



## Market to prospective, current customers

Last week's column discussed the issues that businesses had obtaining financing in 2011. Despite that hardship, entrepreneurs looked for ways of growing their businesses through marketing, specifically low-cost ideas to stimulate their business. "I saw more existing businesses working on their business," said Robert Jahnke, owner of Top Hat Marketing and a Green Bay SCORE counselor. "They came to SCORE looking for marketing ideas."

Social media was a frequent topic. Small-business owners felt like they were being left behind if they didn't get involved, but were confused about how to get started. "Marketing is changing rapidly, and there is a fear of the unknown," Jahnke said. "It's important to remember that you'll never grow your business if you're afraid to get a little uncomfortable."

SCORE tried to ease some of the discomfort with step-by-step workshops available at [e-businessnow.org](http://e-businessnow.org). The topics covered include everything from creating a website to making YouTube videos. Worksheets helped entrepreneurs apply the information to their businesses.

For those preferring a handout, Jahnke created a summary of marketing ideas for SCORE clients (also available at [greenbayscore.org](http://greenbayscore.org)). A firm believer in focusing first on existing clients, he says there are three ways to grow a business: increase clients, increase transactions, and increase transaction frequency. "We all need new customers but don't spend enough effort trying to keep them. Too often, businesses spend their marketing efforts on new customers while the existing customers walk out the back door," Jahnke said. He says businesses grow by retaining current customers and obtaining new ones. A survey showed that 68 percent of customers leave a business because they feel unappreciated. It is important to create a relationship and make customers feel like they matter. This can be accomplished by providing valuable information and services.

Email newsletters are important tools as are coupons, helpful tips, mobile marketing, loyalty programs, promotional items and special events. "Stay in contact with the customers you have," Jahnke said.

Social media makes it easier than ever to communicate with clients and increase the number of clients. It is commonly advised that business owners put systems in place to capture email addresses, but many fail to do so. It should be an ongoing process to keep lists current. About 20 percent of email addresses are changed each year.

At the same time, it is important to know where your customers are and not assume that everyone uses the Internet. "People over 50 years of age have 80 percent of all of the assets, but they are also less likely to be online. Right now is the best time to be customer based, but you need to go where they are," Jahnke said.

**Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt is co-owner of DB Commercial Real Estate in Green Bay and district director for SCORE, Wisconsin.**