



5 low budget marketing hacks

A shoestring guide to marketing your small business



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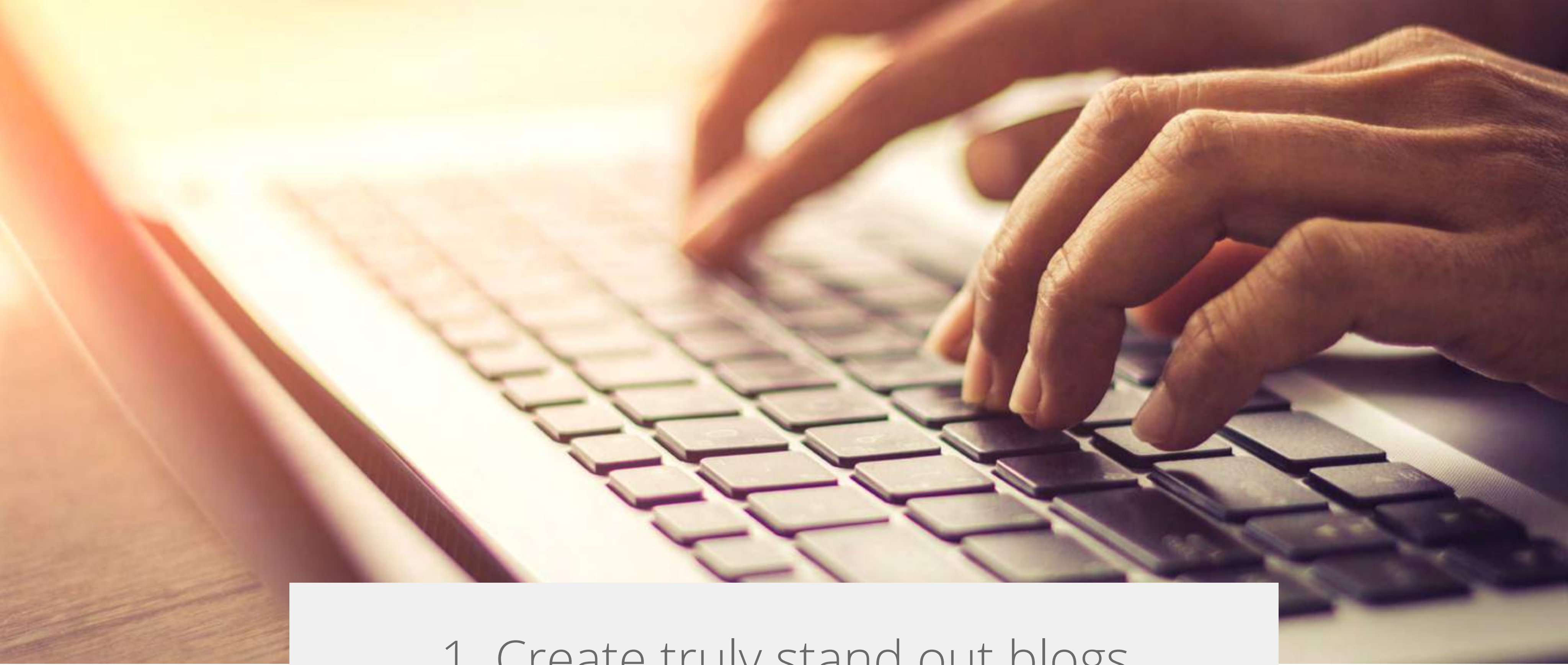


Since everything is a hack these days, please jump aboard our trendy bandwagon and let's get hacking!

Often when starting a business your funds will be stretched like an Olympic gymnast, just to pay your lease, stock products, set up a working space or pay staff. Marketing, however crucial, is one of the fundamental pillars that is the first to be clipped back. We need to start thinking about marketing as a long-term endeavour. We can easily see sales and financial upkeep as our primary issues to be faced first, which is fair, but this will certainly create problems as your sales begin to slump and you realise nobody even knows who you are... Let's combat this problematic mentality.

As a business owner what are the two primary things you never have enough of? Money and market presence. You just can't overdo it when it comes to marketing and collecting bricks of cash, can you? Yet of course, back on the disappointingly solid ground of reality, cash and market penetration are often scarce resources. Furthermore, solid marketing requires deep pockets right? The very deep pockets you don't actually have?

Not so fast now! There is a lot you can do with precious little funding to announce yourself, your brand and your business to the populace. Whatever the bank balance, you simply need strong marketing to attract and maintain customers, no argument. Let's investigate a few ways this can be achieved whilst keeping your overheads to a brutal minimum.



