

10 Ways to Find New Customers

Presented by Jennifer Cox, President & Co-Founder, NNEP at the One Stop Expo, March 29, 2019



"What is my intention for this class?" To show you ways to market your business.

What's important? Giving you workable choices

What matters? Giving you enough ideas that you will act on some of them!

How to find customers (aka **MARKETING**) is the second most discussed subject we cover with NNEP members and apparel decoration business owners. Many embroiderers & apparel decorators are not sure where or how to find customers. Many new business owners guess about what marketing will work for them, or even worse, do no marketing at all, yet they hope for the best... that their business will take off. Today you will discover ways to market your business that A) you CAN do; B) you can afford; and C) that work!

My goal today is to help you make the mental shift, if necessary, from thinking of yourself as an **embroiderer** or **apparel decorator** to thinking of yourself as an **entrepreneur**, a business owner. This is important because our industry is populated by three kinds of people: producers, sellers and entrepreneurs. And the **entrepreneurs** are the ones that are profitable. I want you to be in the third group! And getting into that last group, the entrepreneurs, is totally within your abilities and your control.

- How many of you want a business that makes **no** income?
- How many of you want a business that makes a **little bit of** income?
- How many of you want a business that replaces an **existing** income?
- How many of you want a business that makes a LOT of income? How much is a lot? \$25,000? \$100,000? A Million? What is your "big sexy number?" **Write it down here – I want my business to bring in \$ _____ !**

As it has often been said, when you fail to **plan**, you plan to **fail**. That is especially true for independent business owners. We get so busy doing the "**work**" to fill orders that we overlook the importance of building a solid foundation for our business. Today, we are going to think about exactly that – the foundation upon which we are building our dream businesses. We need to set aside time to work **ON** our businesses, not just **IN** them.

Without a plan, a big picture view of our company, it is really challenging to achieve that objective! I have learned, after helping literally thousands of business owners, that success is possible when

you step back, fly high and look AT your business, often from an angle. In order to see the terrain of your business and where you want to go, you need to view it from **40,000** feet and see what is going on within your company and within your market and with this industry. And then, you need to take what you see and build that into a marketing plan that will take you where you want to go, it becomes your **roadmap**. Without a map, how do you know where you are going, and how do you know when and if you get there? Today, we are taking on Marketing.

I'm going to give you strategies that you can take home and begin using immediately. They are not expensive. They are not tricky. Mind you, they are not **easy** either. Doing any of these strategies will require that you think and then you have to act, you need to actually **DO SOMETHING** in order to benefit from them. Are you willing to take action?

It all starts with **Marketing**, because marketing is the first step that then leads to sales. Marketing produces **contacts**; Contact become **prospects** and finally, Prospects become **customers**

You are getting some homework – yep, assignments to help you define where you want to go and then how to actually get there! Are you ready? I bet that you've heard some of the ideas I'm going to share before. But what you may not know is that only 25% of independent business owners ACTUALLY do intentionally do marketing. The ones that do the work SUCCEED! Because you are here, taking the time to learn how to grow your business, you have already dramatically increased the chances of realizing your dream business.

Marketing is one of those “fuzzy” words – even for me, and I have training in it, and years of experience in it. What does it actually mean? Marketing is the action or business of promoting and selling products or services. How to bring your marketing plan to life – that is where things get interesting. Think about your marketing objectives as real conversations that have a life cycle of their own. Once you know the flow of these conversations, and what to do at each stage of the conversation, you will move forward!

As apparel decorators and embroiderers, we are doing SO MUCH MORE than providing products with logos and designs on them.

- You are a key part of your customer's marketing team!
- You are part of their **branding**.
- You are a problem solver, solution provider.
- You help them build **community**.
- You help them create **unity**.
- And you do ALL of this THROUGH the logo'd apparel and products you provide.
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SO, are you beginning to see what I mean about changing how you think about marketing, and your role as an entrepreneur? When you think like this, that you are a branding partner, you are thinking like an entrepreneur. When you think that you need to make 48 shirts today, you are thinking like a producer, a do-er.

BOTH kinds of thinking are necessary in your business, especially if you are an “army of one!”

The key to your success lies in the fact that you have to take active control over your time, and determine how you make the most money. And then you have to make sure that at least 50% of your working time, every week, is spent on that task. And there are only 2 ways you make money as an apparel decorator – You JAW is moving up and down or your MACHINES are going!

Marketing is the process of finding more customers by reaching the right people and doing the right things. Marketing is the process of developing and communicating value to your prospects and customers. The “4 Ps” of marketing are product, price, place, promotion. Sounds simple, yes?

