

Publish A Home Business Index For Fast Profits

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Publish A Home Business Index For Fast Profits

Publish and distribute an index (or directory) of home businesses in your community. If you can't think of an ideal business for yourself, then start a business that helps others to build theirs -- by publishing a directory of who sells or does what, what they charge, and where to find them! Something like a weekly BIGTOWN BARGAIN BULLETIN containing listings, little write-ups and possibly, some advertisements.

Statistics tell us that some 25 MILLION people are now operating businesses out of their homes -- and that figure is climbing daily. Most of these enterprises could handle much more business if they could get and would greatly appreciate any assistance in this department.

On the other hand, many consumers would just as soon do their business close to home if they could get the same quality and service and didn't have to waste their time looking for a reliable source. A HOME BUSINESS DIRECTORY serves both the businesses and the consumers!

Collect the name, addresses and phone numbers of home businesses in your area (place ads in local advertisers if necessary).

Contact them and explain your intention and find out more about their products or services. You can ask them particulars about their business over the phone, but it would be much better to mail them a questionnaire with plenty of room for comments. Be sure to include details of any types of warranties or satisfaction assurances they give (money-back, exchanges, etc).

Explain that you are making up a directory and that there is no cost to them for an initial listing unless they want to place an advertisement. They should be able to select the heading under which their business will appear, and POSSIBLY given one line for a slogan or brief explanation.

Those who want to be listed under more than one heading (like Service and Word Processing) would be charged for the extra listing-- even for the first listing. Then you can sell larger ads, just like the phone companies.

Stress it that businesses must honor their commitments and offers made through your publication - or risk being omitted from future issues. You want them to offer specials in exchange for the free mention. The objective is to give your readers an incentive reason to read your publication to see what bargains are available this week.

The first few issues will probably have fewer paid ads than you would like. This is the time to place several of your own -- but do it wisely. Make sure there is a variety of ads; some with illustrations, borders, all different sizes, style of print. This is a good time to spell out any requirements for advertiser honesty (like honoring commitments).

Although the ad is aimed at potential businesses, your readers will notice that your standards are high. Include a small code number in each ad so you can tell your customers that an ad the size and make up of "14-d" costs \$10. Tell your customers how long their ad will be valid.

For example, you can say it will be at least 3 weeks until re-publish. Then, if you wait 4 or 5 weeks, the ad purchaser gets a better deal; but never republish earlier than promised without making it right" with your advertisers.

An incentive that many directory publishers use successfully to keep their advertisers in every issue is to place classified ads according to the number of consecutive insertions.

New customer ads would appear at the end of their respective listings and work up as older advertisers stopped (or dropped out temporarily). Of course, they would have more choice with display ads, which can be priced according to position (for example more for first or last page.).

Another incentive to use display ads is to give free bold print in regular listings to the ones who also purchase a display ad. Some would call this pressure (it is), but there is ample precedent: the phone company routinely inserts a "see advertisement" comments as well as bold print name in the main listing for those who buy display ads. Other incentive are discounts for listing under more than one heading; repeats in succeeding issues and various package deals you make up.

Your first issue will be very important. It should be as complete as you can possibly make it (which is why the first listing must be free) and it should have all sorts of ads. This is true even though selling ads for that first issue is very difficult because it is "sight unseen."

Consider offering not only a free listing to each home business in your area, but also a free ad! Each new client would not only be listed in your directory, but would also get a free ad. Of course, the free ad will be small (perhaps a 1" display), but they certainly can't argue about the price. The purpose of the free ad is twofold: first is to "fill up" that first issue (which would have few ads otherwise); the second is to get customers used to placing an ad.

OTHER BENEFITS ARE:

1. Virtually every business person will want to be included because this is where potential customers will look for home businesses.
2. When they contact you for inclusion and give you the ad info, you find out a good deal about them - at a low cost (to you). This is a cheap way to build a mailing or customer listing.
3. When the business gets additional calls as a result of their being listed, they will see the wisdom of continuing to be included (and paying for an ad that brings them business).
4. All businesses will read the index -- if only to check out the competition and look at their own ads.
5. As your customer's business grows, they will be able to spend more money on advertising (take out larger ads).
6. Even if some clients do not get calls they can specifically identify as having come as a result of their listings in the INDEX, they will want to stay listed if only because their competition is.
7. Since you now have their name and addresses - and know something about their business, they are already on your mailing list as customers. Call them to offer specials whenever you wish.
8. Because your first issue has all (all you could find) home businesses in the area, it is a unique and valuable tool. It will be much better accepted because it is more representative than if your first few issues were skimpy.

Another option is to include articles or features in your INDEX. This can be general information of interest to the community, things that would interest either the advertisers or their potential customers, or special features (on advertisers, local citizens, school events, community calendar, etc).

Under features, you could print little summaries of your advertisers -- even a picture here and there. Items like this could be paid for a bonus for taking out a large ad (many local papers use this technique). They can even furnish the copy, so long as you retain editing rights.

