

# The Zero-Budget MARKETING PLAN

FOR EQUINE BUSINESS OWNERS



A Resource Guide: Leveraging Today's Best  
Free Marketing Tools For Widespread Visibility



EQUINE OFFICE  
Solutions

# THE ZERO-BUDGET MARKETING PLAN

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A Resource Guide: Leveraging Today's Best Free Marketing Tools  
For Widespread Visibility

By: Carol M. Aldridge, Founder & CEO  
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[www.EquineOfficeSolutions.com](http://www.EquineOfficeSolutions.com)

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## INTRODUCTION

Every professional business consultant will recommend creating a marketing plan as one of the first steps to success for any business. The equine industry is no exception. However, this step is often overlooked by bootstrapping entrepreneurs and small business owners operating on a shoestring budget. Let's face it - traditional advertising is expensive! But luckily, with a little creativity and some hard work, there are a wide variety of ways that you can "get the word out" about your products and services to the greater equine community without breaking the bank!

Let's get started! First, review the basic components of a successful marketing plan outlined below. Then, follow the suggestions and resources provided to help you create a customized marketing plan that will lead to worldwide visibility for your equine business without spending a dime!

## COMPONENTS OF A BASIC MARKETING PLAN

A marketing plan doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, a simpler marketing plan will be easier to follow, and therefore you will be more likely to stick to it. It's also not a static document. I recommend revisiting your marketing plan on a monthly or quarterly basis to gauge your success and make adjustments as needed. Remember, there's no one exact way to create a marketing plan. It's up to you to include what best suits your individual business. Here are some important components to consider when creating your personalized marketing plan:

### **ESTABLISH YOUR GOALS**

What would you like to achieve over the next three, six and twelve month period? Would you like to double your number of regular customers, reach a certain income level, expand into a higher or wider portion of the industry, etc. In short, you won't ever reach your goals if you don't have them clearly outlined. So take some time to write it all down and adjust as necessary to make sure your goals are achievable.

### **RECOGNIZE YOUR TARGET MARKET**

Who are your customers likely to be? Are they 'twenty somethings' just out of college, male, female, career women over thirty, housewives with teenagers, or second career retired professionals? Regardless, it's extremely important for you to know who you are marketing to before you even begin to create your marketing plan. So take a good, long look at what you are offering, and who you're most likely to benefit. Then look at your best existing customers, and combine all of this to create an image of your "ideal customer". This is who you should direct your marketing to. It's tempting to try to be all things to all people, but the experts all agree, a focused target market will reap much more success than trying to market to a broad general audience. Divide and conquer!

### **KNOW YOUR COMPETITION**

You may think that your competition is your enemy. Wrong. Although you are vying for the same portion of the market, it's a much better strategy is to build alliances with your competitors. Obviously your competitors are those who are offering the same goods and services that you are. But they are also those who are offering goods and services to your target market that you haven't thought of or developed yet. Pay attention to everything your competitors do. Follow

them on social media. Google their business name. Then reach out to them. That's right, let them know you are there, and even consider forming an alliance with them. You could join forces to produce webinars or other promotional and educational materials, working together to build contacts. It doesn't always end in a bed of roses, and they may even play dirty, but as the saying goes, keep your friends close and your enemies (competition) closer.

## **ESTABLISH YOUR UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION**

Your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is what potential clients use to determine why they should do business with you. Once you are familiar with your target market and your competition, you are ready to create your personalized USP. Here are some questions to ask: What makes your business stand out in the crowd?

What emotional needs are being met by customers using your product or service?

Create short, concise phrases that answer your customer's question: "What's in it for me?"

## **CREATE A BUDGET**

For the purpose of this publication, we are keeping the "Zero-Budget" in mind, but if you find that you do have some funds available, even a few hundred dollars over the course of the year would help your efforts tremendously. Be very selective, and consider investing any possible marketing dollars in networking group memberships, targeted ads and promoted posts on social media.

## **CREATE A MARKETING CALENDAR**

Your marketing calendar should be set up to cover the next twelve months. I use Google calendar, since I can access it anywhere and view all of my calendars at once. But you can use any format that you are most comfortable with. Once you read the following chapters, you will have a better idea of what items to incorporate into your marketing calendar, but I would expect you'll most likely include things like blog post publication dates, social media posts, news posts to industry trade & networking associations, ad publication dates, networking events, etc. Set realistic, achievable goals with deadlines and reminders and remember to track your progress. I record dates of significant marketing events, and then I check in on Google Analytics to see how successful they were in relation to website visits.