Ask people to define marketing and you’ll probably get as many different answers as the number of people you ask. Answers will be all over the place:

- It’s brochures and slogans and print ads in magazines
- It’s websites, newsletters and email
- It’s communicating with customers
- It’s an MBA crunching numbers on brand equity and analyzing market share data

Yet marketing is much more than brochures and websites and numbers; it’s a critical investment that generates revenue, profit and opportunity for growth. It is the invoice you send for payment. It is the quote you jotted on a scrap of paper. It is the sign in your front window or on your vehicle. It is the email or actual sample you send for sew out approval. It is every single product and every single piece of paper and every single message that leaves your business. Marketing is happening in every step you take to attract, engage with, and win your customers

Why do people buy green boots? ... wait for it.... To keep their feet dry!

Your customers are not walking around “nekkid!” They have a closet filled with clothes. They are trying to solve some other problem with their logo’d or decorated apparel. Once you identify their specific need or problem, convincing them that you have the best solution becomes much easier.

Quit selling STUFF, start solving problems! Marketing solutions to solve their problems WILL catch their attention.

Think of your marketing from the perspective of what your business is about. Successful companies are “up to something” and they are very clear about what that is. FedEx is committed to getting packages there overnight. What are you committed to? Write it down – right now.

Now you are in the right “conversation” – what is it going to take to bring your commitment to life? You already know the answer, you just may not recognize it! Here is a list of all the different ways that you can market your business:

- Market research
- Business Name
- Your Logo
- Your market Position
- Price
- Packaging
- Public relations (free)
- Newspaper articles
- Magazine articles
- Press releases
- Promotions
- Displays
- Brochures/cards/literature
- Advertising (pay)
- Newspaper ads
- Magazine & trade magazine ads
- Radio ads
- TV ads
- Direct mail
- Sending samples
- Marketing presentations
- Trade Shows
- Networking
- Luncheons
- Seminars/workshops
- Developing professional relationships
- Web Marketing
- Social Media

It is so easy to say, “Yes, I will do X, Y, & Z from the list above.” That is simply not good enough. You need to get more specific than that. Write down what you can do, what you will do, what you know how to do. Put it on a poster, a white board, or on a document. Make it REAL by writing it down.

I promised you ten strategies that you can execute to grow your business. So here are more than ten marketing strategies that I think you could do this year, and have dramatic results. It does not matter if you have a storefront, operate from your home or have a huge commercial operation. Do these things and you will see growth! Remember when you PLAN to work on your business and not just in it, you will see growth! Your goal is to get specific and transform these ideas into actions.

Marketing Strategy #1 Do your **homework!** “Marketing Research” is a meaningless phrase to many business owners. Or people assume that only BIG companies do market research. Let’s make it relevant to your business with three simple questions:

- What is the **average dollar amount** of your orders?
- How much do your customers spend with you **annually**, on average?
- How **often** do your customers place an order with you?

With the answers to these three simple questions, you can then determine the dollar value of every customer and every sale. If your average order from a trades business owner (plumber, builder, painter, electrician) is \$250, and they place orders three times a year, it makes sense that each of these kinds of customers is worth \$750/year. If your “onesie” and gift customers spend about \$50 once a year, clearly these customers are worth \$50/year each.

Which group of customers do you want to get more of, gift and onesie customers or trades people? Go back through your 2018 sales. Take the time to do the “market research” to understand your customers. What groups become evident? What are their average sales? How often did they place an order? Do you see any spikes in activity based around something you did – such as a mailing, a networking event, or a show? You will see patterns emerge that will help you target more customers like the ones that are making you the best income. Once you know who they are, it becomes much easier **to find more like them!**

By looking back over the past several months of orders, patterns will emerge that will help you know where to invest your marketing time, money and effort so that you can attract more customers like your best groups of customers. High turnover industries = ideal customers, where garments are hard used or employees turn often, restaurants, labor, construction, landscapers.

Marketing Strategy #2 Replicate your **Top Five**. Grab your pen – right now, here in class, write down the name of your top five customers, jobs or orders. If you are struggling to name five, you may be fairly new or a small business and that is OK! Write down at least one person or job. My question to you is this: Would you like 5-10-20-50 more just like them? First, WHY did you write them down? Are they nice? Are they easy to work with? Do they pay on time? Does their design sew well? Was that order profitable, or really profitable? WHAT is it about them or that order that made them “top five” worthy? Ideally, you picked customer or job that provided a healthy profit for you.