Your publication can be simply a Directory of Home Businesses or it can be incorporated with something else. It could be a "bonanza of specials," tourist guide, county map or sports schedule. It can be given away or sold. Most of these directories are restricted to home business with short filler items of general interest and are given away.

the publisher has them printed, takes them home and assembles them, and then has them distributed door-to-door in the area (often by school kids). Some index publishers place their directories in stores where they are given away -- but some stores will refuse because they consider some of the home businesses as competitors. Either way, all of the income from this business is sale of advertisements contained in the index.

If your directory is limited to a current list of area home businesses and what they offer, it will probably not be necessary to publish more than 2-4 times a year. On the other hand, there may be enough information for monthly or even weekly publication that feature specials or "what's hot" this period. If this is the case, consider publishing a special issue periodically (1-4 times a year) with a complete list of businesses -- even those that don't advertise with you. One way to list would be alphabetically by service or subject (much like the yellow pages).

The cover of your index should be something to catch the eye of both the advertisers (since they pay you) and the public. Slogans are nice (Support Your Community and \$ave), as are names (Bargain Bulletin) and logos (your town or school mascot) or one that you create. Pictures or drawings are also good attention-getters. If possible, the cover should be in two colors, or at a minimum, printed on heavier colored paper.

The title of your index and any accompanying motto should remain constant -- so it can build recognition. Its size is optional; there are pro's and con's to just about any size; pocket size is nice, but easy to lose and probably involves more waste. Larger sizes will fit into the glove compartment or purse, but not a pocket. Telephone size is too big for either, but might be placed by the phone book.

If you decide to place your index in stores for free distribution, make up some holders -- preferably some with your logo and/or name that stores will be proud to display.

Consider a stand that can be placed in supermarket entries and large aisles. Perhaps a stand that fits under a tray -- which would be suitable for either a counter or aisle. One trick is to build your holders or stands with wood and hardened Masonite. Nails and glue work well, and the Masonite is very easy to paint or silk screen.

While in the preparation (compiling your business names and descriptions), also be checking on places and methods of distribution. It might be possible to combine your publication with another, non-competing freebie, where you could share holders. At any rate, remember that your advertising rates will be governed by the number of indexes that are taken or given out -- the more you give out, the more your ads are worth!

The amount and frequency of issues you publish will vary with the location, number of advertisers and your own capabilities. A good starting place would be quarterly. You must tell your advertisers when each issue is due -- and stick to that schedule as close as you can. It is very important to publish on schedule; otherwise, you might be viewed by disappointed advertisers as a fly-by-night operation.

When a client pays for an ad that is to come out February first, he expects and often schedules some of his operation around that ad. If it is late, he will feel cheated! A customer that stops advertising for cause is much more difficult to get back the second time. As a publisher, you will make all sorts of decisions. One of your first will be to decide whether or not to continue not to charge for listings -- and if you should still offer free ads to first time advertisers. If you can list sufficient businesses that are fairly representative of what is available in your area, you may be in the position to charge a small fee for listing in addition to charging for ads.

But if your publication would look skimpy with only those who are willing to pay for listing, it would be prudent to protect your publication by including all businesses, whether or not they take out paid ads. This way, your publication is a complete directory -- and a more useful tool. Of course, you can offer various deals that you design specifically to correct weaknesses or increase participation and revenues.

Unless you plan to do your own printing, check with several printers (and copy services) in your area for the best prices, but be sure they can meet your deadlines. Don't overlook a desktop publisher who can produce masters that can be photo copied. Write for prices from some of the listed Business Sources for a price comparison.

BUSINESS SOURCES

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE COTTAGE INDUSTRIES Box 14850, Chicago, IL 60614. Association for homeworkers.

EXTRA INCOME, Box 3746, Escondido, CA 92025-9873. Bi-monthly magazine for home workers.

CONSUMER INFORMATION CENTER, Box 100, Pueblo, CO 81002. Free and low priced government pamphlets.

INNES CO. Box 368, Northbrook, IL 60062. Publishes IN PLANT PRINTER, trade magazine for printers.

GRAPHIC INTERNATIONAL, Box 4639, Margate, FL 33036. Magazine for people who buy, sell or trade printing equipment.

SPEEDIBOOKS, 23680 Miles, Cleveland, OH 44128. Offset printer, specializes in booklet printing.

SOUTHLAND PRINTERS, Box 7437R, Sarasota, FL 34241. Offset printer, specializes in copy ready material.

DOVER PUBLICATIONS, INC., 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11051. Discount books, clip art, stencils, etc.

QUILL CORPORATION, 100 Schelter Rd., Lincolnshire, IL 60917-4700 ; 312/634-4800. Office supplies.

SWEDCO, Box 29 Mooresville, NC 28115. 3 line rubber stamps - \$3; business cards - \$13 per thousand.

LELLI PRINTING & ADVERTISING, 2564 CR 175, Rt #2, Lundonville, OH 44842. Offset printing - specializes in booklets.

ZPS, Box 581, Liberyville, IL 60048-2556. Business cards (raised print - \$11.50 per K) and letterhead stationery. Will print your copy ready logo or design, even whole card.

WALTER DRAKE, 4119 Drake Bldg., Colorado Springs, CO 80940. Short run business cards, stationery, etc. Good quality, but no choice of style or color.

USA PRINTING, 160 Washington SE, Ste 30, Albuquerque, NM 87108. Super low printing prices. Write for a price list.