

A Marketing Playbook for Small Business

directwest —

A **playbook is a set of tactics used frequently.**

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Introduction.

Welcome to a Marketing Playbook for Small Business. This playbook provides marketing concepts and methodologies for a practical approach to creating your business's marketing plan. As a business owner, strategically thinking about marketing – and creating a marketing plan – is critical for your business.

Defining small business.

In Saskatchewan, a small business is defined as having 49 or fewer employees and a medium-sized business as having 50 to 499 employees. According to the Government of Saskatchewan 98.7% of businesses in our province are considered a small business.

This playbook is intended for small and medium-sized business (SMB owners who may, or may not, manage their own marketing strategy. In it, we hope to recognize the marketing issues that potentially impact you and your business day-in and day-out, and give you some tools to address them.

Meet Saskatchewan.

As you know, your business operates in a province with a growing population and oodles of potential. We know that Saskatchewan thrives when we support each other.

In Saskatchewan, customers – and potential customers – are spread out over two major cities, smaller municipalities and rural areas. While more than 40% of small businesses are based in Regina and Saskatoon, there's plenty of opportunity in other regions, including the north. Agriculture is a significant part of SMBs in Saskatchewan, but so are professional services, construction, manufacturing, hospitality and food services.

Statistics at a glance



1.25M

Population
of Saskatchewan¹



\$960

Average weekly
earnings in
Saskatchewan's
small business²



124

Small businesses per
1,000 people³
2nd Highest rate in
Canada!

¹ Government of Saskatchewan, April 1, 2025
^{2 & 3} Saskatchewan Small Business Profile, 2024

Focus.

Let's focus on your business.

Your business goes beyond the products and services you offer. Your business is your **brand** – your relationship with customers, your commitment to them and your commitment to quality products and services.

Know your current and target customers.

So much more than a logo and a few colours, your brand speaks to your customers and target audience. It provokes feelings and creates a positive association between your business and your customers when they interact with you. Your brand is purpose-driven and consistent across different business offerings.

Studies show that most customers identify shared values as the number one reason they have a relationship with a brand. Customers expect their favourite brands to know them, and hope that they can help them discover new products and services to fit their needs.

As a SMB owner, you want brand loyalty. You want customers to consistently choose your business offerings over other businesses in the same product or service category. Brand loyalty is the goose that lays the golden egg. Maintaining brand loyalty is essential.

Marketing mix and why it's important.

Marketing gives you the tools to strengthen your brand, stand out from your competitors and, most importantly, grow your business. Determining which marketing tactics work best for your business sets the foundation for your marketing plan.

There's a myth surrounding word of mouth as all you need to market your local business. Friends and family are excellent customers – we agree, but word of mouth can be difficult to control, and casual conversations can easily lead to misinformation (we all remember the playground game broken telephone). One negative experience can challenge loyalty and spread like wildfire. Positive word of mouth is great to have, but not enough on its own. That's where your marketing mix comes in.

Marketing mix is the ideal combination of product, price, promotion and place. It's key to find the right combination for your business to succeed.

The experience is the brand.

Your unique value proposition.

Why should a customer buy your product or use your service? The answer is your unique value proposition (UVP). It's a clear statement describing the benefits of your product or service, how you fulfill your customers' needs and what distinguishes your business from the competition. UVP is a fundamental cornerstone for every business.

Your return on investment.

Return on investment (ROI) in this context tracks how your marketing efforts are performing – measured by contributions to your overall profit – compared to what you invested. As a SMB owner, it's a good idea to define and measure your marketing ROI goals.

ROI - A Real Life Example.

A Directwest customer invested in a 12-month Search and Display campaign that generated 350 phone calls. The customer converted 50% of those calls into sales, and the average sale price was \$20,000.00 This information can be used for calculating ROI.

Paid campaigns now drive over 55% of the customer's total website traffic, making digital their leading acquisition channel. The combination of awareness (Display) and high-intent leads (Search) proved to be a scalable, revenue-driving model for this service-based business.

Statistics at a glance

It pays to do more – the benefits of a marketing mix are clear.



30%

increase in customer lifetime value, as customers are more likely to remain loyal when they have multiple avenues for interaction.⁴



73%

of shoppers use more than one platform during their buying journey.⁵

⁴ brandtheory, 2024
⁵ Firework, 2025

Focus worksheet.



What is the unique value proposition [UVP] of my business?

