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Marketing each other

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Businesses cross-market Tucson to the world

By Nate Searing

Inside Tucson Business

When Kathleen Perkins, chief executive officer at Breault Research Organization, sends a gift package to a customer overseas, she thinks local.

Local printers screen T-shirts with BRO designs, local merchants make bola ties and saguaro-emblazoned shot glasses, local artists produce paperweights and greeting cards.

All of it is designed and produced locally, Perkins said, to guarantee a unique Tucson flair.

"I think that for many people overseas, there is still that image associated with Tucson and the Southwest, cowboys and cacti," Perkins said, "and there are a lot of local businesses that personify that image."

But more than just selling the image of Tucson and the Southwest, Breault and other companies that showcase local products are helping to market the smaller businesses on the world stage.

Included in her Southwest care packages, Perkins sends prickly pear honey, jams and candies, all from Cheri's Desert Harvest, a locally owned novelty foods producer that sees an upswing in online overseas business every time Breault sends a gift to places such as Germany or Japan. Breault spends about \$5,000 a year at Cheri's.

"I feel like you have to open all the doors. If you're not trying to sell your product in a new way, you're missing an opportunity," business owner Cheri Romanoski said from her mid-town warehouse.

In addition to her cross-marketing ventures with Breault, Cheri's Desert Harvest's novelty candies and other products appear in gift shops, restaurants, grocery stores and on the pillows of many hotels in Tucson and elsewhere as an alternative to mints.

The result is a loyal customer base from southern Arizona to southern Asia, Romanoski said, all with little traditional advertising.

Charlie O'Dowd, southern Arizona director of the Arizona Small Business Association, said the most difficult job for a small business is generating interest in its products and services.

"You want as many people to see that company name, see that product, as possible, so you have to find as many ways as possible to get it out there," O'Dowd said.

Above and beyond the traditional advertising strategies, O'Dowd recommends small businesses seek nonprofit organizations, community projects and other groups to become involved with in order to reach customers in nontraditional

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ways.

Businesses owners should network whenever possible, O'Dowd added, because "Tucson is a place where everyone seems to know everyone and if you can get people talking about your business in Tucson, they don't seem to stop."

Colleen Cutshaw, director of account services at LP&G Inc., a marketing and public relations company, said the goal of small business marketing strategies should be to create a relationship with a customer that extends beyond the typical shopping experience.

"The first thought for anyone looking to drum up business is you have to make noise. Advertise as much as possible. Well, big businesses will always win in the noise contest so smaller business need to give shoppers a reason to shop, make them like choosing your store over a chain," Cutshaw said.

Rule No. 1, Cutshaw said, is developing and maintaining an accurate and detailed list of customer information to map which marketing strategies would be most effective and how best to implement them.

In addition to being at times more effective than traditional advertising, focused marketing is far more cost effective.

"You don't need money to do it, you just need to be creative," Cutshaw said.

While the relationship between Breault and Cheri's Desert Harvest is lucrative for both businesses, it is far from the most common form of cross marketing that helps smaller businesses get noticed by a larger customer base.

Cross-marketing campaigns, she said, can incorporate any number of strategies for companies looking to promote their products and services to a broader customer base. Common cross-marketing campaigns include:

Dinner and a Show n Both businesses can create their own unique coupon campaign with the same offer to drive moviegoers to the restaurant, and diners to the movies.

Customer list exchange n By simply exchanging mailing lists with like-minded, but not competitive businesses, such as a mountain bike store and a hiking equipment store, both can gain access to customers.

Loyalty Programs n Merchants in a single location can develop a point system while shopping at their stores, allowing customers to gain multiple points at each store for redemption at any.

Sweepstakes n Non-competing merchants can jointly run a sweepstakes with a prize that encompasses all of their products or services. The more businesses that join in, the more each is advertised at the other locations, potentially driving many customers to stores they may have otherwise never ventured to.

The best way to make sure that the product is being seen by a target customer base is to develop an overall marketing strategy that encompasses different and diverse traditional and nontraditional marketing and advertising strategies.

"I feel like you have to open all the doors," Romanoski said. "If you're not trying to sell your product in a new way, you're missing an opportunity."

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