## **RESOURCES:**

[10 Components for a Good Marketing Plan](#)

[Why a Marketing Strategy Is So Important & How to Create One](#)

[Sample Marketing Plan Template](#)

[10 Reasons to Create a Simple Marketing Plan](#)

[Easy Steps to Creating a Marketing Plan](#)

[Take 15 Minutes to Find Your Winning Difference](#)



## WHAT IS INBOUND MARKETING?

To understand the difference between Inbound and Outbound Marketing, think about watching your favorite tv show. If you have a DVR you are probably going to skip right past the commercials because they are not necessarily offering anything you are looking for. That's Outbound Marketing. Ads in a newspaper are Outbound Marketing. They put their message in front of the masses hoping someone will like what they're selling. Although often creative, their tactics can be invasive and are sometimes pushy and coercive.

Boldthinkcreative.com sums up Inbound Marketing this way: "The idea of inbound marketing is that you target a core audience by providing useful and quality content to entice them into finding out more about your products or services. So, in essence, you give them something in order to get them to come to you. This is an effective strategy for a number of reasons. First of all, you'll be targeting consumers who are actually looking for products and services that you provide, instead of trying to advertise to every consumer out there, no matter what their needs are." We'll explore several effective tools for your inbound marketing strategy in later chapters. Stay tuned!

### **RESOURCES:**

[Marketing and Advertising Tips](#)

[Inbound Methodology](#)

[Inbound vs Outbound Marketing](#)

[Nine Rules of Inbound Selling](#)

[How to Build a Better Inbound Marketing Machine](#)

## EFFECTIVE AND AFFORDABLE (FREE) WEBSITES

If you own a business - any type of business - a website is an absolute must if you're going to be successful in your marketing efforts.

### CONSIDER YOUR DESIGN & HOSTING OPTIONS

Although you can create a completely free website through services such as Weebly.com, Wix.com and Web.com to name just a few, some of them include ads on your site (Weebly does not) and your web address will look something like [www.74820hfk0.weebly.com](http://www.74820hfk0.weebly.com). I highly recommend purchasing your own business domain name usually for about \$10-\$50/year to portray a professional image to your potential customers. WordPress is the #1 website platform today, and the other services mentioned above also allow even beginners with no web design experience to quickly and easily create a basic website with a professional design and additional features such as an integrated blog, contact forms, SEO functionality, eCommerce capability and customization.

### COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE WEBSITE

When designing your site, first decide on the purpose of the website, and then choose the colors, basic layout, navigational structure and intention of each page. Consider function, branding, and navigation.

We'll discuss list building in a later chapter, but for now, suffice to say, you will want to have a method for subscribers to sign-up to receive your newsletter or blog posts via email. The subscribe box should be located in a prominent spot (top right of the home page) and preferably it should have it's own dedicated web page or landing page as well, describing the free resource you are offering in exchange for their subscription.

Try to think ahead to your future needs. For example, it's often recommended that your blog be integrated within your website so that your readers and potential customers will have one location to find all of the information about your business. They can read your blog article and then quickly find your site's navigation menu to continue exploring your products and services. Even if you don't have plans to start a blog in the near future, it helps to have the capabilities for one incorporated behind the scenes in the design from the start.

Sketch it all out on paper, then begin populating your site with professional content and graphics (watch out for copyright issues). It's also always wise to secure a proofreader before the site goes live to assure the content is a positive reflection of your business.

## **SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)**

The topic of SEO could literally be a book unto itself, but I'll try to give you the very simple basics here with extended resources below that you can review at your convenience. One thing is for sure, Google's focus and recommendations for SEO keeps changing, so be sure you have the most up to date information when attempting any in depth SEO work. But the following remains true:

SEO can be divided into two main areas:

- *Off-page SEO* - (work that takes place separate from the website). This usually entails creating backlinks or links leading back to content on your website. See the section on Promoting Your Content & Link Building later in this document.
- *On-page SEO* - These are keywords, hyperlink anchor text, image alt tags, meta tags, title tags, etc.

## **GOOGLE ANALYTICS**

The final consideration for your website is installing Google Analytics. This is a must if you are going to be able to track the success of your marketing efforts. Your inbound marketing will attempt to lead people to your website, and therefore this tool is essential in determining what efforts brought in traffic, where your visitors are coming from, what pages they are visiting, how long they are staying, etc. And, of course, Google Analytics is free!