**Who are my current and target customers? What is their age range?
What % are male and what % are female? Are they rural or urban?**

How is my business doing at reaching those customers?

**Do customers perceive the same UVP of my business that I do?
How would I determine that?**

Marketing basics.

Having a mix of traditional and digital approaches to marketing brings big benefits.

Basic concept: if an approach to marketing leads to a positive action on the part of the customer or potential customer, it's worth pursuing.

Customer Journey.

In order to sell a product or service, a business leads a customer through a journey. While different businesses use different visuals and words to describe the stages, every business goes through the same cycle.

The customer journey starts with creating awareness about your business, showcasing what sets you apart from your competitors and why a customer should choose to do business with you. Pre- and post-customer service is aimed at turning customers into repeat buyers. It's important to know which stage of the journey your marketing efforts fall into. For example, some ways to evaluate your exposure efforts include measuring business name searches on Mysask411, click-throughs on Mysask411 and click-throughs on Google searches.



Laying the foundation.

As a small business owner, if you have strong brand awareness and know how to best engage with your current and target customers, the rest is gravy.

According to DataReportal's Digital 2025 Report, 95% of Canadians use the internet. This makes developing and promoting a digital footprint absolutely essential for Saskatchewan businesses.

Directory and online directory advertising.

In our province, directory advertising is a tried-and-true method – a printed listing in the phonebook. Online directory advertising is a Mysask411 digital profile listing all your products and services, as well as a description of your business as a whole. Mysask411 is an up-to-date source for local business information that can also be shared through the Mysask411 app.

And remember, don't get rid of an approach if it still works! While some methods may seem outdated or traditional, many consumers continue to find value in them.

Statistics at a glance

It's all about engagement.



92%

of Canadians use the internet on a mobile phone.⁵



83%

of Canadian's are exposed to ads on YouTube.⁶ Facebook and Instagram users spend 40% of their time watching videos.⁷



87%

of consumers are more likely to buy after watching a video⁸

⁵ & ⁶ DataReportal, 2025

⁷ Sprout Social, 2025

⁸ Wyzowl, 2025

Web and SEO.

Today, having a website is considered the minimum that you need to enter the market with your product or service. Customers expect to be able to find your business quickly and easily **online**.

Your business's website.

Research has found that the majority of consumers do online research before making a purchase either online or in a store. Believe it or not, according to DataReportal, in 2025 Canadians spend 6 hours per day online and 51% of Canadians make an online purchase weekly.

Make sure to highlight your Saskatchewan roots - Saskatchewan has the highest percentage of consumers who prefer small local businesses.

Having an up-to-date business website with mobile-friendly technology is a must. Today's customers have little patience for incorrect or out-of-date information, and it's easy to go somewhere else.

Break through the digital noise.

The noise you need to worry about most is the noise made by competitors operating in the same product or service category. Search Engine Optimization (SEO) focuses on growing your visibility in organic search results and enhancing proximity-based searches. SEO can impact your competitors' noise.

What information works best to improve your online visibility can be tough to determine. Start by putting yourself in a customer's shoes. How would you search for the product or service that your business offers? Here's an easy first step for optimizing your online information: make a list of words to describe your product or service that would closely match how a potential customer would search online. These are your keywords!

Leveraging Google.

Launched in 2014, Google Business Profiles is a service for business owners operated by Google as a way to give owners more control over appearances in Internet search results. Business owners can verify their own data by creating a new profile or by claiming an existing auto-generated business profile.

Another option is Google Ads, an online platform where business owners pay to display brief advertisements, product and service listings or videos. As a business owner or advertiser, you can bid on keywords to appear in a potential customer's search. Measuring the number of click-throughs, or conversions made to your website, helps identify which strategies are working and which aren't.

Social media marketing.

You can't really dabble in social media and be good at it. Part of knowing your current and target customers means knowing which social media channels they engage with, and what each channel is best used for. Be **selective** and focus your efforts on the channels that provide the most benefit.

The big guys.

Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and X are the big guys for businesses.

Every social media channel has its own benefit, but not every channel will serve the needs of every business. Ask yourself, what social media channel best suits my product or service? Is my business a tow-truck service or a high-end restaurant? If it's a tow-truck service, customers need my service right away and the immediacy of X would be a good fit, [#stuckonCircleDrivebyLorneAve](#). On the other hand, a high-end restaurant is all about photos of delicious food in a sophisticated setting so Instagram would be an appropriate channel.