Now evaluate these top customers. What industry are they in? What was the order size? How can you connect with other customers that have some similarities to these top five? Market to companies and customers that have parallels to your top five customers, and you will bring more top five type work to your business. Why market to people that are like your “**worst nightmare**” customers? Stop marketing to them, completely! If they walk in, sure take the work. But 100% of your marketing messages, efforts and money should be going out towards top five candidates!

Marketing Strategy #3 Your B-E-L. Look at your **B efore E mbroidery (or other decoration process) L ife** to see if you have hidden opportunities. What are you interested in? With what groups are you connected, much less have some sway? Examples – I should not sell to horse farms, you should sell into groups where you have involvement, knowledge!

Marketing Strategy #4 Business Cards. Dollar for dollar, this is the best money you can spend to share the key basics about your business with anyone, anytime and anywhere. Always include your full phone number, including the area and your postal zip code. On the back of the card add a coupon, add lines for notes, or even your favorite quote.

Marketing Strategy #5 Sexy Sells! The **machines** we use to put logos and designs on products are SEXY - they are fun to watch in action. Showing a machine going is one of our greatest marketing assets. When people see the machine running, they often become enchanted enough to buy something that was done on it. Harness that power, as it is likely that they will continue to buy from you well after the initial event.

Shoot 20 - 30 seconds of **video** of an order being created. Include this video as an attachment the next time you email that customer or when you send them their invoice. It is highly likely that they will share that video with the people they work with, their family and their friends! You can also post these short videos on your Facebook page and on YouTube.

Host an **open house** at least once every six months and have the machines running so that people can see them in action. Showcase your machine to specific groups of targeted prospects. If you do business with trades people such as plumbers, builders, electricians, invite all of them to an open house. Also invite every other person from those trades from your local communities. When these not-yet customers come and see that you are doing the work for some of the folks they probably know, you become a high value supplier – instantly!

Many chambers offer monthly gatherings, usually at the business locations of various members. Offer to host a future gathering. Have the machines running, the display area filled with current samples, and catalogs available for browsing. Remember just how fascinating it is to see the machines when they are running? Your fellow business owners are also likely to be fascinated, and once they know where to find you, they will come back when they have a need for decorated or logo'd apparel. If you are not part of the Chamber, host your own open house. Send out invitations or post flyers to announce it, invite the local newspaper and make sure to encourage your existing customers to stop in and bring a friend.

Marketing Strategy #6 Enthusiasm is contagious. When you are given the opportunity to talk about your business, in any setting, be prepared to briefly explain what you do in a catchy, enthusiastic manner. If you can barely manage to say you embroider on jackets for companies, you will probably lose the interest of the person rather quickly. If you come up with a quick, memorable answer, you may open the door for a conversation about what you do and how you can help them, leading to the opportunity to do business with them in the near future.

I have used countless answers to the question, "So, what do you do?" over the years. Some have been more effective than others. The answers have ranged from "I am a logo specialist, putting your name where it counts," to "I am the jacket lady here in town, we make the school jackets," to "We put logos on everything, from boxers to briefcases!" to "We get our customers dressed in the morning." Take the time to develop your answer and to practice it, so that the next time someone asks you about yourself or your business, you are comfortable opening the door on that conversation, and that potential customer.

STOP saying you are do embroidery! Or worse, that you are an embroiderer-ererer!!!!

Marketing Strategy #7 Be visible where they are. Where does your community and your target markets gather regularly? **In my husband's hometown, nearly everyone in town attends the home and even the away football and basketball games. In the community where I live now, there is a huge community showcase each June. Business owners set up tables throughout the high school and thousands of people come through the school over the weekend. A town near us hosts a huge pumpkin festival every year, and you can sponsor a contest, the cider tent or set up a booth with a game in it. Volunteer to work a fundraiser or golf outing when asked to donate goods. Volunteer time instead of costly goods, and network the event like crazy while "volunteering!" Again, concentrate on meeting everyone, not selling them.**

Participate in your community. Attend Chamber of Commerce and community events, with the intention of WORKING the CROWD instead of snacking and drinking with your friends. Concentrate on meeting the other people, getting to know them, it is not about selling to them in this setting.

