. Think of it as a guaranteed return on your charitable donation.

It's a win-win-win scenario. You win because you attract new customers that they send you. They win because they get money and publicity for their group. Their supporters win because they get to "donate" just by shopping for what they already need.

#7 Fixed-Return Marketing

Ads = Sales

If your shoestring is a little bit longer, you may consider doing traditional advertising. One of the biggest problems with traditional advertising, however, is measuring the return-on-investment. You would like to know that if you spend X dollars on advertising you'll get Y dollars in business. Unfortunately, traditional advertising just doesn't work that way.

But there is a surefire way to draw more traffic where your cost is fixed, ***where you know exactly how much you will spend per customer gained***. And best of all, you don't have to pay that cost until the customer makes her first purchase. Intrigued?

Here is how it works (and it is so simple).

Print up a whole bunch of gift certificates for $10.00 each. Carry them with you wherever you go. Hand them out freely and unannounced every time you meet someone new, telling them how much you would appreciate it if they gave your business a try.

Take them with you at Networking events. It leaves a lasting impression on someone whom you have just met. Take them on public outings. You never know when you might meet a new customer.

As for your costs… You only have to "pay" for the ones that are redeemed. And if your markup is keystone, the cost per customer is only $5.00 out of your pocket (the cost of the goods sold). And for every $5.00 you spend you have a new happy customer who has made a purchase *in your store* (probably for far more than the $10 value of the gift certificate)!

Sure, you might give some away to existing customers. Sure, you might have some customers get two or three. That's perfectly okay. Think of those gift certificates as over-the-top generosity.

The rest are marketing expenses that bring you new customers for only $5.00 each.

> *Note: I didn't say coupons. Don't give out coupons. You won't get as much of a draw and you won't get any of that over-the-top generosity word-of-mouth from it. Stick to gift certificates, unannounced, and given from the heart. Your return and your WOM will be better!*

#8 Community Baby Shower

Many communities are hosting Baby Showers. These events vary in type and style. Some are booth shows similar to

bridal expos. Some are community events for the less fortunate. Both are ripe with opportunity for marketing your business.

Get a booth at the Expo-style shows and bring your most unique items. Then entice attendees to visit your store with a free gift certificate (or if you wish to do a coupon, do a limited-time offer such as "expires tomorrow").

If it is a community event for the less fortunate, get the organizers on your radar. They have to buy the stuff they give away for free from someone. It might as well be you.

We have helped our local organizers for years by supplying them with affordable playpens, car seats & other items. Yes, we cut them a special deal, but the volume allows us to often get a better deal from our suppliers. Plus, we often move out a lot of high-quality goods that haven't sold well for us.

Spend the Time

Marketing is far more than simply buying ads in print or on the air. And most marketing won't cost you an arm and a leg. If you are willing to spend the time, you will definitely see the results. Remember…

When you don't have the money, you have to spend the time.

*Special thank you to **Roy H. Williams**, aka The Wizard of Ads, for his information on garnering Word-of-Mouth.*