

SCORE offers thought provoking questions on how to succeed in 2018

What can your small business do differently in 2018 to boost the results of your marketing efforts? Here are seven marketing resolutions every entrepreneur should make for the coming year.

1. I resolve to build relationships with customers. Consumers and B2B buyers alike have seemingly endless options for purchasing almost any product or service they could possibly want. With so much “noise” out there, how can your small business hope to stand out? By targeting your most valuable prospects and customers—those who aren’t just hunting for a bargain, but want lasting relationships with the companies they do business with. Find out what customers want and need, then personalize your marketing to help build relationships.

2. I resolve to understand the customer journey better. Customer journey mapping is growing in importance for 2018. Essentially, this means figuring out how your customers get to the point of buying your product. Where do they first learn about your business? How do they research products like yours? Whose opinion influences their purchasing decision? How long does it take them to make up their minds? Your website, tools for managing customer relationships, and social media analytics can help you visualize the customer journey, so you can reach out to customers at the times they’re most likely to take action. (See Resolution No. 3 below.)

3. I resolve to take content marketing to the next level. That doesn’t mean churning out more and more content, but instead crafting *better* content. For example, your understanding of the customer journey will help you come up with content that answers your prospects’ most common questions at each stage of the process. Just 41 percent of marketers create marketing content based on specific stages of the customer journey, according to a [recent study](#); doing so will give you a huge advantage. You should also target content to specific types of customers.

4. I resolve to learn more about micro-influencers. “Influencers” are celebrities, athletes, and other people with huge social media followings. For most of us, it’s not realistic we’ll get our businesses on the radar of Kim Kardashian or Selena Gomez. That’s why the rise of micro-influencers is such good news for small businesses. Micro-influencers are people with small, but devoted, fan bases—for example, a fashion blogger that your target customers love, or a local musician with a big following. [MDG Advertising](#) cites micro-influencers as one of 2018’s top marketing trends, and getting micro-influencers to review, mention, or share your product or service online can really boost your sales.

5. I resolve to harness the potential of email marketing. It’s hard to believe, but only 27 percent of small business owners currently use an email marketing service, according to Infusionsoft’s latest *Small Business Marketing Trends Report*. Email may be old hat, but it’s the best way to speak directly to prospects one-on-one. Plus, with the number of e-mail users in the U.S. projected to grow to 254.7 million by 2020, up from 244.5 million in 2018, email isn’t going away any time soon. If you’re not using email marketing, make 2018 the year you start. If you are, make sure you’re taking advantage of transactional emails, segmenting and personalizing emails, and monitoring your email analytics to continuously improve.

Use eye-catching design and fun features like gifs, videos, or surveys to make your emails stand out.

6. I resolve to make time for marketing. According to a [survey by Infusionsoft](#), more than one in five small business owners say their biggest challenge is finding enough time to properly market their business. There are two ways to make time: 1) Block it off on your calendar and treat it as sacred and 2) automate as much of your marketing as you can, using tools like email autoresponders, social media scheduling and CRM software.

7. I resolve to stay up-to-date on marketing technology. Artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality and voice search are just a few of the technology trends that will transform marketing in 2018. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of marketing executives in a [recent survey](#) say they will spend more on marketing technology in 2018. If you're uncertain which tools will work best for your business, connect with industry associations, marketing consultants, other business owners or SBA resource partners like [SCORE](#), Small Business Development Centers or Women's Business Centers for assistance.

The tools we use to market our businesses change, but the basic principles of marketing don't. Your prospects still want to know that you care about them, understand their needs, and are ready to solve their problems. If you've got those elements in place, you're well on your way to a successful 2018.