
ADVERTISING YOUR BUSINESS

An introduction

I'll start by answering the most fundamental question: "Why would you want to advertise the business anyway?" Then I'll talk about ways to advertise on St. Helena and how to decide between them.

Published in the St. Helena Independent, May/June 2012

In most places, promoting a business is almost automatic. When I first arrived here I was surprised, and more than a little frustrated, at how few businesses did advertise. Many weren't even in the 'phone book. As a new arrival it can be hard to find out who does what, or even if anybody does it. Even after seven years I'm still discovering businesses that have always been here; I just didn't know about them.

St. Helena, as I'm sure you're already bored with being told, is about to undergo the biggest change in its economy since the demise of the flax industry in the 1960s. Many more people will be coming here who do not know how to get a key cut, or a watch repaired, or some packages shifted from the wharf to their new home. Advertising has to be the way forward.

Let's look at the common reasons for advertising a business:

- **You have a new business, or a new product or service.** In this case you want potential customers to know about it. It could take years for word of mouth to catch up, so you have to advertise. And if it's a whole new concept your advertising may also have to explain what the product/service is and why customers will benefit from it.
- **You have changed something.** Maybe a special offer, or an upgraded product. You need your existing customers to know about the change and advertising can be a good way to communicate with many people at once.
- **You want more customers.** I've heard it said here that if a business is advertising it must be in trouble. That attitude needs to change. Coca Cola spends around two billion pounds each year on advertising and it certainly isn't in trouble. Even if you are already as busy as you can be, your current customers may move away or their circumstances may change, so you should always be on the lookout for new customers. Added to which, new people arrive and if you don't attract them to your business, somebody else will attract them to theirs.
- **You want to remind people you're there and what you do.** If your business provides a product or service that people only need occasionally, they may not remember how to contact you, or even that you can do this thing. Last time you advertised your product or service maybe it wasn't relevant to them, but now it is. It's up to you to remind them!

Can you really say none of these applies to your business, and not one of them ever will?

Advertising, however, costs money, and no business wants to waste its financial resources. It's commonly joked that half the money you spend on advertising is wasted, but you cannot work out which half. Actually, though, there are things you can do to minimise the wastage. If you're considering placing an advert, on radio or in a local newspaper, think about these things:

- **Your audience:** who are you trying to reach? Are they the sort of people that read newspapers, or would your advert get more attention if it were on the radio?



- **Your message:** can you convey all the information necessary in a thirty second radio advert, or would it be better printed where people can study it and even cut it out and keep it? A list of your opening hours is probably best in print; a quick message that you have new stock may work better on radio.

Notice I didn't include "cost". What matters is not simple cost: it's value for money. "Bang for buck", as it's sometimes called. An advert costing £40 that reaches 2,000 potential customers is a better use of your money than one costing only £20 but which reaches only 500. To assess value for money you need to ask two questions:

- 1) How many people does this station/newspaper reach; and
- 2) How many of these are likely to buy my product or service?

In environments with more developed media, all the radio, TV and newspaper businesses publish comprehensive statistics showing how many people they reach and what kind of people these are. An American business selling a product for teenagers will advertise with a radio station that is popular with that audience. That doesn't (yet!) happen here, largely because all the radio stations and newspapers have the same audience. For you that makes life easier because you only need to know their overall circulation. The calculation is really simple: divide the circulation of the newspaper by the cost of the advert and go for the one with the biggest result.

In this brief article I can't hope to answer all your questions about advertising but the pointers above should help. If you want to discuss advertising your business, please contact me at Burgh House Limited.

John Turner

Director, Burgh House Limited – <http://burghhouse.com>

