

Engaging Small Business through Effective Marketing

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Author: Carolyn Merriman, president

Acme Trucking, a small operation in your city, seems like it should be an “easy sell.” After all, the owner Bill Acme, is always there, so getting access to the decision-maker is a no-brainer. In addition, the Emergency Department has done some of his drug screens—and you have a clinic that is within five miles of his firm.

While working with Acme and other small business enterprises seems like it should be easier, in fact, these are often more difficult sales. These companies are a constant reminder that our marketing strategy, message and approach must be adjusted to meet the needs of each business.

However, that’s not to say that we need to start from scratch since there are some commonalities in this market. The starting point is to reflect on the small business prospect and what makes this kind of company successful. Then, we’ll help you evaluate how to utilize your collateral materials and messages to meet your prospect’s critical occupational health needs.

Small Business Basics

Small business owners are driven by passion. Many individuals who chose to start their own business do so because they have a passion. This is an important differentiation from those leaders or staff who get their positions based on skills. What makes the restaurant owner successful is likely his passion for food—but he may lack the well-rounded business skills to support this.

The bottom line is a personal thing. The owner is often the person who makes all the major financial decisions and feels personal accountability for payroll. If the company does not make money, the owner is the person who accompanies the controller to ask for a loan. At that level, all the decisions are very personal. That’s one reason why smaller companies are less impressed with statistics and more interested in their personal gains.

Risk is calculated differently in the small business world. Though the math is much the same, the small business owner is certainly less driven to minimize risk than bigger companies with boards, stockholder investments and published earnings. Occupational health marketing materials might talk about many risk-reducing services for the large industry. But keep in mind that this approach may not serve you as well with the smaller ones.

Small business may not have a benefits manager.... or a human resources expert or an operations executive, or a CFO or many of the other specialists that we assume in a

large company. The approach needs to be targeted to the level (or lack) of expertise the owner has regarding the subject. Just think about the fact that many people within your organization are uncertain what occupational health does, then multiply it by ten!

Marketing Materials and Messages

While you as a marketer will need to be flexible in your style and approach based on the type of business, here are some considerations when you target the small business owner:

- When designing collateral materials, make sure the messages lend themselves to the smaller audiences as well as large ones.
- Assess your current materials and process. Evaluate messages, materials and activities in groups according to your target audiences.
- If small business is one of your target groups, how many of your messages work for this group?
- Adapt the presentation to learning about their passion, simplify your offer supports this interest.
- If they can't understand it, they won't buy it. Don't use industry language or jargon. Provide simple sound bites of information and include only what is relevant to them.
- Schedule meetings just like you do for the big companies. Just because the owner is always around doesn't mean he's waiting for you to drop in.
- Get involved with your local chamber of commerce. Many have small business councils; see what they're offering. Consider hosting a small business educational event with the Chamber. When you present, remember the audience.
- Recognize that many small business people will buy in pieces and parts. The key here is to getting something sold and then proving value.
- Consider a one page, desktop-produced flyer that demonstrates win-win for the small business. Client testimonials, quotes and stories of success and/or recognition should be featured.
- Make the purchase easy and seamless. Don't expect the owner to go to your Web site, read much or come to a presentation. Respect their schedule and make it easy for them to use your clinic and services.
- Postcard mailings are ideal for this customer group. Again, their time is limited, and the postcard can quickly remind them of you. This is a very effective tool for packaging a snippet of education and the call to action.
- Consider a day for training and development if you are launching a new small business initiative. Make sure your staff role-plays the scenarios and is able to clearly differentiate advantages for this audience.

Small business owners are on the increase in the U.S. And this group is a major contributor to the economy and represents a market opportunity for many programs within the occupational health portfolio. Take the time to tailor your programs to this audience. You'll reap new opportunities in your marketplace—and pave the way for future growth in this ever-important business segment.



Carolyn Merriman, FRSA, President, Corporate Health Group,
www.corporatehealthgroup.com, 1-888-334-2500