Ultimate Start-Up Guide & Indispensable Digital Resources

Starting up is hard. With little to no brand awareness or marketing platform, and no resources to create it...the outlook can appear quite bleak for your small business. Thankfully, whilst resource based theory acknowledged freely available resources cannot be a source or sustainable competitive advantage (Barney 1991), knowledge of such resources, combined with your product and USP just might be. This guide is going to take you through the hidden gems the web has to offer, from free logos and web templates to named leads and crucial social media stats that drive traffic in your industry.

Websites:

A functioning website appears to be perceived as the cornerstone of any modern business, when in fact, paying clients are! Even many successful online businesses don't have a website. That being said, a new site can be a platform from which to drive PR/media interest and, if well designed, can go a long way to demonstrating credibility to your customers. If you're after a free site, Wordpress.org is a good start for you(this link will show you how to set up your first Wordpress site: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maNuM_-Oe8g); some of the free templates may look basic, but can be tailored to suit a professional business (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFCUncdli3c).

If you're on the market for something a little more custom, and have some funds at your disposal, £25 ($20) should get you up and running...if you know the tricks that is. The cheapest custom domain BY FAR I've found, is obtained by searching the keyword "domain" into google and selecting Godaddy.co.uk (or .com) from the sponsored search listings (usually displayed in a beige, or distinctive colour, right at the top of the search results)...not the organic listings! Once you've got that purchased, (click here for a complete guide: https://support.godaddy.com/help/article/1361/hosting-account-getting-started-guide) it's time to buy a hosting account (this is where all the data on your site gets stored). If you think of your domain name as a postbox, your hosting account is the house (stashed full of helpful research fuelled e-business advice a la moir OR the shady filthy that comprises 99%of the rest of the internet!!)

The best hosting deals I've found to date are all found via topcashback.co.uk (http://www.topcashback.co.uk/), essentially, you visit the site, set up an account, type in 'hosting' into the search box and choose the best deal from the providers listed. This should knock off at least 50% of the price and enable me to buy hosting for £25 (~15$) last year!

Once you've purchase your domain and hosting account you'll have to link them together, it's much easier to simply post a video of how this is done (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCx_cxLywaY) and save you reading time. If you get stuck, simply email/call customer service, they'll offer to do it for you! Once completed,

install Wordpress on your site (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ql7Y4qzCjDs) and you're good to go.

Now you've got your site, you'll need a theme…ideally a free one. Wordpress themes allow you to change the aesthetics of your site without changing the content. For a basic intro to searching for and applying themes, take a look at this video (http://edcottam.com/create-free-website/). If your business is looking for a more professional touch, this follow up video will show you how to quickly mock something up that'll appeal to more corporate audiences (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFCUncdli3c). Finally, if you're feeling adventurous (dirty buggers!) you can try downloading one of the free premium templates, upload it onto your hosting account and configure it to REALLY dazzle your clients (here's a 2 part video showing you exactly how it's done: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqLKJYa5MIs AND https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oJBQtTRGE0). – *Bear in mind this approach can be a little technical and require a little more patience for those of you without basic development experience.* Try Googling "free wordpress templates" for a huge list of excellent designs, but beware, these freebies aren't always what they seem (http://www.whoishostingthis.com/resources/remove-wordpress-links/) so try and use themes from reputable sources like smashing magazine.

Images

No matter how good a Wordpress, or other theme is looks on a site like smashing magazine, when you install it on your hosting account it will look absolutely terrible if you aren't using optimized, high-quality images to go with it! High-quality images can command quite the premium, so often you're best off either using the ones already provided with the template (these tend to be excellent quality and formatted for quick loading times), or failing that, conduct an Google Image search for items labeled for 'commercial re-use' (see this video to see how: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFCUncdli3c). I also find searching for large images helps to maintain quality, even if you do need to shrink and copy them. I've found Flickr.com to have an excellent collection of images sorted into the creative commons, which are free to use, providing you adhere to the rules laid out by the author (hint: you may have to provide an attribution on your site). Here's another excellent site featuring free, professional stock photos

