

This system can as quickly rise you to fame and fortune, also serve to destroy your image and reputation if you deviate from the fundamental original principles that you initially promoted and were recognised for.

A LITTLE PLANNING AND CREATIVITY CAN MAKE FOR A SUCCESSFUL MARKETING DRIVE THAT BRINGS CUSTOMERS TO YOUR DOOR. AND REMEMBER, THIS SHOULDN'T JUST BE A ONCE-OFF EVENT WHEN RUNNING THE BUSINESS OR WHEN TIMES ARE TOUGH. MARKETING SHOULD BE PART OF YOUR QUARTERLY/ ANNUAL BUSINESS PLANNING AND ONCE THE CUSTOMER HAS BEEN ENTICED, YOUR CORE BUSINESS DELIVERABLE (SERVICE AND PRODUCT) MUST THEN DISTINGUISH YOU FROM OTHERS.

NETWORKING

The value of networking opportunities to make your company visible should not be underestimated. But no matter how outgoing your personality, you must have a clear strategy when attending networking events.

Networking is the new buzzword for doing business and there are many formal and informal ways of creating this type of occasion to get your business profiled. Regular lunch dates, socials, cocktail functions with clients or the odd round of golf to events arranged by local business chambers are such opportunities. The theme in marketing is constant interaction and reinforcement in a non-forceful but inviting and unthreatening manner with your clients and potential clients.

The key word here is "regular". While time is often an issue for the average entrepreneur, you need to put networking high on your list of priorities. Not every event will produce a business deal, but the intention is to develop relationships, build your list of contacts and for you to come to their mind when the need for your services arises.

TIPS TO BEING AN EFFECTIVE NETWORKER:

- Your image, branding, grooming etiquette and business card on hand are simple areas to give attention in preparation for planned interactions.
- Confidence is key! Even if meeting new people is not your forte', don't be afraid to approach people. Often, many of the attendees are just as nervous as you are, so they will appreciate you breaking the ice. This will get easier as you attend more events.
- Be strategic about who you speak to. Make a point of talking to a few people you have never met before. It's pointless speaking to only people you know, or those who will never bring you business or may never need your service.
- Do as much listening as talking. By being genuinely interested in what the other person has to say, you'll be able to ask thoughtful and insightful questions. In this way, you build relationships that could bear mutual benefit over time. Exchanging e-mail addresses and keeping each other updated on what you're doing could result in work opportunities or viable business leads.
- You don't have to speak to everyone in the room. A few meaningful interactions are better than having many forgettable conversations. Having said that, don't monopolise one person's time. Be able to give a brief description of what you do and don't forget to follow up. If you've made some good contacts, follow up on these. A brief e-mail post the event to merely say you enjoyed meeting them will put you on their radar for possibly interacting on future business.

These pointers form just the pinnacle of an effective networking strategy. Now that you've planned your approach, start getting yourself out there.

Further useful information can also be obtained from the Contractor Management Guidelines; CMG 101, available from the cidb website at <http://www.cidb.org.za>.



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**Contractor Tips & Advice:
MARKETING YOUR CONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISE**

INTRODUCTION

Marketing can be defined in simple terminology as activities executed by any business with the objective to place product or/ and service in the hands and top of mind of potential customers. It includes diverse disciplines like sales, public relations, pricing, packaging, and distribution.

Marketing your enterprise is essential to help create and define an enterprises' image- especially in today's competitive market. This is especially relevant when operating in the private sector where contractors are invited to quote or tender, as compared to an open tender system used in the public sector. Because Construction Enterprises provide specialised and complex services which are very different from other products and services, creating and making known a professional and memorable image of your construction business is particularly vital and challenging.

A construction business needs to inform potential clients that your services are distinguished and that your business strives for excellence. There are several businesses in the market competing for the same business opportunities, forcing that the appointment of one business over the other be based over and above just pricing. This makes it necessary for you to ensure that your potential clients know why your service is better than that of your competitors.

Marketing your enterprise also helps your business to break into the market for long term survival and sustainability of your enterprise.

Marketing is a part of overall business strategy which should be actively used to promote your products and services. It is imperative that marketing strategies are clearly established and defined. If a company lacks the marketing skills to properly promote the business, then it becomes difficult for the business to survive and reap profits. A business should have the ability to analyse the respective sector efficiently and sufficiently to have a complete marketing strategy to make an impact in that market/sector.

MARKETING CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE TO A CONTRACTOR'S SUSTAINABILITY AND PROFITABILITY.

The more you market your business, and you deliver on the promise of your business to clients the more likely the business is to prosper. Marketing your business has to be executed correctly, else it will just be an expense lost to futile efforts. There are several types of marketing tools and activities that can be utilised to ensure effective marketing.

Firstly you need to set-up your marketing goal(s) and budget, and most importantly choose the best marketing medium for your services and value offerings.

There are many ways to advertise, but only a few will be suitable for your product/service to reach your target clientele. Selecting the right medium should yield you the highest return on your marketing budget. To ensure this, you need to go for the most suitable marketing medium which has the highest potential to deliver the message to your prospective customers. Different types of marketing mediums to consider include:

PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

These are the items which the business uses to create exposure and market itself. These items include brochures, business cards, and other relevant items reflecting your logo. Promotional items are important and when utilised and distributed effectively the marketing becomes a success as the business tends to become entrenched in the space and mind of potential clients and other businesses.

Promotional items and activities should include details on

- The name of the business
- Your core business
- Business location
- Business contact details
- Previous projects by the business
- Current projects by the business
- Recommendations and success stories from other clients reflecting that the construction business is the best at that work
- Reasons for clients to contract your construction business rather than others (your competitive edge).

It is essential that all information provided is accurate. Inaccuracy of information or malfunction of the promotional gift provided may lead client to have a negative perception of your construction business as they might associate the business services to the quality of items/information provided.

Promotional tools should not be too expensive and should leave a lasting impression. Making an investment in promotional tools is a smart business decision especially for small organisation and businesses which need to introduce themselves in the market.

INTERNET AND ONLINE TOOLS

One of the most common, effective and important marketing tools is the internet and the World Wide Web. Most enterprises make use of internet as a marketing tool as well as a platform to identify possible Service Providers because this medium is the most accessed platform in the world. The internet also gives the facility to implement marketing strategies at a much cheaper rate than other print and media modes of communication. More clients are attracted to businesses that are promoted online which might result in significant increase in your sales. There are several strategies, innovative and unique web designs that can be deployed over the internet for marketing purpose. It is also advisable to consider utilising internet based social networks for marketing purposes as it allows instant and constant interaction with people or forums within your business sector.

REFERRAL SYSTEM

Another successful marketing activity is a targeted approach to networking, which includes joining and interacting with established associations; clubs and forums. Another important tool that is mostly out of your control is 'word of mouth' because as a business owner you cannot force clients and previous clients to talk positively of your services and products unless their experience is a positive and impressive one. Referral systems includes making use of other companies to advertise your business for you. The power of this system is however dependant on a distinguished level of service and customer satisfaction, reputation, ethics and quality of performance and deliverables being impeccable.