YouTube has become a replacement for television for younger consumers but has significant usage among all demographics. Videos are an opportunity for you to humanize your business, demonstrate product and service value and showcase what you do best.

Social media is becoming more frequented,

with new channels focusing on a particular demographic rather than trying to appeal to everyone. An example is the emergence of TikTok and Snapchat. While their audiences are young, they represent both present and future consumers for businesses that are able to tap into its success.

Digital ads.

When it comes to digital ads, Meta is the most well-known social media platform. Billions of people use Facebook and Instagram each month to connect with friends, family and colleagues to discover new products and services. Any SMB owner with a Facebook business page can boost a post on Facebook. Boosting means paying a small amount to get your content seen by more people and can be a quick and efficient method of marketing.

Digital ads are also available on YouTube, LinkedIn and X. Where you place digital ads should reflect your business needs and which channels best fit your business goals. Social media can be a lot of work as your following grows. Be prepared: plan for growth.

Reputation management.

Reviews, recommendations and response times – there’s no doubt that reputation management is an ongoing piece of the marketing puzzle. Monitoring your online reputation involves more than simply knowing what people are saying about you. You need to make sure you’re engaging with customers who leave reviews. How you handle positive and negative reviews can have a big impact on your SMB’s reputation.

Best practices.

While specific best practices vary by social media channel, we can’t emphasize enough the importance of keeping your social media fresh and relevant.

An out-of-date contact or business address, the wrong store hours, a positive or negative online review that hasn’t been dealt with in a timely manner, or at all, are just some of the pitfalls of social media.

Statistics at glance

Social media site usage.



77.2%

Canadians using
Facebook each
month.⁹



37H 43M

avg. time
Canadian users
spend on TikTok
in a month.¹⁰



550.7

avg. number of
times
Canadians
open Snapchat
each month.¹¹

Web and SEO & social media marketing worksheet.

List the places where your business appears online.

How does my mobile website compare to my desktop experience?

What social media channels do my customers and target customers use?

What is my approach for responding to online reviews? What if the review is positive? What if it's negative?

Out of home.

Yes, we're talking about billboards. Saskatchewan residents spend a lot of time in their vehicles, making billboards a perfect medium for highlighting your brand and messaging. Placing a billboard at a popular intersection provides a natural captive audience.

Digital out of home (DOOH) advertising.

Billboards are no longer a solely traditional marketing medium. Out of home has broken into the digital advertising space in a big way. While traditional billboards are typically printed and static, digital billboards allow for both static and dynamic advertising options. DOOH also allows for advertisements to be changed out more efficiently. As well as great visual options, digital billboards bring new built-in technology to this once traditional medium – cameras. Cameras allow daily monitoring of the billboard's face(s) for optimal advertising quality.

Real-time traffic impressions give business owners tangible results like how many times a billboard ad was displayed and how many vehicles were exposed to it. DOOH can be a terrific digital addition to a marketing mix, and the costs are getting more manageable for small businesses.

And now your message on Directwest's digital billboard can be targeted in a number of ways to reach the right consumers.

Targeting can be done by:

- Market
- Geographic radius
- Time of day
- Weather conditions
- Desired demographics

Statistics at a glance



69%

of consumers have made a purchase triggered by OOH advertising.¹²



30%

The increase to search efficiency by adding OOH to a media plan.¹³

¹² DPAA Global Digital out of Home, 2023

¹³ COMMB, 2023

Other options.

Newspapers and magazines.

In Saskatchewan we have two large daily newspapers: the Regina Leader-Post and the Saskatoon StarPhoenix. There are also community newspapers and smaller city papers such as the Prince Albert Daily Herald. There are lifestyle magazines, city magazines and publications intended for members of an association, a profession or a chamber of commerce.

The benefit of print media is that it's tangible and has some shelf life – think of a magazine in an airport lounge or a newspaper in the office lunchroom. It's there and it's easy to flip through.

Radio.

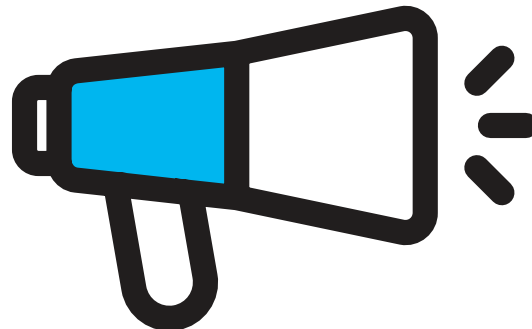
There are more than 170 radio stations available in our province, although not all play advertisements. And, as we mentioned, Saskatchewan residents spend time in their vehicles. Radio has a lot of benefits as part of a SMB's marketing mix, but there often isn't time in a radio ad to mention a lot of detailed information. Radio advertising gets attention from frequency and consistency.