1. Create truly stand out blogs

Your blog will be one of the cornerstones of your marketing efforts, and thankfully, cheap and easy to implement. This is where the bulk of your content efforts kick in and you can use this content for a huge variety of purposes which can then be reused on an equally diverse range of platforms.

Don't sell

The blog is one of the single most effective ways to build brand awareness and should be your business' archive of wisdom, not just a home for company updates. In fact, those should be a rarity.

It is not a place for sales pitches, I repeat NOT a place for sales pitches. That is about the quickest way you can turn your audience off forever.

Be a thought leader

This is where you display what the industry calls 'thought leadership'. It may sound a touch pretentious but that is exactly what you should strive to be – a thought leader (It's free too!).

Let's look at an example of Peter Maxwell, a custom surfboard shaper, sculpting surfboards under a new business name 'Wax On'. If you were Peter, you wouldn't take up much of your blog with updates on new models or a new type of epoxy resin you used in a recent board, you would write pieces that make you a thought leader on surfing.

How?

Write a 10-part series on how to perfect your long board riding technique. Write a weekly post on undiscovered surf breaks throughout Asia. Script an etiquette guide to waiting your turn in the line-up. Pen a tongue in cheek 'local grommet' piece about colourful young characters on your local break. Create an infographic that details how to do minor DIY board repairs at home. You get the idea.

Be genuine

These are genuinely interesting and shareable pieces of content, very relatable and useful to the target audience of regular surfers. That's what you need to strive for.

Be more than a person selling things, be more than a brand, instead become a source of genuinely useful information in the industry. Try to create a source of humour or commentary that resonates with those who would buy a custom shaped surfboard. To do this successfully you need to be very aware of the particularities of your market and your customers.

Kickstart search engine optimisation

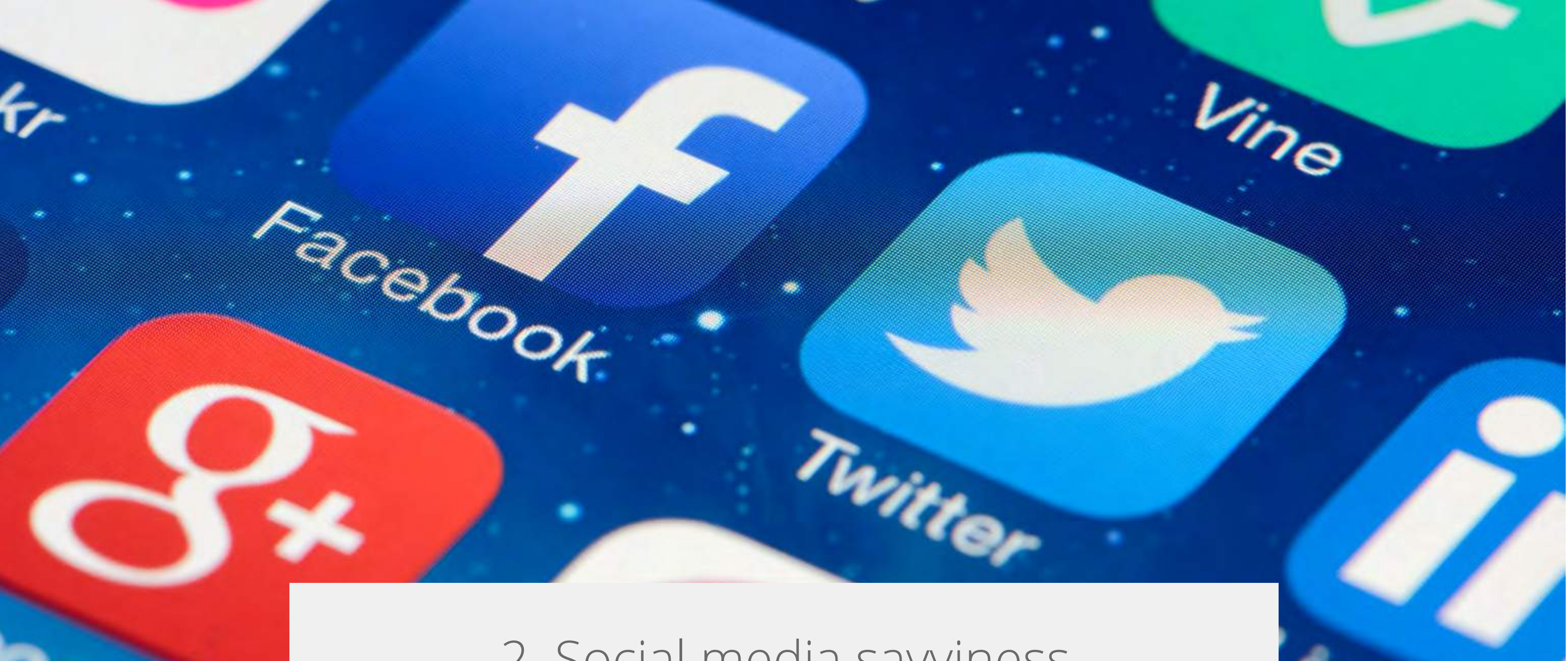
Another hidden benefit to creating high quality, honest, 'sales-free' blog content is that your SEO will get a natural boost, assisting your rankings in the eyes of the almighty king of search – Google. SEO optimisation and paid search will have their place, but original, regular and interesting content is absolutely paramount.

