

How to Raise Your Profile

You can step up your marketing without spending a mint.

By Ronaleen R. Roha

So you don't have a Madison Avenue marketing budget, and your worldwide HQ is a spare room over the garage. How do you lure new customers?

Jeff Davidson, a management consultant and author of *Marketing for the Home-Based Business* (Adams, \$10.95), and a home-based business owner himself for 15 years, says the most important step in any new marketing strategy is to review how you present yourself to current and potential clients—starting with such basics as your phone greeting and voice mail (see the box below).

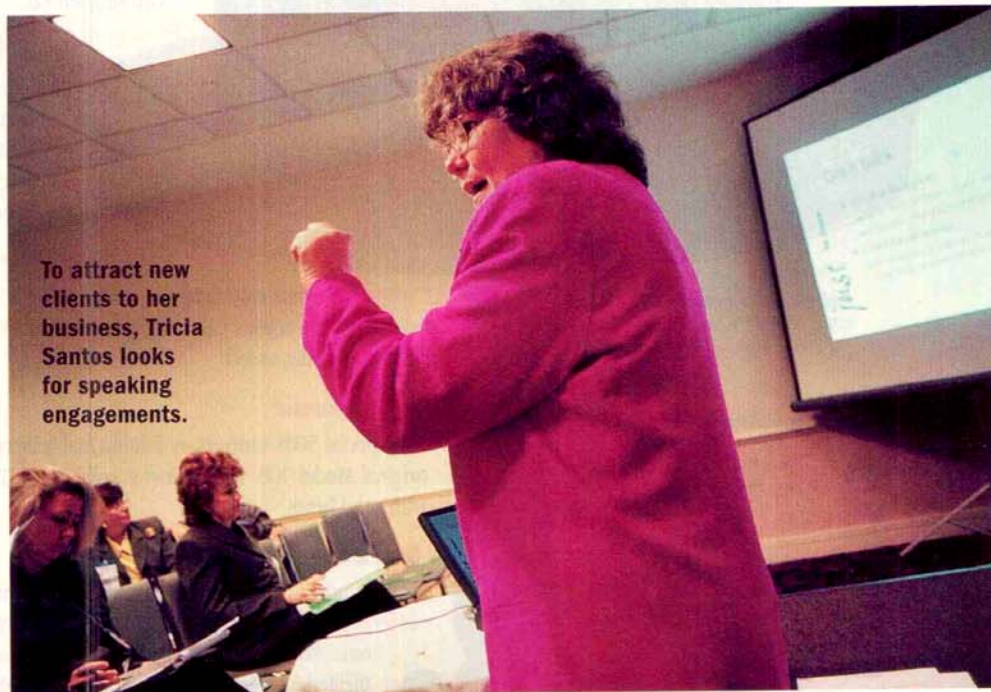
To see how Davidson puts his theories into practice, we asked him to review the marketing efforts of Tricia Santos, owner of imP (Information Management and Presentation), a ten-year-old, home-based computer training and consulting firm in Durham, N.C. Santos works mainly with one- and two-person firms, but she wants to start adding companies with up to ten employees.

On a sunny afternoon over herbal tea, Davidson critiqued her marketing efforts.

FINE-TUNE THE NEWSLETTER. Santos is already using one of the most effective home-business marketing strategies: the newsletter. Santos sends a two-page newsletter—which covers such topics as how to use a word-processing program efficiently or do high-quality Internet searches—every two months. She targets “only about 230 people who say they want it,” Santos says. It’s a single sheet, fold-

ed in thirds, stapled and mailed without an envelope, that she produces using *Adobe Pagemaker*.

Overall, Davidson gives it high marks. “It’s an easy read, pretty much noncomputerese and reader-friendly,” he says. “You can plow through it in about five to eight



To attract new clients to her business, Tricia Santos looks for speaking engagements.

minutes. It has a clear layout without a lot of fonts jumping all over the place. And whether they read it or not, once every 60 days your name flashes across their minds for a second.”

Davidson’s suggestions for fine-tuning the newsletter to attract larger firms:

- ▶ Include more information of special interest to larger companies.
- ▶ Make it a four-page newsletter (a single 11-inch by 17-inch sheet, folded in half) rather than two pages. “You are

First, be sure you've covered the basics

JEFF DAVIDSON, author of *Marketing for the Home-Based Business* lists the six most important things you can do to present your home-based business to the world as a first-class operation.

- ▶ Develop a polished phone

greeting and make sure you have professional-quality phone and message-pickup services, whether voice mail or a service.

- ▶ Don't skimp on the equipment you need to be competitive and productive.

▶ Create high-quality stationery, brochures, business cards and a Web site that convey a professional image.

- ▶ Get assistance when you need it. You aren't an expert on everything.
- ▶ If clients visit your home

office, do a top-to-bottom critical review of anything the client will see both inside and outside the house.

- ▶ Get out of your office once in a while to network “so that you can keep current and gain new insights,” Davidson says.

doing twice the work, but when you fold it, it magically has ten times the value." The postage stays the same. Send it already punched for a three-ring binder because "it implies you're to keep it in a notebook."

► Switch from rag paper with dark flecks in it to a plain paper that scans and faxes better.

► Stick circular or starburst labels, maybe gold foil, on the outside of the newsletter with special messages such as "Attend our free seminar at . . ."

► Ask for feedback—such as with a box that says "call us to see if you need Windows 98."

Also, make every third time you have contact with a client, whether by phone or mail, have nothing to do with your services—"such as telling them about an article or gathering," Davidson says. "Mailing information you think they want to see makes receiving yours highly palatable."

WORK THE SEMINARS. One of the best ways to attract new clients is to conduct free seminars for local business groups, or at nearby colleges, perhaps under the auspices of the Small Business Administration's Small Business Development Centers. "My first

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year in business," Santos admits, "I did a lot of teaching, and virtually every one of my current clients goes back to that somehow." It's time to do it again, Davidson says.

Choose two or three business groups that interest you, he says. The calendar of meetings is usually published in the newspaper. "The right groups will jump out at you." Then, he says, "appear once as a guest speaker at each, pass out your information, do a great show and collect names for your newsletter."

CHECK OUT THE COMPETITION. Make a list of all the benefits that are touted in Yellow Pages ads for businesses like yours—such as "conveniently

located" or "accepts MasterCard," Davidson says. Also check out features, such as "can help with all word-processing software." Then decide what you will provide that will make your offerings and literature superior to everybody else's. Davidson likes Santos's brochure for its sophisticated appearance and clean layout. He

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says she could add a small photo to her business card, though.

TAP THE WEB. Santos doesn't have a Web site yet, but so far that's not a problem because, she says, "most of the people I work with are so low-tech they aren't going to look for me on the Web." Not so with the clients she's trying to attract. "Once you have a Web site, that may be the primary way they find you for the first time. Some would find your site through Internet search engines and hyperlinks from other sites, he says. "But more would probably check out the site once they had heard about you."

Setting up your own Web site can cost several hundred to several thousand dollars, but "many brilliant computer students will do it for the lower price," Davidson says. Eventually, Santos will add another bit of technology to imP by sending her newsletter via e-mail.

WATCH THE INTANGIBLES. You won't always agree with a consultant. Santos is unlikely to take one piece of Davidson's advice: that she change the name of her company. "From a pure marketing standpoint," explains Davidson about the imP name, "we don't know whether to look this up in the phone book under capital *I* or small *i*, or is it under *imp*?"

"Are you kidding?" says Santos. "People love it and remember the initials. I joke and say *imp* is a basic personality trait, which it is." •