Can your business get noticed when you don't have thousands to spend on advertising and public relations? Should you even bother with marketing programs if your budget is limited?

The answer, of course, is yes. It’s financially riskier for a business not to market. But when your budget is stretched, it’s challenging to determine the most effective places to focus your marketing dollars. Below are five ideas that will move your marketing forward and help you make more money.

1. **Relationship marketing.** This type of marketing — networking — is one of the easiest, most cost-effective forms that exists. Networking allows you to reach a larger audience by developing relationships with people who can connect you with your target market. Studies show that we all know 250 people. Imagine if you could harness the power of 10 people who know 250 and are willing to refer you business? Suddenly your sales opportunities have increased to 2,500 prospects!

You can conduct your relationship marketing informally or within the structure of a formal networking group. There are fees to join a formal networking group. However, the benefit is that everyone involved is there for the same purpose — to help each other sell.

2. **Creative packaging.** A postcard is one way to market. But what about putting a small box together with a fork, knife, spoon and a custom print napkin that invites your prospect to “have lunch on us?” Think out of the box and your marketing campaigns will have more impact.

3. **Press releases.** You just landed a huge contract. Your company was recognized with an award. Someone on your staff received a new certification. This is all news, and your marketing needs to know about it. A press release that is well thought out and crafted can help increase your visibility. Send your releases directly to an editor at the local paper, post it on a free resource such as PRweb.com to distribute to several hundred media outlets, post it on your website, and send it to your customers and prospects.

Public relations can be more cost-effective, and more credible, than advertising. Use it to get the word out and don’t forget to leverage every press release, every article, every mention. Put it all on your website, add it to your marketing kit, and send the piece to clients, colleagues and professional organizations.

4. **E-mail marketing.** Marketing through email is flexible, cost-effective, easy to measure, and high-impact. E-mail marketing allows you to market your services and establish your expertise with your audience. Use it for newsletters, for new product announcements, to share your publicity success. The ideas are endless.

5. **Customer contacts.** Tap into the wealth of your customer base. A brief conversation with your existing clients can help you sell more to them and help you sell more effectively to others. Clients and customers know more about your business than anyone else. They know your strengths and weaknesses, they know why they buy from you, and they know what they value most about your product or service. With your client’s permission, have someone contact them to understand why they originally chose your product or service, what strengths you bring that are important, what value you delivered, and how they think you can reach more people.

This short conversation will yield enormous results. You may get new ideas on how to package your services, communicate clearer messages that close business more quickly, and make adjustments to pricing and service delivery. You may also be able to gather testimonials that you can use in your marketing.

Susan LaPlante-Dube is a principal of Precision Marketing Group (www.precisionmarketinggroup.com) in Upton, MA. She is also the president of New England Women Business Owners.