Marketing Strategy #8 Contests are a fun way to attract the attention of new customers. Embroidery lends itself very well to a contest format, “Guess how many stitches are in this design?” Run an ad in the local paper with a printed version of the design, and invite the public to stop in to see the actual embroidered sample. Offer the winner a free jacket, shirt, sweater or sweatshirt with a stock design of their choice. For the cost of the ads, one shirt, and one stock design, you could attract a large number of new faces to your business. Make the contest fun and even maybe a bit wacky and be sure to really talk it up around town. Post flyers on the bulletin boards at the grocery stores, laundromats, libraries and everywhere else you are allowed in town. If you can get a buzz going around town about your contest, then this effort is working. Plus, you should be able to get some free publicity at the end of the contest. Maybe you could even get the local paper to run a photo of the contest winner holding or wearing their winning item, along with the answer to the contest in the accompanying blurb. Begin an annual tradition, and you might be able to create a phenomenon that will work year after year after year.

Marketing Strategy #9 Ask for **Referrals, Reviews and Testimonials**. When you ask for a referral, be sincere and direct. Many folks are intimidated when they even think about asking for referrals. Done correctly, the customer will be flattered that you asked, and will volunteer names without hesitation. The secret to asking for referrals is in how you present the idea. When a customer picks up a job, and is thrilled with your work, that is a prime opportunity to gently ask for referrals. Make sure you are prepared with a pen, paper, and telephone book to collect or dig up all the information you will need to follow up on the referral. Ask for permission to use the name of the person that gave you the referral. And then be sure to follow up on the leads you receive.

You can also say something such as, "I'm glad that you're pleased with my work. I'd really appreciate it if you'd pass my name along to anyone else you know who would be interested in custom apparel and products. May I leave these extra **business cards** with you?" Leaving extra business cards with them makes it easier for them to pass your name and contact information to someone else. Capitalize on past customers by asking them to review your business online

or let you quote them in a testimonial. Ask permission for “bragging rights” before bragging. Ask permission before using images of their designs in printed materials

Marketing Strategy #10 Create a **portfolio** of samples. In many fields, professionals are hired based on the quality of their portfolio. For some reason, our industry does not seem to get this concept. Make a very high end portfolio of samples so that your work can speak for you. Do not toss some random sewout scraps or printed shirts in your bag. Take the time to create a portfolio, all on the same material, with designs cut out to the same size. Ideally, you would also include a testimonial from that same company on their letterhead or a copy of an email they send you. A professional portfolio creates a professional image of your company. If a picture is worth a thousand words, well presented samples care priceless.

Marketing Strategy #11 Be your own **best marketing**. Wear your best work on your personal time. I have lost count of how many business cards I have handed out at the grocery store, waiting in line at the dry cleaners, and sitting on the sidelines at our kid’s school events. I am always wearing bold, splashy apparel I made when I am bopping around town. **I have a stack of sweatshirts for the spring and fall that are the bulk of my weekend wardrobe.** Make sure you and your family are wearing your work whenever it is appropriate. And take the time to make it good – designs and products that will be noticed! Even when my kids were four years old, they could say “Mommy did it, ask her!” It is the perfect set up to offer the interested person a business card and the invitation to stop by so I can show them that I can **“make for them.”**

This is a key phrase – nowhere is the word sales, selling, embroidery or screen printing! And a lot of these folks have stopped in and become long time customers, simply because I was so casual and sincere in my invitation. One lady told me she simply was so curious to “see what else I could make” that she stopped in the next week, and made the trip specifically to come to my business as she lived on the other side of town. My husband always had cards in his wallet, and needed to refill his supply frequently.

One of my favorite stories is about a passenger seated next to a guy friend of mine in the industry on a flight. That other passenger was a very athletic, macho, NYC Police Officer. “So what do you do for a living,” he asked my friend. Jim replied “Embroidery.” The officer leaned back away from Jim, and gave him the most incredulous look, that read, “What kind of guy are you?” Jim quickly pointed to his shirt (embroidered, of course) and said “we do logos, like this.” Then it began to dawn on the officer what Embroidery was all about. Next, Jim pointed out the fact that the officer was wearing a Yankees cap, Nike shorts, and a country club golf shirt, all of which were embroidered. By then he fully understood what it was that Jim did, and restored him to full-fledged, red-blooded American Guy status in his

mind. Furthermore, he wanted to know more about Jim's business, and became a potential customer very quickly. So keep in mind the importance of wearing decorated apparel in public, especially your own logo. Always look for that extra edge in the marketing game.

Marketing Strategy #12 Garment care hang tags or stickers. When your customer places an order for shirts for their business, they know where these shirts come from, but do their employees know? On the front of the hang tag, put washing and drying instructions. On the back of the tag, include your logo, phone and website information.

Marketing Strategy #13 Internet - If your business cannot be found on someone's **smartphone**, you do not exist. You MUST have a web presence - and that does not necessarily mean a website. Get at least a Facebook business page. Tell stories, show photos and share videos on it. It is NOT a salesperson for your business, it is a marketing tool! Many first impressions are a digital experience, and more and more it is a mobile digital experience.