Sponsorships and local community involvement.

As anyone who has been to a Rider game can tell you, Saskatchewan residents are engaged community supporters! And it doesn't stop there. Many rural and urban Saskatchewan residents are actively involved in initiatives ranging from large fundraisers to smaller charitable donations.

At Directwest, we provide sponsorships annually to non-profit and charitable organizations across Saskatchewan. We also donate promotional items for draws, raffles and prizes for fundraisers.

Being active in your local community is a terrific way to increase the positive perception of your business and strengthen the shared values of your brand. We encourage you to do it too.



Putting it all together.

When it comes to your marketing mix, it's important to consider the cost, effort and other factors that might play a role. The cost of different marketing approaches can be impacted by the number of people needed (effort) and the length of time you wish to use that medium). Make sure your marketing mix doesn't require more effort or cost than you're getting in returned benefits.

The right marketing mix starts with defining your unique value proposition and knowing how to best reach your current and target customers. It's about building lasting relationships through shared values and a commitment to provide quality products and services.

Your marketing plan is not a set-it-and-forget-it strategy. It requires ongoing review and evaluation. If you don't have the time or manpower to create a strong marketing foundation for your business, Directwest can help.

We are Directwest.

We're a Saskatchewan-based company, and we know where you're coming from. With offices in Regina and Saskatoon, Directwest is operating in the same space you are.

Directwest has more than 100 years of serving the province with dedication and dependability. We want local businesses to continue to thrive, to help drive the Saskatchewan economy. We're continually upgrading our own products and services to bring more opportunities to our province's businesses.

Working with your local Directwest Media Advisor.

Directwest's sales team is not just online or over-the-phone. Our Media Advisors engage face-to-face and in the field with customers like you across the province (don't worry, we speak to customers over the phone too!)

We understand that as a SMB owner, you're probably short on time. Let our Media Advisors handle the details of business marketing for you and guide you to that ideal marketing mix. Our dedicated local team understands life and business in Saskatchewan, and we have a proven ability to convert shoppers into buyers. Simply put, we help you stand out.



Directwest
Market Coverage

**Support
Local** 

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Summary.

This Marketing Playbook for Small Business is an overview of marketing in Saskatchewan. We encourage you to use the following worksheet to create your own marketing playbook.

Summary worksheet.

What are the key strengths of my business over competitors?

What need does my business fill for customers? Can they get this somewhere else? Where?

What shared values does my brand promote?

What is my current marketing mix?

How could my current marketing mix be stronger?

How am I using search engine optimization (SEO)?

Is my business on any of the following social media channels?

Facebook	☐ Yes	☐ No	LinkedIn	☐ Yes	☐ No	YouTube	☐ Yes	☐ No
Instagram	☐ Yes	☐ No	X	☐ Yes	☐ No	TikTok	☐ Yes	☐ No

How frequently do I post on those social media channels?

What other marketing options would I consider?

[illegible]

Glossary terms.

Click-throughs – the process of clicking through an online ad to the advertiser's intended destination.

Digital ads – also called Internet advertising or marketing. This is when a business leverages online technology to deliver ads to potential customers.

Impressions – the number of times your content is displayed online, whether it was clicked on directly or not.

Keywords – ideas and topics that define your online content. In terms of SEO, these are the words that potential customers enter into a search engine, also called search queries.

Leads – a potential sales contact, individual or organization that shows an interest in your product or service.

Multi-channel marketing – promoting and selling anywhere your customers buy. This includes, but is not limited to, online advertising, social media channels and out of home media.

Organic leads – potential customers who find your company by searching for a product or service in a search engine, versus visiting your website directly or clicking on your ad.

Organic search – search engine results that are naturally generated and not paid advertising. Results are the relevant webpage listings that most closely match the user's search query.

Proximity-based search – performing an online search based on a specific location, with results displayed by distance from that location.

Return on investment (ROI) – a performance measure used to evaluate the efficiency of an investment or compare several different investments.

ROI calculation = (current value of investment - cost of investment) / cost of investment

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