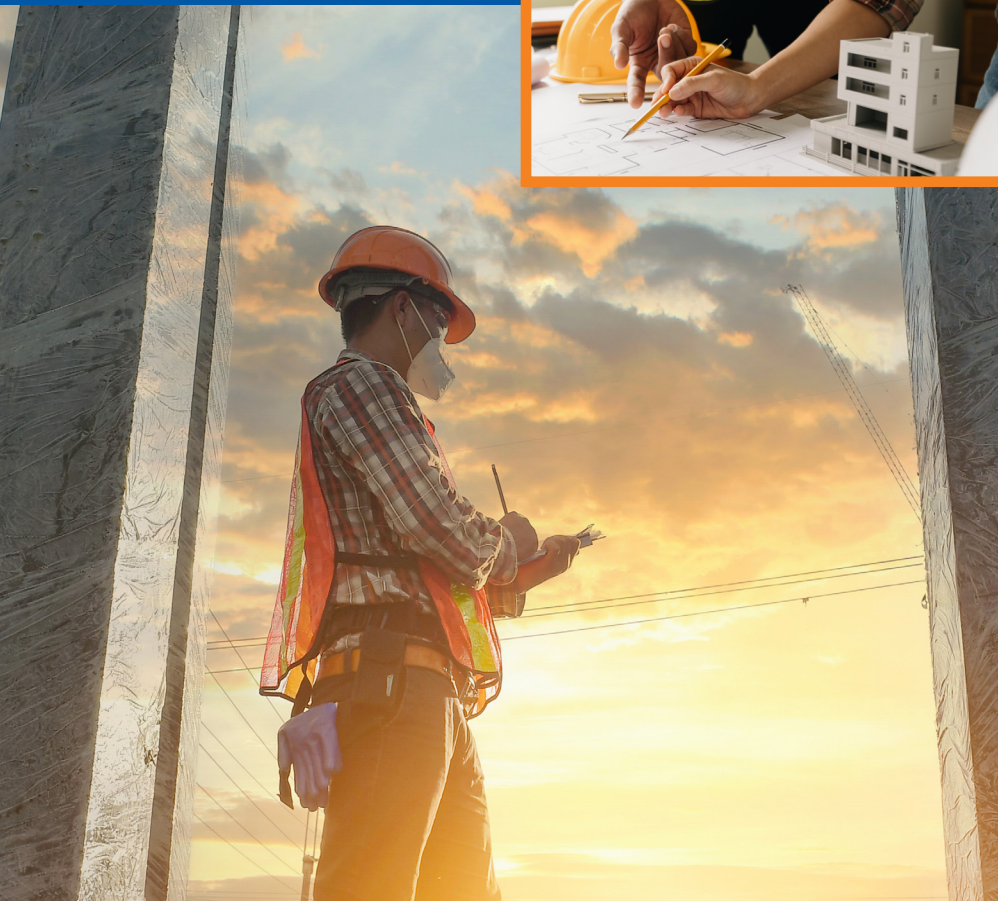




IDAHO TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT DBE NEWSLETTER

September 2026



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TTY/TDD Users| Dial 711 or
1-800-377-3529 to use
Idaho Relay System

Developing a Customer-Centric Marketing Strategy

■ *By Project Solutions Inc. Team*

In today's competitive market, standing out from the crowd to attract and retain customers with your products can be tough. Adopting a customer-centric marketing strategy can help differentiate your company from others that provide similar offerings by focusing not only on the products you provide, but on the people you provide those products to. This shift in focus can help your business attract new customers and retain those it already has, improving brand loyalty and boosting your bottom line. This article will explore the key elements of a customer-centric marketing strategy and offer a few practical tips that can help small businesses thrive in an ever-evolving marketplace.



What is Customer-Centric Marketing?

Traditional marketing strategies focus primarily on the products a company provides. A company that relies on traditional marketing creates advertisements that emphasize the impressive features of their products, what makes them unique, and why those exciting features make the product worth the cost they are charging. In contrast, customer-centric marketing focuses instead on the customer and their needs and explains how the company's products can help address pain points in the customers' lives. A traditional shoe company might advertise how comfortable and stylish their shoes are, while a company focusing on customer centricism might instead focus on how their shoes can help ease older customers' chronic back pain.