Marketing Strategy #14 Claim your **google** local business page. Google the name of your business and see what comes up. Be sure to sign out of your google accounts first, as that influences what results you will see.

Marketing Strategy #15 Cohesive and **Comprehensive**. Everything that your customers see, touch, read and experience in relation to your business is a marketing opportunity. Boxes, invoices, catalogs, actual products, vehicles, quotes, how you answer the phone, it all should be giving the same impression about your company. Big brands invest massive amounts of money into creating and then protecting their brands, logos, colors for a reason - they are at the heart of that company's value!

STOP creating or distributing **"marketing junk!"** Marketing junk is all the advertisements, websites, brochures, Facebook posts, blog posts you created because it seemed like a good idea at the time. It is anything you wrote quickly, without much thought or focus because you were too rushed or too broke to hire a professional. Marketing junk is the stuff that looks like it could belong to any of your competitors. Here's a good way to remember this strategy. Think like a non-profit. By that, I mean think like the Grand Canyon National Park. They can rest pretty darn peacefully that a new grand canyon is not going to open up just down the road, right? Your competition is real. We can't pretend they do not exist. What you CAN do is adjust how people see you with information and images that go outside the expected. If everyone brags about how fast they are, tout your delivery service. If your competition is all about price, focus on quality and product selection. If your competition is known to be slow

with delivery, or missing deadlines, pump up your message about ALWAYS on time, every time.

Marketing Strategy #16 Know your competition. What do people say about the other apparel decoration businesses in your area? Are they expensive, or inexpensive? Hard to get in touch with? Miss their deadlines? Make your business's marketing message a specific counterpoint to the businesses around you. The objective of marketing is to make it easy for someone to recall your business right when they have a need that you can meet. Create a message that has "mental peanut butter" so that you stick to the top of their brains!

Marketing Strategy #17 Employee Data Tracking, Bagging, Invoicing. Make it easy for your customers with multiple employees to do business with you. Set up a basic spreadsheet for that customer, and track what sizes each employee ordered of specific items. When it is time for the company to place another order, give them a copy of the list of employees with the items and sizes already filled in. Create a custom order form with a due date that can be handed out with payroll or posted in the lunch area. When the job is finished, sort the products by employee and bag them and label each bag with the employee's name. This level of customer service is unusual, so much so that it is likely that they will tell other people about it.

Here's the thing - your real competition is NOT what you think it is!
Believe it or not, your competition is NOT the other businesses that sell decorated apparel in your area!

Your potential customer has a finite amount of money. And they have an infinite number of things they need to spend it on, from a new copier at their business to a new roof to their child's wedding to new tires because some of theirs are bald. **These completely unrelated needs are your real competition!** Your goal is to be visible to them when their need to solve a challenge with logo'd and decorated apparel moves to the top of their priority list - that is when your marketing pays off.

Good marketing is essential for every company. It can make a company with a mediocre product successful, but poor marketing can send a good company out of business. Yet even business-to-business marketing is often seen as a soft creative field instead of the engine that drives company revenue.

Here's the real secret that successful companies know and live by: Creating a clear marketing strategy is not what companies do after they get big - it is what small companies do to grow and get bigger in the first place!

Doing **anything** is better than doing nothing, no matter how small or infrequent!

What is one marketing thing can you do TODAY and do every day to move a single step forward? When you have a clear target, clear message and a plan, use this to guide your small day to day decisions. Ask yourself, "How will doing X help me reach goal Y?"

Your greatest limitation – is YOU, and what you believe to be true and the decisions you make based on your beliefs...

- They won't pay that... They don't need that...
- They won't like this... It is not good enough...

THEY are NOT saying these things, only YOU are – STOP IT!!!

They are not walking into your business naked – they need MORE than a shirt to wear with some colorful threads, ink or vinyl on it. Learn to discover their "what" or "why," and you will never have any real competition!

Stop selling STUFF and start offering SOLUTIONS!

Every NO gets you one step closer to your next YES... Keep count and track your averages...

No matter what approach you take to build your business and attract new customers, keep in mind that you should fine tune each effort on a small scale before investing in that effort on a larger scale. Also remember to let each effort have a fair shot at working before you abandon it. And most important of all, remember that unless the person has need for your decorated apparel at that exact moment that they are seeing your message, it doesn't matter anyway. So keep your company visible and accessible so that when the customer does have a need, you are already in place in their mind.

"Success is getting it wrong as infrequently as possible" – Unknown