

Advertising tips for small businesses

Every small business owner knows that cash flow can be a challenge - especially when you are just starting out.

In a world of increasingly sparse attention and vast amounts of advertising assailing your customers' senses, how do you make your business stand out? There are numerous portals offering free advertising but are these sites worth it?



Promoting your business

Darrell Cuthbert of WordTiffie Copywriting and Web Content, a company providing high-quality copywriting services to SMEs using the internet to grow their businesses, believes that it is. He had been using the classified Gumtree for a number of years as a buyer, but in 2010 decided to use the site in order to promote his business.

"I get a fair amount of quality enquiries from my ads and three of my long-term regular clients contacted me via the same process. They view one or more of my ads, go to my website for more information and then phone me. Small, local businesses that are both B2B and B2C focussed can definitely gain significant targeted exposure from classified ad sites like Gumtree."

Free classifieds may not seem like the ideal platform to promote your business, but if one considers the fact that Gumtree alone draws close to 6 million people to the site every day, coupled with sophisticated localised search functionality, it makes sense why companies like Cuthbert's are enjoying success online. They do it, simply, to be found - not necessarily to pitch the company with a flashy advertisement, but with a short concise description and a link to the site, where interested parties can drill down to the finer details of the transaction.

Cuthbert says he even advises his clients to use free classifieds the same way he does. "I usually recommend having a good company website and then using social media and classified ads to drive traffic to the site and generate enquiries and leads."

More examples

Chelsea, a small business owner from Cape Town that sells cane furniture agrees. "We've been using Gumtree for about five months now, since the day we opened. I can't tell you how much we sell or how much money we make but I can tell you that most of our online business comes through Gumtree," she says. "Our products are hand-made and brand new. I think the cool thing about Gumtree is they don't charge too much for a premium ad - I think it's about R199 - and if you have the right product or service (that people are looking for) then there is no reason why you shouldn't see your product / service selling."



Cuthbert says that there is a science to using free classifieds. "Spend some time identifying which category is right for your ads and analyse your competitors' ads. A little working knowledge of how search engines work (and your customers think) is also crucial. Work out what keywords or phrases potential customers are likely to search for. Place alerts on these words and phrases to keep you in touch with what competitors are doing. Include as many of the keywords and search phrases as possible in the title and body of your ad, while keeping it sounding natural. Place several ads, one giving a general overview and a few others each highlighting a different aspect of your business offering."

Visual aids

Visual impact is still very important according to Cuthbert. "Include at least one relevant image in each ad. Don't be afraid to

be different and a little unconventional - add little creativity and appropriate flair to your ads."

He remains convinced that small business owners can draw value from classifieds - even if the ad placement is free. "In my opinion, online classified ads are one of the best ways for a small business or freelance worker / consultant to market their services - especially when their target clients are based in a particular country, province or city," he concludes.

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