

Title:

Breaking the Chains!

Word Count:

558

Summary:

How to compete and win against Corporate America.

Keywords:

small business marketing, small business promotion, small business web sites

Article Body:

Everyday, customers and business owners are bombarded with billboards, logos, print and electronic ads from huge corporations. With annual ad budgets that are more than our businesses' SALES in an entire year, our small independent businesses are getting squeezed out of consumers minds (and wallets) more and more each year. But the good news is, there are ways to fight back and "break the chains":

Build that website and perfect your online presence.

The Internet is one place where, compared to print and other forms of electronic media, the playing field is relatively level. A website filled with loads of great content will be loved by the search engines like Google and Yahoo!, and because of that, customers that may not even know where you are can find you and buy online. If you own a retail store, start an e-store. If you own a restaurant or a service-related business, offer a gift certificate or printable coupon. Starting a mailing list on your website with the latest news, events and special offers is a great way to get (and keep) loyal, regular customers. The options are endless, and best of all, content is the Internet king, not slick, flashy, repetitive advertising. If you aren't comfortable with all things Internet, there are many companies that are, and can help you with web design, web hosting, search engine optimization, and web marketing.

Join (or start) a co-op or business association.

"Strength in Numbers" is more than a catchy phrase, it is becoming a necessity in our current business climate. Trade organizations can purchase products together to get better rates and buys, they can advertise together with direct mail coupons and newsletters (another big money saver), and they carry more

political clout by appointing representatives to call on state legislatures or even Congress in order to promote legislation favorable to small independent businesses. If your area doesn't have a trade organization, or does but you feel it doesn't meet your needs, start one! The National Federation of Independent Business is a great resource with representatives in all fifty states and Washington D.C.

Don't mimic Corporate America

Advertising is not cheap, because the prices that the large corporations are willing to pay for it have priced it out of the reach of most small businesses. This is not necessarily a bad thing; let them have all of the cold, impersonal, beat you over the head repetitive advertising! People only care about this on Super Bowl Sunday anyway! Always go for the personal touch. If you own a restaurant or retail store, introduce yourself. Let them know you appreciate them coming by, and you can't wait to see them again. Always offer coupons or incentives, and be as unique, creative and memorable as you possibly can. Remember that "word of mouth" advertising is so great you can't put a price tag on it. Put yourself in the customers shoes, and stay there! Don't ever do what you want; do what they want. Don't just market your business, market yourself. It leaves an impression, and with the sorry state of customer service today in most (chain) businesses, people won't forget it!

Remember, you are an independent business because you wanted to do something new or different, so promote yourself accordingly. Here's to you "breaking the chains" and becoming successful with your chosen endeavor.