10 marketing moves that bring in more sales.

For owners who run their own marketing. The research, boiled down to what to do this month. Most moves take under an hour and cost nothing.

1 page

The one-minute version, if that's all you read

10 moves

Each with the short version and three things to do

30 days

A week-by-week plan at the back

The whole playbook on one page.

If you only read this page, start at the top. The moves are ordered by how fast they pay off: first the leads you already get, then better ads, then spending smarter. Each page after this one gives you three things to do.

	DO THIS	WHY	TIME
PART 1 · WIN THE LEADS YOU ALREADY GET			
01	Answer every lead within five minutes.	The business that answers first usually wins. Most don't answer for hours.	30 min to set up
02	Do the marketing by hand before you automate any of it.	You can't automate something you don't understand yet.	30 days, a few minutes per lead
03	Ask every customer for a review. Reply to every one.	More reviews and real replies beat a perfect 5.0.	15 min a week
PART 2 · MAKE ADS THAT WORK			
04	Put your customers' exact words in your ads.	Your best ad copy is already in your customers' mouths. Go get it.	About 5 hours once
05	Copy the pattern of your competitors' longest-running ads.	Nobody pays for a losing ad for months. The ones still running are the winners.	10 minutes
06	Spend your time on the ad, not the targeting.	The ad itself drives about half the result. The first three seconds decide if anyone sees the rest.	1 hour a week
07	Add proof, a real deadline and a free extra.	You don't need to be the biggest name. You need to make choosing you easy.	1 hour once
PART 3 · STOP WASTING MONEY			
08	Know the most you can pay for a customer.	If you know your numbers, you can outspend competitors who are guessing, and still make more.	30 minutes
09	Don't let the ad dashboard grade its own homework.	The dashboard counts people who would have bought anyway. A simple test shows what your ads really did.	4 weeks, mostly waiting
10	Test turning off ads on your own business name.	People searching your name have already picked you. You may be paying for clicks you'd get free.	2 to 4 weeks

01 SPEED

Answer every lead within five minutes.

The business that answers first usually wins. Most don't answer for hours.

7x more likely to qualify a lead when you answer within an hour, versus even one hour later.

DO THIS

- [ ] Turn on an instant text reply for every new lead, nights and weekends included.
- [ ] Make the first reply a question, not a receipt. “What day works for you?” beats “Thanks, we got your form.”
- [ ] Time yourself for a week. Most owners guess their response time is much faster than it is.

TIME: 30 MIN TO SET UP | COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Harvard Business Review studied 1.25 million leads. Answering within an hour made a company about 7 times more likely to reach the decision maker. When they audited 2,241 companies, the average reply took 42 hours, and 23% never replied at all.

> **Watch out.** The study is from 2011. Every newer study we found points the same way, and people have only gotten less patient.

SOURCES: [1]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

02 BY HAND

Do the marketing by hand before you automate any of it.

You can't automate something you don't understand yet.

30 days of answering every lead yourself shows you exactly what to automate, and what to say when you do.

DO THIS

- [ ] For the next 30 days, reply to every lead yourself, or listen in on every call.
- [ ] Keep a note of the questions you get asked over and over, and the answers that get people to book.
- [ ] Then turn those answers into your auto-replies, your FAQ and your ads.

TIME: 30 DAYS, A FEW MINUTES PER LEAD

COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Paul Graham, who started Y Combinator, wrote the best-known essay in startups about this: do things that don't scale. The best companies did things by hand that looked silly, like recruiting users one by one, because that's how they learned what worked. Marketing is the same. The owner who personally replies to every lead for a month learns which questions close deals and which ads bring the wrong people.

HOW WE LEARNED THIS OURSELVES

Before Osmo ran anything on its own, we built our first client's campaign completely by hand, kept a group chat going with every customer, and cold called 60 or more businesses a day. That's where every one of Osmo's playbooks came from.

> **Watch out.** Doing it by hand is for learning, not forever. Once you know what works, automate it, or the business stalls on you. Speed still counts: if you can't reply within five minutes, send a quick “Got it, I'll text you shortly” first.

SOURCES: [2]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

03 REVIEWS

Ask every customer for a review. Reply to every one.

More reviews and real replies beat a perfect 5.0.

4.2–4.5 stars is where buying peaks. A perfect 5.0 can look too good to be true.

DO THIS

- [ ] Text every customer a direct link to review you on Google right after the visit or job. While you are there, fill in every field of your Google Business Profile.
- [ ] Reply to every review within a day or two. Mention what they actually bought.
- [ ] On a bad review, write for the next customer reading it, not just the angry one.