## **RESOURCES**

[Five Components of an Effective Website](#)

[How to Build a Website with Weebly \(Video\)](#)

[Three Easy Ways to Set Up Your Own Website](#)

[10 Components of Effective Website Design](#)

[Wordpress Tutorial](#)

[SEO Tutorial for Beginners](#)

[A Beginner's Guide to Google Analytics](#)

[A Beginner's Guide to SEO](#)

[The Best Free Stock Photography Websites](#)

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

If your business doesn't have a presence on the major social media platforms, you're missing out on a huge audience. In fact, you should claim your business name and keep a respectable presence & profile on all of the major networks (I use the free BufferApp service to broadcast posts across the 4 major networks), and then focus on those one or two that work best for your specific business. Remember to keep your posts conversational and informative, and post on a regular basis. Connect with your audience and build relationships. This is networking, so direct sales tactics are generally not well received. Remember, it's "Social" media for business.

### **FACEBOOK**

Facebook statistics boast over 1.26 billion users to date and growing (as of December 2013), making it by far the #1 resource for free business marketing! Without a doubt, one reason for its popularity is that it is an extremely user-friendly application. Anyone can do it! Once your business profile is created, invite your friends, family and other contacts to "Like" your page, and be sure to post brief, informative, interesting items several times a day.

### **LINKEDIN**

LinkedIn is THE place to be if you are trying to market a professional small business. Like any other social media application, it's based on networking and therefore takes some regular time and effort. To gain maximum exposure on LinkedIn, join groups that attract your target audience. Then establish yourself by posting informative and interesting brief articles that your readers can quickly absorb, share and use! And remember to 'give back' by 'liking' and commenting on other member posts frequently.

### **GOOGLE+**

Basically Google is the king of the search engines, so every business marketer wants to be in their good graces. Google+ will raise your status with "King Google". As explained by Abraham Aboraya of the Orlando Business Journal, "Everything you post on Google+ is indexed by Google's search engine. So when you post about how your soup is the best soup in all of, say Greensboro, your ranking gets a boost whenever someone googles "what's the best soup in Greensboro." It's as simple as that.

## **TWITTER**

Twitter is ideal for sharing real-time news and updates. You can say a lot in 140 characters or less if you keep your message concise. (Those last two sentences were a total of 135 characters including spaces.) It's an excellent platform for connecting directly with potential customers, especially the 'under 30' audience. The conversation is casual on Twitter, and people respond best to friendly, personal style tweets. As on all social media platforms, remember to thank those who share (or retweet) your posts and always reply to comments.

## **YOUTUBE**

YouTube is quickly becoming the go-to media of choice for direct marketing, as well as indirect promotional videos. Your audience wants to be engaged in your content, and YouTube is an easy, free, universal tool for getting your message out there. Consider creating a short, personal introduction, just you in your element, be it in the office, out in the barn, at a trade show, etc. Post this to your website or include it in a welcome email to new subscribers to help them get to know you better. It will go a long way toward building relationships and establishing credibility with your potential customers. There are hundreds of ways to use YouTube for your business. Give it a try, with today's smart phone capabilities it's easier than you think.

## **PINTEREST**

In short, Pinterest can serve as a highly effective source of traffic for your website if used properly and consistently. Your audience is already on Pinterest, shopping, researching and discovering their interests. For more information on how to use Pinterest to promote your business, check out: [Equine Businesses Receive Massive Marketing Success with Pinterest](#)

**OTHER ONLINE NETWORKS....** Instagram, Vine, Snapchat...and there are more popping up everyday! Social media is here to stay, so dive in and enjoy!

**TIP:** Promote your social media pages in your email signature block, stationary, brochures and all other marketing materials and you will soon see your fan base grow.

## **RESOURCES:**

[How Do You Use LinkedIn](#)

[100 Smart Ways To Use LinkedIn](#)

[The Conversation Prism](#)

[How to Choose the Best Social Media Platform for Your Business](#)

[How To Use Google+ for Business](#)

[Twitter for Business](#)

[Equine Businesses Receive Massive Marketing Success with Pinterest](#)

[The Hidden Benefits of Social Media Marketing](#)

[Convert Facebook Fans into Customers](#)

[Facebook Fan Page vs. Profile](#)

## **CONTENT MARKETING & LINK BUILDING**

Content marketing remains one of today's key promotional tools for any business. Have you ever wondered where all those articles come from in magazines, on websites and even in blog posts? Usually, if you read between the lines, someone is covertly selling or promoting a product or service. It's not a direct marketing tactic, but it can be even more effective, especially if you gear your article's message to emotionally connect with your target audience.

### **WHAT IS ARTICLE MARKETING**

Article marketing is the central key element of inbound marketing. It incorporates submitting articles to industry specific websites and publications, blogging, distributing press releases, etc. and can be extremely effective in increasing your website's search engine rankings, building brand awareness and credibility and driving traffic to your site.