Professionally designed logos, leaflets and posters

As you'll start to realize by now, bootstrapping entrepreneurs have a huge amount of free resources at their disposal, this includes professional logos and other brand material. The trick is to know what you're looking for and how to find it. A quick search for "free logo template psd" should send you in the right direction; .psd is the file extension for Photoshop, the dominant text-editor on the market. Here's an example of a site you could use (http://www.freepik.com/free-psd/logo). How do you think we designed the logo for the NBS' flagship undergraduate consultancy project (hint: we didn't). Photoshop is hugely expensive, but fortunately http://www.gimp.org/ provides a free version with much of the same functionality. My advice – find a logo template that suits your

image/colour scheme and simply change the text, its way too time consuming to start making adjustments. If you'd like something a little more custom and unique, sites such as fiverr.com and peopleperhour.com feature a ton of top quality graphic designers, and other freelancers, who will gladly take on the work for as little as £10 (complete with unlimited iterations)…although, sometimes it pays to invest a little extra in quality and a decent service. The same tactic can be applied for business flyers/posters by searching "flyer" instead of "logo", here's an example of some high quality free flyer templates (http://blogsizzle.com/templates/flyer-templates-free-download/).

Utilizing Photoshop

Photoshop is editing software that works on layers, this means in many instances any downloaded image will often be built on multiple levels. Thence, you can decide to change the text, background colour or sub headings on their own unique levels, which makes working, selecting and correcting mistakes easier. If you don't have much design experience, Id suggest a simple textual edit to logo templates, don't try and get fancy and customize, more often than not it'll end in frustration and ALOT of time wasted…stick to what you know. Again, outsourcing is an excellent option if you do want something a little more unique.

Marketing:

Marketing is the toughest part of your job, what I mean by this, is advertising and finally selling your services to your target market. Whether you're freelancer offering a service to potential clients, a webstore with a product(s) to sell or a new start up looking to create a buzz and attract some attention. Dividing the sales process into two sections helps, let's use generating leads/ validating leads as one example, and closing as the second. In my experience, email marketing is the quickest and most efficient form of advertising I've used whilst selling a service.

So let's find some email addresses, not just any email addresses, the goal here is to add value and not spam, by targeting those individuals who are interested in what you have to offer. Here are couple of my favorite tools and strategies;

Buzz sumo: This web app is one of THE most effective tools for finding influencers to pitch to and reaching out to potential customers. Simply search for a topic, e.g. "Dairy free milkshakes", and the app will provide you with a break down of top yearly, monthly and weekly content, sorted by number of shares. First off, this is an excellent market research tool and gives you an excellent break down of what appeals and interests your potential customers, and also…it will provide you with the twitter accounts and pages of all those who share shared the post (I.e. They're interested in what you've got to offer). Depending on your service offering, you can reach out to these guys via email on an individual level, or sort by 'influencers' and go for quick wins by going straight to the big guys with audiences you can cross advertise to. Either way, it's important to add value, it's incredibly easy to come off as spammy on hype internet…giving away guides, tips, and free samples or running competitions to spark interest can really help.

FAME database (free for students only): The FAME database is a financial data package providing detailed breakdowns of the accounts, industry and contact information of worldwide (although packages can be restricted to specific countries). Primarily utilized as a research to help quantitative scholars crunch some numbers and find leads to send out questionnaires to, this tool is epic. It will provide you with the full contact details of MDs, CEOs and lower level staff of public companies, better yet you can sort by industry, financial, size (you name it) and it outputs straight to Excel. I've used it myself to gain access to the MDs of small to medium sized enterprises for my research. If you're a university student, it's highly likely this database can be accessed via your libraries databases.

Company blogs: If you have a particular industry you're attempting to sell to, then why not simply put Google to work and search for "software firm Newcastle". If there's no named contact, it really helps to have a named contact, on the contact page, try looking for their blog; usually they'll provide personalized contact information here. Still struggling to find contact details? Read this!

