



Berman

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*Book explains how to hone free marketing using online resources*

BY JEFF ZBAR

In small businesses' search for effective marketing, Margo Berman believes they overlook one key outlet: the freebie.

Companies will pay thousands of dollars for print ads, promotions, and television or radio spots of questionable worth or effectiveness. But they then fail to use increasingly effective resources surrounding them in their daily lives.

From social networking and online relationship marketing services to word-of-mouth marketing and building buzz among potential customers, companies are missing valuable opportunities to execute low-cost, high-return marketing, said Berman, an associate professor of advertising and entrepreneurship at Florida International University and author of the new book, "Street-Smart Advertising: How to Win the Battle of the Buzz" (\$27.95, Rowman & Littlefield).

"Business owners think social marketing and the Internet are for young people. Older people think it isn't for them," said Berman, whose book has been named *Delta Sky* magazine's Business Book of the Month for June. Her Web site is [www.unlocktheblock.com](http://www.unlocktheblock.com). "But people always have done business with people they know. On the Internet, young people have figured this out."

There's no science, secret or myth behind the plethora of free online resources that can make a difference in a company's marketing effectiveness, Berman said. In fact, many of the services available are fast becoming household names. Consider Facebook,

MySpace, LinkedIn, Flickr or Squidoo – all highly popular, free Web sites that require the user only invest time to hone and improve their return, she said.

Using these sites, people "connect" with others to build their own community. Similar sites encourage users to "trade links" to one another, trading online traffic among other professionals.

"People want to link with you," Berman said. "Affiliated links are really good for your Web site. People or companies who want to link to your site give you more visibility for the search engines."

Among the other free practices that can pay dividends:

- Write a blog for your Web site. Writing recurring content for your site helps both position you as an expert among your audience, as well as increase search engine exposure.

- Write articles for others. Services like SubmitYourArticle.com and SubmitArticlesForFree.com, and directories e-articles.info and Web-Articles.info allow users to upload articles that can be used by others on the Web. Be sure to include a brief biography, contact information and your Web site link.

- Send an e-mail to customers. From free to about \$20 a month or more, distribute an online newsletter using your own e-mail software or a service like ConstantContact.com.

Each of the 250 pages of Berman's book focuses on the free opportunities found in do-it-yourself marketing that help business owners build a better brand. Learn to find free fonts (Page 28). Find out what certain colors mean in other countries (Page 155).

Craft slogans that "stick like peanut butter to the roof of your brain" (Pages 84-87).

The key to any marketing is to be remembered. One way is to style your marketing as if your product was a celebrity. Think of a popular person, she said. Consider how memorable that individual is – and craft your marketing message in an effort to build similar brand appeal and characteristics, she said. Create a tone of voice, use of color and visual appeal for your brand. How would your new brand think, speak, act or look? Adapt that marketing look and feel to all your outreach, including the Internet. Replicate that in your marketing materials, using that voice to speak directly to specific audiences – youths or seniors, for example – or by demographic or psychographic.

Among other tips, Berman suggests using polls, questionnaires and other forms of Web-based voting to draw customers in and make them a part of the answer. This can entice them to return in the future to learn the results or participate in future polls. Many Web-hosting companies provide polling. Other services include SurveyMonkey.com, PollMonkey.com or EasyPoll.com.

"They're not just participating, they're engaged," Berman said.

Ultimately, the goal is to involve your audience. Create relevant messages that speak directly to your audience, and entice them to become actively involved with your site or brand.

"You shouldn't be afraid to do it," she said. "These services don't cost you money, but you become the expert in the field."