Write concise, quality articles while keeping in mind that your reader's attention span is short, so edit extensively and use sub headings and bullets whenever possible. Also, remember to use keywords and include links to your other articles, services and website when appropriate. Finally, a resource box placed at the bottom of the article is an extremely effective form of promotion, and usually includes such items as a photo of the author or company logo, author and/or company bio and contact info including a link to your website.

### **BLOGGING**

Blogging is another very effective form of article marketing, usually directed toward your current subscribers. Once you've decided to take the plunge and create your own blog, you will find a variety of free platforms to choose from including Tumblr, Blogster, Blogger, Weebly and WordPress to name just a few. Whichever you choose, be sure to schedule your posts for regular distribution, be it daily, weekly or monthly. Keep to a schedule and assure that each post provides information relevant to your target market. And remember, your blog is a reflection of your business, so create a design that identifies your brand and be sure each post is professional and appealing. Again, it's also a good idea to secure a proofreader to assure there are no typos or spelling or grammatical errors.

### **CONTRIBUTE AS A GUEST BLOGGER**

If you haven't had the time to create and maintain your own blog, or you would just like some

added exposure, consider writing as a guest blogger for other complimentary businesses that share your same target audience. This is a very effective and easy way to gain visibility with an extended market and increase credibility with the people you want to reach most. Often, others will welcome your posts, if topic appropriate and well written, as it saves them the effort of writing that particular month's post themselves.

## **DISTRIBUTE PRESS RELEASES**

Consider distributing a press release whenever anything newsworthy occurs within your business. For example, you hire a new employee, publish a new article, attend a trade show, launch a new website or blog, have an event or activity planned, add a service or product, partner with an associate, win an award, etc. You get the picture. Here are some steps to successful press release marketing:

- Research targeted websites and publications to determine the correct name and email address of the editor.
- Maintain a spreadsheet or CRM to track your distributions
- Send your press release with a personal note to begin to establish a relationship with the individual media professionals
- Include the press release as plain text within your email (never as an attachment)
- Include 'high resolution images upon request' at the bottom. Never include images in the email itself.
- Always include complete contact information and a resource box.

## **EBOOK PUBLICATION**

Writing and selling (or distributing free) eBooks is one of the most beneficial forms of free marketing today. The popularity of eBooks is growing by leaps and bounds, so jump on the bandwagon or you'll quickly be left behind. It can also be an excellent form of residual income. Publish once, promote, and enjoy ongoing sales. There are numerous sites to choose from when publishing your eBook, including Amazon, Google books, Smashwords, Wattpad, Barnes & Noble, BookBaby and iBooks to name a few.

## **CONTENT PROMOTION & LINK BUILDING**

Okay, so you've written and edited your first great article, blog post or eBook. Now you can sit back and wait for the masses to come flocking to your door, right? Wrong. The most important step is now at hand - promoting your content! There are numerous ways to promote your



valuable content and I recommend that you implement all of these and keep a checklist to track your progress.

- Post your new content directly on your website
- Add social sharing buttons so your readers can do your marketing for you!
- Share a link to the content on all your social media pages
- Post your content/article to sites such as Ezine Articles, Squidoo, Technoradi and others
- Send your article to your email subscribers
- Distribute a press release about your content

## **RESOURCES:**

[Blogging Basics](#)

[Blog Tips](#)

[Where To Submit Your Articles](#)

[The Top 10 Benefits of Article Marketing](#)

[What is Content Curation?](#)

[How Press Releases Generate Publicity](#)

[Press Release Tips](#)

[Complete Guide To Writing An Effective Press Release](#)

[How to Publish an eBook](#)

[11 Top Free Article Submission Sites](#)

## EMAIL MARKETING & LIST BUILDING

When it comes to email marketing, there are several services to choose from, but Mailchimp is by far the best free service available today. A free account allows you to send up to 2000 professionally designed emails and e-newsletters per month. This outstanding service provides beautiful designer templates as well as several integrated features, including automated blog-to-email, Facebook integration and more. It's simple to use and will give your email correspondence a professional, cutting-edge feel. Be sure to practice legitimate list-building techniques and reward your contacts with regular emails or newsletters providing valuable information.

*Some basic tips for successful email marketing include:*

- Know your audience
- Only send permission based emails
- Always include a way for them to unsubscribe
- Never share your list with others
- Always strive to strengthen customer relationships
- Keep your message personal and casual, not sales based
- Carefully craft your subject line

### WHAT IS LIST BUILDING?

List building is the practice of growing an audience of subscribers who have agreed to directly receive your content via email. It usually entails incorporating a 'subscribe' box in a prominent location on your website, and offering a free resource or publication in exchange for their email address or subscription. MailChimp provides everything you need to make this all happen. All you have to do is create the free resource. And although it is a very user friendly service, you may want to have an expert walk you through it the first time. Once your system is set up, it's a breeze to continually keep in touch with your subscribers and promote your business via email.