TIME: 15 MIN A WEEK | COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Northwestern's Spiegel Research Center found buying peaks at 4.2 to 4.5 stars, and 82% of shoppers go looking for bad reviews on purpose. A separate study of hotels found that once owners started replying, ratings rose 0.12 stars and reviews went up 12%. Google adds that a complete Business Profile makes people 70% more likely to visit.

> **Watch out.** 0.12 stars sounds small, but ratings round on screen: it can be the difference between showing 4.3 and 4.5. Never fake, buy or filter reviews. It breaks platform rules and the law.

SOURCES: [3], [4], [5]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

04 CUSTOMERS

Put your customers' exact words in your ads.

Your best ad copy is already in your customers' mouths. Go get it.

10 short calls with recent customers teach you more than a month of ad dashboards.

DO THIS

- [ ] Call your last 10 customers. Ask what was going on when they started looking, what else they tried, and what almost stopped them.
- [ ] Write down their exact words. Use them as headlines, word for word.
- [ ] Make one ad for each reason you hear more than once.

TIME: ABOUT 5 HOURS ONCE

COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Don't ask people if they like you; they'll be nice. Ask what actually happened. Research on how people buy lands in the same place: people buy in a specific moment (“wedding in six weeks,” “hitch broke before a trip”), and the business that comes to mind in that moment wins.

HOW WE LEARNED THIS OURSELVES

A Y Combinator founder ran a mock interview with us and said we only understood our customers on the surface. We got on the phone with every customer that week. It changed how we pitch, and it'll change your ads too.

Watch out. This is the slowest move in the playbook, and the one with the biggest payoff.

05 RESEARCH

Copy the pattern of your competitors' longest-running ads.

Nobody pays for a losing ad for months. The ones still running are the winners.

$0 to see every Facebook and Instagram ad any business is running, and when each one started.

DO THIS

- [ ] Search Meta's Ad Library for your top five competitors, plus the biggest name in your field in another city.
- [ ] Sort by the ones running longest. Screenshot them. Note the hook, the offer and the format.
- [ ] Don't copy the ad. Copy the pattern (a price up front, a face on camera, a before and after) and make your own.

TIME: 10 MINUTES COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Meta's Ad Library is public. Type in any business and you'll see every ad it's running, the date each started, and the versions it's testing. An ad that's been running three or four months is almost always working, because businesses turn off losers fast.

> **Watch out.** “Running a long time” is a rule of thumb. Some businesses just forget to turn ads off, so look for patterns across several ads, not one.

SOURCES: [8]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

06 CREATIVE

Spend your time on the ad, not the targeting.

The ad itself drives about half the result. The first three seconds decide if anyone sees the rest.

47% of an ad's sales impact came from the creative. Targeting was about 9%.

DO THIS

- [ ] Take the hour you'd spend on audience settings and make three new ad ideas instead. Different hooks, not new colors.
- [ ] Open with the payoff in the first three seconds: the result, the price, a face, the problem.
- [ ] Design for sound off. Captions on, and words on screen that carry the message alone.

TIME: 1 HOUR A WEEK

COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Nielsen broke down where advertising's sales impact comes from: the creative 47%, reach 22%, brand 15%, targeting about 9%. Facebook's research with Nielsen found nearly half of a video ad's value lands in the first three seconds, and captions added about 12% more viewing time.

> **Watch out.** The breakdown was compiled by a media company and the video numbers are from 2016, so take the exact percentages loosely. The direction shows up across many studies.

SOURCES: [9], [10]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

07 PERSUASION

Add proof, a real deadline and a free extra.

You don't need to be the biggest name. You need to make choosing you easy.

87% of shoppers picked an unknown car insurer over their favorite once it added six simple nudges.

DO THIS

- [ ] Show proof: your review count and real numbers (“412 five-star reviews”), plus licenses or press.
- [ ] Give a reason to act now, only if it's true: “4 openings left in November.” Add something free: a consult or an add-on.
- [ ] Put the one thing people compare (price, warranty, how fast) up front in plain words.

TIME: 1 HOUR ONCE

COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Google and The Behavioural Architects ran 310,000 simulated purchases. When an unknown brand added six nudges (reviews, authority, scarcity, “available now,” something free, and the key spec up front), it pulled shoppers away from their favorite: 28% for cereal, up to 87% for car insurance.

> **Watch out.** It was a simulation, not real purchases, and every nudge has to be true. Fake scarcity backfires the moment people notice.

SOURCES: [11]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

08 THE MATH

Know the most you can pay for a customer.

If you know your numbers, you can outspend competitors who are guessing, and still make more.

95% of the people who see your ads aren't ready to buy yet. The money comes later.