Validating your leads:

Now you've got some addresses to pitch, you need to start reaching out. To save you time, I've attached a simple email template of your initial pitch (Sethi, 2014):

Option 1: The 'Free'-lancer

Subject line: I want to work for you for free [**Best subject line I've ever received**]

Hey Ramit,

Love your site, especially the articles about automation and personal entrepreneurship. It's because of you that I have multiple ING Direct accounts for my savings goals, a Roth IRA, automatic contributions, and asset allocation all set up. [**Good buttering me up**]

I'm a web developer for [Company], a site that gets around 50 million hits per month. I used to do freelance work exclusively, and I'm preparing to make the switch back to doing freelance work ~30 hours / week while I travel and study in China. I work in Ruby on Rails, doing everything from the database to the front-end, and I'm especially good at rapidly prototyping new ideas and projects. [**He's in my head: I'm always looking for talented developers and he's clearly one of them**]

In order to start getting myself back out there, I'd love to have the chance to do some development work for you, completely gratis. If you like my work and have some paid projects for me down the road, that'd be great of course, but I'd be happy just for the opportunity to network and receive a little advice. I'm sure you have a project or two in the back of your head that you haven't had time to prototype yourself yet; let me do it for you! [**I LOVE IT!! As a matter of fact, yes I DO have some side projects I've been wanting to do**]

You can give me a call at ###, or find me on Google Talk under this address. You can also check out some samples of my work here: [website]

Thank you!

This is a script taken from a great freelance site, click here *for the full article!*

Alternatively, if you don't want to work for free…you'll need to have a very 'specific value offering', i.e. know that the prospect is actively pursuing a solution, or is working on a very specific project you can help with (hint: you can find this using buzzsumo), you can try this.

Option 2: The laser accurate/Just in time pitch (Harris, 2012):

Adarsh,

I've been following you since last March when I saw you share Noah Kagan's article on how to spend your first $100 on a retargeting campaign.

I love that article.

In fact, I started offering the exact process he laid out in that post as a service.

Trippeo is a really cool app and I've put together (based on Noah's article) three different retargeting scenarios for Trippeo.

Here is a link to the full campaign and some projected results: [link to Google doc]

Would love to help you guys implement some of Noah's awesome strategies.

-Bryan

*This is a script from the following, excellent <u>website</u>, click to read the full strategy or to copy the text!

Now, I know you won't all be selling a service, but these templates, and the underpinning logic behind them, can be adjusted to convince influencers or potential customers to buy or promote your product, or help you out with your marketing. Here's a 3-step email pitch I wrote to convince business owners to write highly informative content for an upcoming website of mine, whilst advertising their services and businesses at the same time;

Email 1: Interest

Title: Feature Article Opportunity

Hi Craig,

My name is Ed Cottam, I'm a lecturer in entrepreneurship and e-business at Northumbria university (here's my profile: https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/c/ed-cottam/) . I've been involved with several big consultancy projects, featuring several big firms in the north east (e.g. http://www.ugcproject.com/)

I found your site whilst reviewing the work of north east-based freelance photographers online.

I'm currently working on a personal website aimed at gaining exposure to local SMEs, my industry connections and access to several large marketing channels is driving this initiative. I was interested in whether you'd like to have a couple of feature articles published.

Being featured could really attract new clients and increase your business. Does this sound like something you might be interested in, it would require only a few hours of your time?

Kind Regards

If prospects responded to this relatively gentle, intriguing email I followed it up with something like this;

Email 2: Validation

Thanks for your quick reply, Katy.

I noticed your site featured a great collection of work, this website will take a digital marketing slant, what my audience are really interested is detailed, strategic posts about a marketing success. So this could be how you (digitally) reached out to a prospective client and landed a decent contract, how you landed a public speaking gig, or how you succeeded in doubling the traffic to one of your site. So, it's more about those detailed strategies underpinning a fairly big marketing win, than a life story per se.

The content will gain significant industry exposure and be read/presented to hundreds of undergraduate and postgraduate students. This is a fairly grand project which wants to ensure your cover piece is remains relevant and drives traffic to your site for years, and isn't just keyword riddled link bait.