### RESOURCES:

[How to Build a Large, Engaged Audience](#)

[Getting Started With MailChimp](#)

[25 Clever Ways to Grow Your Subscriber List](#)

[60 Amazing Email Marketing Tips](#)

[34 Tips for Email Marketing Success](#)

[8 Basic Email Marketing Basics to Remember](#)

[Building Your Email List](#)

## **NETWORKING & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**

TIP: Once your business starts growing, allocating a small budget toward memberships in key networking groups and industry specific associations will expand your reach to a new segment of your targeted market both online and in your local area.

### **TARGET YOUR INNER CIRCLE**

Contact your extended family, friends and associates to keep them updated on your business, and invite them to subscribe to your blog or newsletter. Consider all the people you are connected to already as suppliers or business associates such as your farrier, hay & feed supplier, vets, mechanic, accountant, etc. Your best fans are those who know and love you already! Keep them in the loop; they will be your greatest source of referrals.

### **ATTEND LOCAL NETWORKING EVENTS**

In this age of online everything, it's easy to disregard the power of personal interaction. However, it remains clear that face-to-face networking is still one of the most effective forms of promotion. Networking is all about building relationships, and there's no faster way to do this than to actually meet and speak with your peers and prospective clients in person. Of course, be sure to promptly follow-up with your new contacts. Without follow-up, networking is just about worthless. So get out there and give it a try, if you haven't already. You'll be amazed at the results!

### **SOCIAL MEDIA**

Follow industry leaders on social media and comment and offer helpful information whenever possible. Soon you'll find you are establishing relationships with even the most prominent experts!

### **MANAGE YOUR CONTACTS**

A Contact Relationship Management (CRM) application is nothing more than a database designed to keep track of your contacts and chronological interactions. It allows for each contact record to include comments (tracking interactions), tags for organizational grouping (media, prospective client, active client, etc), and reminders. Some social CRM apps even track

your contacts' social media activity so you can easily interact with them there in a timely manner as well. I use Highrise HQ as a free basic CRM, but there are others like Zoho that seem to work just as well.

### **OFFER TO TRADE SERVICES**

The barter system is alive and well! Once you've been introduced or have become fairly well acquainted with someone who you feel would be a potential client or good referral source for your business, offer to volunteer or trade services. This is an excellent way to 'get your foot in the door', become better acquainted and really spotlight your excellent product or service. In this case, it's definitely best to give more than you receive!

### **ASK FOR REFERRALS**

We all know that word of mouth is often the most effective form of advertising. However, just sitting back and waiting for a client to tell their friends about you may not be the most efficient way to take advantage of this opportunity. Go out there and ask your top clients for a referral! Be sure to also offer them an enticing incentive, and soon you'll have new clients knocking at your door.

### **GATHER TESTIMONIALS**

If you are providing a quality product or service, eventually you will receive accolades for your hard work. And when you do, after expressing your gratitude of course, ask your clients if they would mind you quoting them as a "testimonial". 99% of the time they won't mind at all, and will actually be happy to be able to help in your promotion. Post these testimonials on your social network profiles, your website and in your brochures to let your prospective clients know how much your products and services are valued by others.

### **RESOURCE:**

[Why Networking In Person Matters](#)

[How to Manage Your Contacts For Outstanding Business Success](#)

[Six Keys to Successful Networking](#)

[How To Build Better Business Relationships](#)

[The Lost Art of Following Up](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Following are some of the blogs and newsletters that I follow on a regular basis to keep abreast of current inbound marketing trends and information:

[Chris Brogan](#)

[Social Media Examiner](#)

[CopyBlogger](#)

[Hubspot](#)

[Mashable](#)

[Verticle Response](#)

## CLOSING

This is just a sampling of ideas, but by now you see that there are enough valuable free marketing opportunities to keep you busy for a lifetime! Take it one step at a time, and soon you'll find that you're establishing some wide-spread recognition for your equine-related business. In all of your marketing efforts, remember to stay true to yourself and only promote what you believe in. And for the most part, try to avoid the hard-sell approach. Instead aim to inform, enlighten and even entertain your audience. Your message will reflect your values, and customers will be instinctively drawn to your business.



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Carol Aldridge, owner of Equine Office Solutions is an administrative consultant and support specialist with over 25 years of business management experience in the equine industry. Equine Office Solutions provides customized administrative services designed to relieve workload pressure, streamline administrative systems and maximize marketing results!



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