Write once, use indefinitely

The best part about curating a great quality and original blog is that you can reuse and redeploy and repurpose your content across a variety of 'delivery devices' to make sure your market gets a chance to read them. So in a nutshell, now you have a regular blog going you will also have what you need to fill your social channels!

Speaking of social...





2. Social media saviness

Social accounts have one thing in common – they are free and luckily, one of the best methods you have to get your message to market. Awesome. So how to maximise the benefits?

Pick your battles

Firstly, you need to pick your battles. There is no reason to go about spreading yourself thin by feeling the need to be represented on every form of social media you can list. Be picky.

For example, our surfboard shaper above would do very well from platforms like Instagram, as he will have very photo friendly products and associated imagery – sunsets at the beach, local kids carving up the surf, cocktails on the oceanfront... the potential subject matter for our mate at Wax On is very photogenic and highly shareable. Something that would not sit well with say, LinkedIn.

Alternatively, let's take a different example, a small software development house called 'Chrono Logic' working in the finance industry. Let's say they have developed a timesheet app and are looking to get a foothold in the market. Instagram is not your friend guys, you are more of a LinkedIn business, here is where the important conversations around more professional and business-like products and services live.

You certainly should not restrict yourself to one channel however, Facebook for example pretty much suits everyone and with its reach, is always a hot target. But be careful of being everything to everyone – you will invariably waste time and resources shouting into an empty room.

Host your content here and link back to it!

Create interesting infographics, videos and gifs, something clickable and shareable. Be genuine, know your audience and if in doubt, sponge ideas from your competitors. There are competitors out there that have spent tens of thousands on media teams and social experts so you don't need to! Don't steal... just borrow. There is no need to reinvent the wheel so be original in your specific posts but see what others do and why they do it.

A little goes a long way

You will have to drop some coin though for real traction. Social media for business is now a pay to play scenario. But fear not a little goes a long way so this is still very cheap in the big picture. So after you have written an excellent blog, posted a link image and teaser line on Facebook, look into boosting it with a few bucks to get it trending. Do a little google research into how others have boosted their content by paying 50 -100 bucks and glean their learnings. Again, to be cheap you can't reinvent the wheel, instead learn lessons from those who paid to learn them so you don't have to.





3. Pursue industry partnerships

These can be very lucrative indeed and the involved costs are minimised by sharing them with another business. How does it work? Team up with a brand that you share a target audience with to expand potential reach and gain new audience insights.

Let's take our two business examples, our surfboard shapers, Wax On and our timesheet app developers, Chrono Logic to see how each could form industry partnerships.

Wax On – Surfboard maker

Wax On will have a host of suitable businesses to approach. They can reach out to fin manufacturers, surf wax makers, wetsuit companies, local boardshort stitchers, even more obscure brands such as those who stock casual surf clothing, beach shelters, sun care, ice creams, even the local beach café.

What would this look like? Let's take the more obvious fin manufacturers. Every board needs fins so this would be an extremely easy partnership to form, let's say you co-create blogs, or share each other's on your unique networks. You allow them to put up content, ads or deals on your site or social channels and in turn they do the same to double the reach. Perhaps you can each review the other's products and do a post about your new board which you kitted out with their new fins, to great effect.

Essentially you can form a variety of co-branded marketing efforts, package deals for buying one of each and cost-split advertising. In this manner not only will your social be shared but your audience will be doubled and together you will be more than you are alone.