Therefore, you'd be preparing something a little longer than your average piece, at least 1, 750 words I'd say. But our research, and experience, tells us it will generate a far greater buzz and drive far higher traffic to you long-term.

Does this sound like an interesting opportunity for you?

Regards
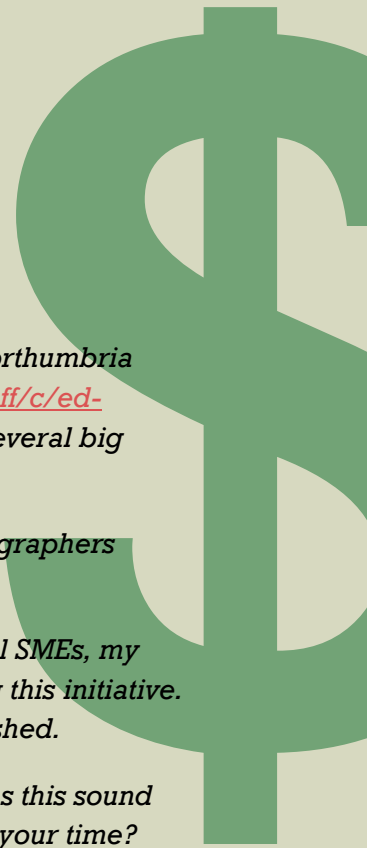
Ed Cottam

Writing 2,000 words to someone you barely know is a tall order, but if they agree (and they should because it's great exposure) I simply close with some guidance and a deadline.

Email 3: Close

Hi Rachel,

I've attached very short guidance notes to help you out.

To ensure this is something you can be proud of and really inspires people to take action, I've provided an overview of sections that will really excite the readership.

Here's a broad outline of how you could structure it and what you could discuss:

 (Unimportant details for this example excluded)

Feel free to add or take out as you see fit, this is merely guidance. Drop me an email if you have any questions, Does 1st December sound okay as a tentative deadline? I think this could be as really big hit with the readers!

Thanks again for your contribution.

Emailing Tips

A couple of points on such cold emailing whether this is for research purposes or finding new clients;
-**always find a named contact** so you can address leads by name, this demonstrates some familiarity with who they are and differentiates you from some spammer.

- **provide some indication of who you are**. If you have a portfolio, use it. If you don't have anything, don't fret, maybe try working for free (for a high profile client) or someone who you've identified has a specific, immediate need for your product/service (i.e. Via the buzz sumo strategy mentioned above).

- try and demonstrate you have an awareness of who they are, their business. Reference newspaper articles or blog posts on their site, possibly even the portfolio work they have on display, it always pays to complement and take the time to show you are interested in them and what they do.

Bear in mind, freelance expert Ramit Sethi highlights a 50/10/1 ration is to be expected, even for firms with extensive portfolios. This means for, every 50 emails you send, 10

should be replying (if it's an effective email) and 1 should convert into a sale (check this). This does depend on industry, and the viability of an effect email marketing strategy depends on your service offering...if your selling a service for £3000 you may be able to stomach an even thinner ratio, but if it's a product for £5.99, this strategy may not work for you.

For those who still can't seem to close a deal, you can always recruit someone to find some customers for you, send out a contract for 1/5 of your asking price (e.g. £100 for a £500 website) and let them do all the hard work. Their network can work for you! Although, be careful not to low ball and do it on the cheap, generally cheap freelancers are ineffective and result in a lot of time micro managing and chasing your tail.

Marketing Brainstorm

If email doesn't quite fit the build, or you simply want to try additional approaches, here's a list of ideas:

- competition for likes (giveaway)
- feature article request in local media outlet (paper, site etc)
- guest post (local blog)
- Local markets
 - advertise where you demographic hangs out (gyms, restaurants etc)
- identify the platforms that will reach your target market
- ads in student halls
- latch onto halls fb pages

For more details, or help contact me at ed.cottam@northumbria.ac.uk