

One 2011 small-business resolution to keep: Get out and spread the word about your business



By: Christina Le Beau January 10, 2011

Starting a new year in a tanked economy is one thing. Trends are pretty self-evident. But what about in a year in which economic recovery is possible, if still elusive and very much debated? Well, then the idea of a "trend" gets rather squishy. Really, who can tell?

But for 2011, if there's one thread running through the surveys and resolutions and talking heads, it's this: Get out and spread the word about your business. Because when the recovery comes, you don't want to be scrambling for customers. The time to cultivate them is now.

Marketing of all stripes counts, but the most buzzworthy method is social media. A recent poll by Mountain View, Calif.-based Intuit Inc. found that 71% of small-business owners think social media is an effective way to keep customers engaged. Not that they're doing it yet. More than 90% of those surveyed don't have a blog. And two-thirds don't use Twitter, Facebook or similar networking sites.

But another survey from business-networking site SaleSpider.com reports that 75% of small businesses plan to make social networking a bigger push in 2011. And small businesses already do well with websites and e-mail. (A fall survey from Waltham, Mass.-based Constant Contact Inc. found more than 90% of small-business owners use both.)

Two examples of how the trend could play in 2011:

Katie Ernst, 42, owner of Chicago's Revision Home, a vintage furniture and housewares seller, has mapped an online marketing plan that includes listing items on high-end sites like 1stdibs.com, and previewing merchandise and promoting events through Facebook and Twitter.

Another local entrepreneur, Kelly Golden, 39, owner of Neapolitan, a luxury fashion retailer in Winnetka, resolves to build a stronger online presence not only by offering special purchases through the company's website, but also by launching a companion blog with fashion advice and trend-watching.

Sure, there are other trends — another recurring one: booting bad customers and boosting good employees — but social media is a resolution on a roll.

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