DO THIS

- [ ] Write down three numbers: what a new customer spends in their first 90 days, what share of leads become customers, and your profit margin.
- [ ] Multiply them. That's the most you can pay for a lead and still make money. Most owners find it's higher than they thought.
- [ ] Check it every month against your real cost per booked customer, not cost per lead.

TIME: 30 MINUTES

COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Paul Graham, who started Y Combinator, asks founders one question: at today's numbers, do you make it? Run the same test on your marketing. Most owners know their cost per lead and nothing after it. Researchers at the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute found only about 5% of buyers are ready to buy at any moment. So part of your spend plants seeds that pay back months later, and you can only afford that if you know your numbers.

> **Watch out.** 95:5 comes from research on business buyers. The idea holds for anything people buy rarely, like a med spa treatment, a trailer or an event.

SOURCES: [12], [13]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

09 MEASUREMENT

Don't let the ad dashboard grade its own homework.

The dashboard counts people who would have bought anyway. A simple test shows what your ads really did.

15 big experiments at Facebook. The usual ways of measuring ads often got the answer wrong.

DO THIS

- [ ] Ask one question: what would have happened if we hadn't run this ad?
- [ ] Pause ads in a few zip codes for three or four weeks. Compare bookings there with the areas where ads kept running.
- [ ] Judge ads by the trend in total bookings, not the number the ad platform reports.

TIME: 4 WEEKS, MOSTLY WAITING

COST: $0

WHY IT WORKS

Northwestern and Facebook researchers ran 15 real experiments covering 1.6 billion ad views, then checked the usual measurement methods against the truth. They often got it wrong, usually making ads look better than they were. A separate test of retargeting found it really did work (+17% site visits, +11% purchases), but you only know because someone tested it.

> **Watch out.** None of this means ads don't work. It means you won't know which ones work until you test them.

SOURCES: [14], [15]. FULL LIST AT THE BACK.

10 SEARCH ADS

Test turning off ads on your own business name.

People searching your name have already picked you. You may be paying for clicks you'd get free.

99.5% of eBay's brand-search traffic came back through free results when eBay turned the ads off.

DO THIS

- [ ] Skip this if you don't run Google search ads on your own name.
- [ ] Pause those ads on some days, or in part of your area, for two to four weeks. Compare total leads, paid plus free.
- [ ] Keep the ads if competitors bid on your name. That's when they protect you.

TIME: 2 TO 4 WEEKS | COST: SAVES MONEY

WHY IT WORKS

eBay shut off ads on searches for “eBay” and almost none of the traffic disappeared: people clicked the free result right below. But when Edmunds ran the same test, it lost more than half of that traffic. So it isn't always waste. It's worth testing.

> **Watch out.** eBay is a giant that always ranks first. A small business on a crowded results page is closer to the Edmunds case. Test it; don't assume.

The whole playbook as a to-do list.

About two to three hours a week. The number in brackets points back to the move.

WEEK 1

Stop losing leads

- [ ] Turn on an instant text reply for every lead (01)
- [ ] Time your real response for a week (01)
- [ ] Reply to every lead yourself and note the questions (02)

WEEK 2

Get your reviews moving

- [ ] Text a Google review link after every visit or job (03)
- [ ] Fill in every field of your Google profile (03)
- [ ] Reply to every review from the last 90 days (03)
- [ ] Write down your three numbers (08)

WEEK 3

Make better ads

- [ ] Call your last 10 customers (04)
- [ ] Spend 10 minutes in the Meta Ad Library (05)
- [ ] Make three new ads in your customers' words (04, 06)
- [ ] Add proof, a real deadline and a free extra (07)

WEEK 4

Test, don't guess

- [ ] Pause ads in a few zip codes (09)
- [ ] Test pausing ads on your own name (10)
- [ ] Compare cost per booked customer to your max (08)

ONLY HAVE TIME FOR THREE?

1. Answer every lead within five minutes (01).
2. Ask every customer for a review, and reply to every one (03).
3. Know the most you can pay for a customer (08).

Or let Osmo run the playbook.

Everything in here works. It's also a lot to keep up with every week on top of running a business. That's why we built Osmo, a marketing department you text.

Osmo answers new leads, asks for reviews, makes your ads and posts, and reports on what's actually booking, across the channels you connect. You text it like a teammate in iMessage, and you approve what goes out.

Want to see what Osmo would do for your business?

Book 15 minutes at osmoti.com/book, or just reply to the email this came in. You'll talk to a founder, not a sales rep.

Sources

Where a number comes from a news report, a vendor summary or a company's own data instead of the original study, the “Watch out” note on that page says so. The stories on moves 02 and 04 are our own experience.

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