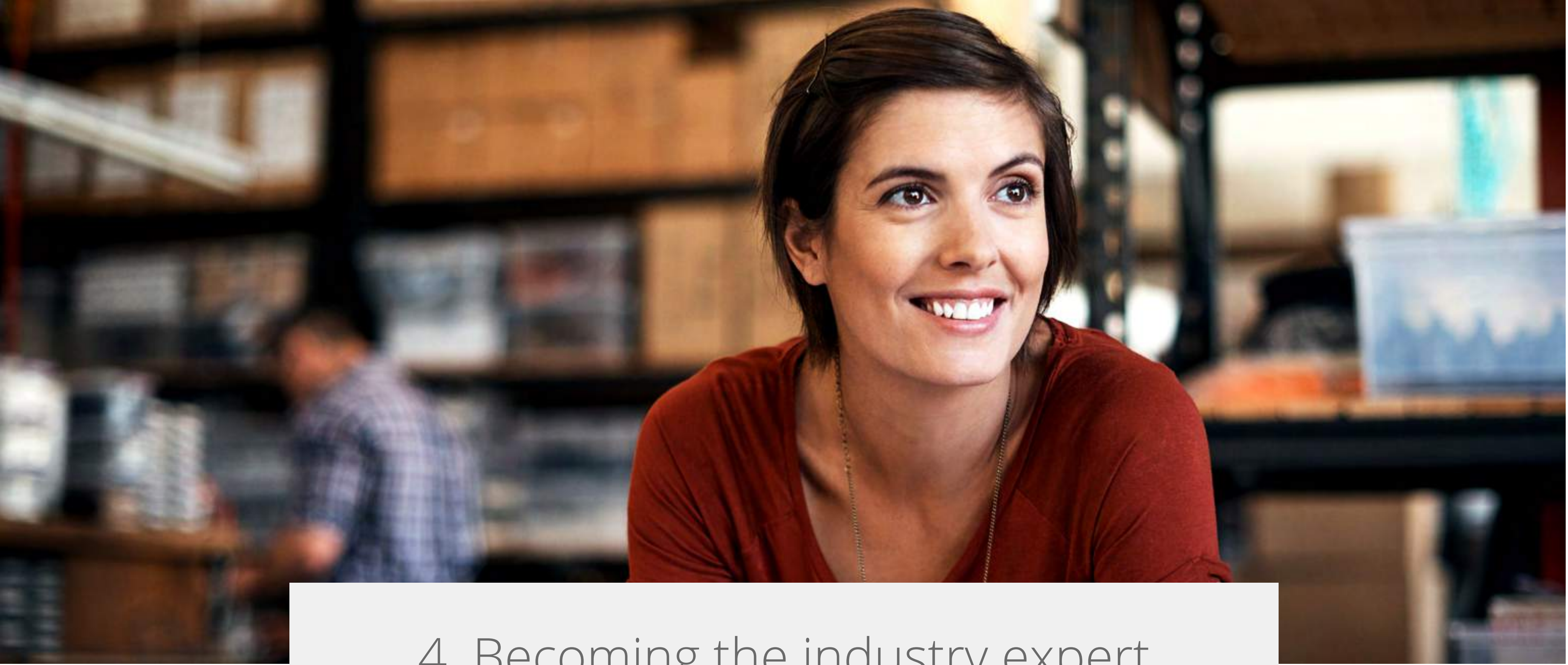
Chrono Logic – Timesheet app developers

What about our friends at Chrono Logic?

With a timesheet app, our friends at Chrono Logic will be very well suited looking to industry partners in the accounting industry, payroll industry and business project arenas.

Seek out established players that can use you as an add-on to their products. Assuming your timesheet app was developed to integrate with a variety of popular software products, these would be your first target. As above, you would approach them for opportunities to tap into their audience. You want to be able to have your content displayed to their users to easily seize a sizeable amount of interactions with your brand. The opportunities for co-sharing and co promoting would be similar to the above, however you may be playing a more minor role with these partners as they would tend to be your superior in terms of audience, brand and reach, so be prepared to negotiate. However, you would also have integrations and business opportunities to discuss with them, making your co-marketing efforts a very natural fit.





4. Becoming the industry expert

If you have been following the above you will already be creating high quality, original content, be connecting with industry partners and like brands, and be gaining momentum online. Time to put your name to it!

This is where you sew your name to your brand and put yourself out there as a source of knowledge. The benefits will trickle down in the form of sales and market penetration if you do this well.

Publish, don't advertise

An easy first step here is to reuse the blog content you have already created to be published in online magazines, webpages and established industry social channels.

You may have already considered advertising in these publications at great cost – banish this thought! You can be smarter and more effective than that, and mostly, do it for free!

Let's take Wax On to see what they might do here.

