

Your quick guide to improving your business—yes, even during slow season

We're happy to see you here, digging into another educational resource developed to offer you valuable information on keeping your small business going during the slow periods.

Ever heard of the dreaded "J" months? This refers to the post-holiday slump of January and the summer slump of June and July. The fact is, every business—landscaping, tourism, accounting, ski resorts, to name just a few—experiences its own version of the "J" months.

While slow season is unavoidable, there are ways to put this time to work for you. Start with our 25 tips for increasing traffic, and take advantage of the slower pace to work on your marketing and improve your business inside and out.

We're here to help, so if you have questions or would like to consult with a member of our team, please reach out to our firm today.



Using the slow months to invest in your business

It's inevitable—the slow months arrive for your business—almost like clockwork. But instead of focusing on the negatives, treat this downtime as an opportunity to improve your small business. There may be fewer customers, and the cash flow may not be as heavy, but this is your chance to capitalize on what you can do better.

Start the projects you don't have time to deal with during busier seasons. You can identify and promote seasonal specials to increase customer traffic, partner with local businesses, or revamp and test new strategies in your marketing plan.

Take a look at what did and didn't go right during your busy months and make changes to improve the way you run your business. Train or re-train employees on proper processes, analyze your online presence and/or cut expenses wherever possible.

The steps you take during the slow months can determine the success of your busy season, so make the most of it!

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25 tips to make the most out of slow season

Not sure how best to fill the gaps during slow season? We've curated 25 ideas to help keep you on your customers' minds all year long.

- 1 Offer slow-season specials, like one-day sales, BOGO (buy one, get one) promotions or restocking deals in order to increase cash flow.
- 2 Hold a contest or giveaway. You'll collect email addresses (with permission, of course) and build your lead list. You can also use your social media feeds to promote your initiatives. For example, a clothing store could ask people to submit photos of themselves decked out in brand-specific clothing for special occasions or events. Using a unique hashtag helps, too!

- 4 Obtain online reviews from happy customers through email campaigns and/or social media.
- 5 If you don't have a Google Business Profile (formerly known as Google My Business), set one up to increase your business's online exposure.
- 6 Partner with other area businesses and brainstorm ideas for special events or sidewalk sales—and be sure to cross promote.
- 7 Offer an exclusive preview-and-buy event for the upcoming season's merchandise or offerings.
- 8 Hold a customer appreciation day just to celebrate your loyal customers.

Use this time to contact your satisfied customers and ask them for a referral. You could offer a coupon or a gift card—to both referrer and referee—as an incentive.

- 9 Conduct a customer survey to see what other products or services your customers are interested in. You can use Google Forms (which is part of your free Google account) to create an online survey that's easy for anyone to answer.
- 10 Use your social media platforms to add interest. Post photos and videos of interesting merchandise, post staff photos and intros, link to good informational articles, or create polls for engagement and share results.
- 11 Once you have permission to use email addresses (see step 2), send periodic emails (once a month; don't overwhelm) to advertise specials or preview upcoming sales, new merchandise or events.

Create a marketing plan for the upcoming seasons. Implement new campaigns during slow season, since you'll have the time to analyze the results before business picks up again.

- 13 Redesign your business's website—and don't forget to make sure it's mobile-friendly. Another thought: Could you offer online ordering, if you're not already?
- 14 If you're not using Google Analytics to measure your website traffic, look into it. The analytical data you'll get could completely transform your marketing efforts.
- 15 Explore new markets. If your business is strictly local, start marketing to other geographic areas that might be interested in your products or services.

- 16** Look into new, non-salesy content for your website. For instance, a lawn care company could offer tips on keeping a lawn green. (Don't feel confident about your writing? Hire a freelancer.) Interested readers could provide their email address to download your site's content, giving you another address for your lead list.
- 17** Start a loyalty program. It can be as simple as investing in some cards and a punch tool (though digital is preferred by most). As an example, a bakery could offer a punch for every loaf of bread purchased. After 10 or 12 punches, customers get a free loaf. Or a coffee shop offers a free drink after completing a punch card. Depending on your business model, the reward can be a discount, rebate, free merchandise, coupons, etc.

Remarket to people who have expressed interest in your products but are not current customers. Come up with a new set of emails and targeted ads and try to convert them one more time.

- 19** Go above and beyond to provide excellent customer service. Add more value to your product with faster delivery, offer a longer return policy or provide incentives for repeat sales.
- 20** Investigate new types of marketing, like text message marketing, Facebook ads or different social media platforms. Not all will suit your needs, so do some research to find the best fit for your business.

21 Take advantage of the slower pace to offer a new product during the slow months. You won't have as much competition and will stand out more. Plus, you can use the smaller audience to judge if the new product is a hit or a miss before going full steam ahead.

22 Research how you can improve your customer's experience. Can you streamline processes or improve efficiency? Is this a good time to change your sales floor layout or spiff up your dressing rooms?

24 Connect with your community. You and your employees can partner with a local organization to volunteer for a worthy cause. Not only will you feel good by giving a helping hand, but it's also a great way to show your community that you're invested in its success and well being as a whole, not just in selling your products and services.

25 During this slow season, plan ahead for the next one. Keep expenses low, create a cash reserve, look at your marketing campaigns to see how they performed and evaluate your work processes to see if they can be improved.

Work on your professional development by checking out reasonably priced sites like LinkedIn Learning, Udemy and Coursera for courses that will help you improve your business. You can also read industry blogs, attend conferences or earn industry-related certifications.

We hope this guide will serve as a good starting point for taking advantage of slow season to improve your small business. Slow months may limit you financially, but there's always something you can do during downtime. Taking advantage of the extra time you have during a slump in your business can also lead to an even greater productive peak season, setting you up for continued success.

If you'd like more information on how you can keep the financial aspects of your business on an even keel during slow season... contact us today!

Simply click the **GET IN TOUCH** button and complete the brief form or give us a call. Remember, we're here to help.

