

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF COUPON MARKETING

There are more traditional ways of running special offers than group buying. Here's how to do them well.

BY BOB JURKSCHAT

Offer-based marketing and promotions have long helped businesses and brands communicate with their audience. Coupons are one of the leading forms of offer-based marketing and have existed for decades from local newspapers to letterbox drops to more recent online offers, group buying deals and mobile applications.

People love to get value for money and save money. Online coupons have now become part of the business landscape and

bigger brands are integrating them into their marketing campaigns to feed consumer sentiment.

So, how do small businesses get involved and grab a piece of the value pie and is it worth the effort?

IS IT RIGHT FOR MY BUSINESS?

The first step to take, like any form of marketing, is to consider if coupons are right for your target market and if they will deliver value and ROI to your business or brand. You need to assess this tactic alongside your overall marketing plan.

Coupons can be a fantastic value proposition to the consumer and for a small business it can be a gateway into gaining new customers and increasing profit, particularly in the food and service industries such as restaurants, hairdressers and travel.

The opportunity, once you get customers through the door, is to provide a great experience so they return.

The benefits of coupons are:

- Builds traffic by attracting new customers and reigniting old customers: a good offer will give them a reason to return.
- Consumers are known to travel to take advantage of valuable deals so this provides the potential to expand your market area. Coupons also work in targeting regional areas and building your presence in your own local community.
- Gain market share and entice customers that have been using your competitor. It's proven that consumers will break routine shopping patterns to take advantage of a good coupon offer.
- Coupons are a great way to promote a new product, service or location.
- Once you get the new customers through the door you have an opportunity to upsell to them and earn additional profits.
- A measurable and accountable form of marketing: simply count the coupons redeemed to judge the effectiveness of the offer.

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TOP 5 TIPS TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OFFER

- Remember the offer provided should centre on your business's core product and offerings. Work with what you know— don't reinvent the wheel.
- Don't be restrictive. The best offers are open-ended and give consumers ample time to redeem.
- The offer needs to be attractive and something which consumers will want or need.
- Make sure your offer is simple to understand and redeem, consistent and genuine. The offer needs to be considered of real value or it will not be attractive to consumers and you will not get any results.
- Ensure you resource your business accordingly to deal with new customer. The last thing you want is to damage your reputation with bad customer service or failing to deliver on any offers redeemed. Customer service is paramount.

CONTENT IS KING

We have witnessed millions of offers over the years and the formula for good uptake on an offer is to get the content right. If you are truly offering the customer a good product or service partnered with a good offer, 'they will come'.

Make a solid and clear offer: Offer discounts, bonuses or something free, for e.g. 50 percent off, buy one get one free or free delivery. The customer needs to see that they can get something which will benefit their purse strings.

Use bold and specific headlines: There is nothing more frustrating for a consumer when the offer is not clear and they have to check the small print to discover the real deal. Try to minimise the conditions on the offer – the broader the appeal the better the result.

Use interesting colour images: Make effective use of the space you have. Show the product or service that the consumer can obtain. Also remember to make sure your

brand and logo are clear to build company awareness and lend credibility to your offer.

Make benefits clear: Use language that sells your product or service such as 'free', 'save money' or 'get your favourite'.

Where do they get it?: Make sure your location and phone number stand out.

Add your website: Add this to drive traffic and ensure the offer is also online.

ARE YOU AND YOUR STAFF READY?

It is vital all your staff are notified of the offers and know how to handle the coupons correctly. Couponing is incumbent upon businesses providing a full service experience. Think about the long-term effects and consider training your staff on the whole process so all are prepared.

Customer service and the quality of the experience are paramount. Remember you have paid good advertising money to entice the customer to come to you – make sure they come back by spoiling them.

A great offer can come undone simply because the business is not prepared to take on the extra customers. Make sure you have enough staff and stock to meet the requirements of the offer.

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT

The lure of a good deal will get customers through the door but it is vital to ensure

customer experience and satisfaction is always top of mind. A business can damage its brand with bad customer service or by not fulfilling its promised offer. Consumers are fickle and it takes just one bad experience for them never to be seen again. Plus, research has shown that a satisfied customer will tell on average three people but an unsatisfied one will tell an average of 11 other people.

Customers using coupons must be made to feel the same as every other customer and must get the full service experience. You will not get a second chance to make a first impression. You have been given an opportunity to demonstrate how good the product or service is and give the customer a reason to come back.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

So now you have the customers through the door, what next? This is your opportunity to impress and try and get them to return.

Offering great customer service goes without saying but also try to upsell to the consumer. Point new customers towards other products or service related to their purchase or point out added benefits and features of what they are buying. Offering knowledge about the product or service you are selling builds credibility and is an opening to get to know your customer, become their local partner.

It is worth capturing your new customer details on a database to enable you to engage with them regularly or notify them of new products or offers they might like. As a business your customer database is one of your most valuable assets. Consider other marketing tactics which sit alongside your offer such as loyalty cards or schemes and other promotions – think of ways to keep your customer and interact with them.

In our experience, a campaign needs to be run more than once to build awareness and establish credibility in the market. If the consumer only sees the offer briefly there is a chance they might forget and not take advantage at that particular time, however if they are exposed again they have another opportunity to take part. Over time you can change either the value of the offer or the content to keep it fresh and adjust to market conditions. **DB**

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