Peter Maxwell from Wax On has been shaping boards for decades, surfing since he was 8 years old and lived at the beach his whole life. He has checked out the full-page ad rates for Surfing World Magazine... they run into tens of thousands of dollars. Yeah, no.

But hang about, Peter has written a solid article on his blog page about DIY hacks

to repairing dings in your board! Approach the magazine as a contributor instead, more than likely, as long as you aren't name dropping or selling, they will be looking for this content and will publish it for free!

The upshot here is that they will give you an author credit and more often than not, a headshot and a bio line you can use to list your company.

"Peter Maxwell, board shaper at Wax On" sitting underneath a quality, interesting piece of content will do wonders for you as an industry expert and this profile will feed back into business awareness and thus sales. Repeat this process until you are blue in the face, better yet, make a series that fit together and feed them out one at a time. Again, this is being smart with what you already wrote for your blog. Don't reinvent, reuse.

Be creative with channels

Let's take our app developers Chrono Logic. The founder of the company, Kim Wexler, was a highly placed accounting expert working for KPMG when she and her business partners came up with a superior timesheet app and went into business. Kim has built up a wealth of knowledge when it comes to managing projects, modern accounting systems and payroll software. Similar to the above, she would best market her new venture by banking on her industry expertise and personality.

Kim would do well leveraging LinkedIn Groups for example, setting up her own discussion forums, chairing discussions on prominent and well-established Groups and hosting house made webinars on her channel.

Webinars on how to go about managing projects effectively would set her up as a dependable and useful industry expert while simultaneously pointing people to her business and social pages.

Furthermore she could be persistent in offering herself as a speaker at industry events, or offer herself for interviews in print and radio. The key is diversity and persistence. It will pay off in the end if you persevere and keep yourself at the forefront of your industry. Again, original content is key!





5. Don't neglect digital marketing

Yes, yes, these are broad and disparate topics but you will see that they really come together for a single purpose – visibility.

Here we have techniques that have become close to necessary in a modern digital era. They are not free unfortunately but with some savvy small investments you can make heroic gains in driving traffic to your website.

For all intents and purposes I'll assume your website is in decent shape and your social channels are well branded and populated. Now we need to put our money where our mouth is. All that good work above? It comes down to this.

Search engine optimisation is a necessary evil

This may cost, but if you do your research you should be able to get a really good head start. It starts with your original content (can't stress that enough, duplicate or copied content will kill you in the rankings) and ends with well indexed websites and a thorough understanding of key words your potential buyers use.

Grab a few of the guides you will find floating around the web, become something of an expert yourself, with easily accessed tools and you may even skip the SEO expert. You may want to invest in an expert here though, at least for 'pay as you go' technical advice, as it has become a necessary dark art to becoming highly visible in Google searches.

Throw some coin at paid social

As mentioned, you now need to pay to play. If you want your Facebook or LinkedIn post to have a wide reach and rank in people's feeds, you need to put some dollars behind it. You can't be passive anymore unless you have a monster following. But with good budgeting and a targeted approach, you will see that this can be done on the cheap. Pick your battles, if you have a blog post linked to your social that was particularly good, choose it and don't boost everything else – but heck if you can afford 50 bucks here and there – this is a great place to spend it.

Get onto Google AdWords

This is the reserve chute when SEO has not given you the high ranking you desire. So if the search term 'timesheets' for Chrono Logic or 'custom surfboard' for Wax On has not resulted in a high ranking – you can skip ahead and make immediate gains by using this keyword to activate your Google AdWords campaign. We have all seen these 'ads' in our google searches as the top three ranked results.

It works like this: set a daily budget (here is your thrift control) and name a keyword that people will most likely search to find you (worth asking an SEO expert). Now write a compelling ad and it's ready to go live!

If your poverty is worrying you, drop the budget or switch it off altogether. Easy!

Make sure customers can 'Google My Business'

Make an account and get populating your Google My Business profile (free of course) to ensure people can find you if you are operating from a physical space (Wax On better get to this one quickly). This ensures Google Maps as well as web searches net your business as a result. Be found and get your customers in the door with an easy listing as well as a place to house a business description, logos, taglines and even news and special offers.





Conclusion

If you have followed on above, you will notice that you have now spent... virtually nothing. A few bucks to boost social posts, a small AdWords and SEO budget, some creative or written asset - a lot of ingenuity and use of free social media and publishing opportunities. That's about it. But if you did it by investing your time well, and have the hard work behind you in terms of a quality product or service, that is sometimes all you need.

About Reckon

Here at Reckon we are more than just accounting software, we are a business solutions hub – and marketing is another way we are helping businesses grow.

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