With consumers increasingly focusing on brand values and purchasing from businesses that make them feel appreciated and represented, customer-centric marketing can result in noticeable increases in profits with minimal extra investment, making such strategies worth considering for businesses of all sizes. As a small business, appealing more personally to your community can boost loyalty and engagement with your potential customers, and make current customers more likely to stick with your business when faced with other options.

How to Develop Customer-Centric Marketing Strategies

The first step to developing customer-centric marketing is to understand your customers. You need a deep knowledge of the people your business serves to be able to appeal to them personally. To develop a better picture of your customers, you might:

1. **Monitor intent data** to determine how people find your product and what they are looking for when they do. What keywords are they searching for that lead them to your website? What problem are they having when they call your customer service line? How did they hear about your business?
2. **Track demographic information** to understand the segments of your community to which your business most strongly appeals and what marketing strategies resonate with them. If your business appeals to multiple segments of your community, creating different profiles for each type of customer can help you develop marketing material that caters to their differing needs.
3. **Deliver concise surveys** to obtain direct feedback and specific information about the way people who interact with your business feel after the fact. These can be very useful, but it's important to keep them short and infrequent. Asking for too much of your customers' time can become a pain point that drives them away from your business.



These are just a few options, and there are others that might be worth your time. Try to implement as many methods of information gathering as possible while minimizing the amount of extra work required of customers and use these data points to establish trends in your customer base. Understanding who is interested in your product, what drives them to your company, and how they feel about the interactions they have with your business is the vital first step in improving your customer centricism. Once you understand your customers, you can begin developing a marketing strategy that is designed with their needs in mind.

Advertise to Your Customers' Concerns

Advertisements that expound upon the greatness of your product can be effective, but customers respond most strongly to content that speaks to their problems and offers personal solutions. When developing your advertisements, focus on the customers instead of the company. Content should feel relevant to your customers' interests and needs. This can extend beyond advertisements to buy your products and into other types of content, like personal demonstrations of how to use your products once they have been purchased, which can help customers feel confident that they can trust you to take care of them after they have given you their hard-earned money.

Develop a Consistent Brand Voice

When you understand your customer base, you can develop a brand voice that caters to them. It might be fun and bubbly, or calm and formal, or something else entirely, but it needs to speak to the people you want to attract. It also needs to be consistent. If your company runs an Instagram account that's upbeat and exciting while the company website is cold and corporate, both voices will feel insincere. If your commercials are upbeat and enthusiastic but your customer service representatives are harsh, the sudden shift in tone can make customers feel confused and unsafe.



Whatever your brand's voice is, it needs to be consistent across all platforms, and customers should be able to transition between platforms without harsh changes in voice. By integrating user data that is accessible across varying methods of company-customer interaction, you can help promote the feeling that these interactions are part of a single, longer conversation with someone who cares, which encourages further engagement, especially when compared to services that ask customers to repeat their information or restate their needs over and over again.

Produce Non-Ad Content

No matter how personal an ad feels, it will always be apparent to customers that it exists to convince them to give you money. By providing informational content that doesn't explicitly advertise your products, you can position your business as an entity that cares about the wellbeing of its customers above its bottom line. Sending out informative newsletters or publishing other content that raises awareness about issues that are relevant to your industry shows that your company cares about its customers and wants to make things better for them, even if doing that doesn't make the company money. Even though content like this doesn't explicitly advertise your products, it makes customers think more positively about your business, which makes them more likely to trust you enough to do business with you over other companies that produce less customer centric material.

UPCOMING TRAINING & EVENTS

September 8

Mastering Google Workspace Everyday Productivity Hacks for Small Business

SBA Webinar

Tues., Sept. 8, 2026 | 10:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

September 15

The Hidden Costs of Poor Financial Visibility

AGC Webinar

Tues., Sept. 15, 2026 | 12:00 P.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

September 18

Branding for Your Small Business

SCORE Webinar

Fri., Sept. 18, 2026 | 9:00 A.M. MT | Cost: \$10

[Learn More>](#)

September 22

Demystifying Financial Foundations: Income, Assets & Cash Flow

SCORE Webinar

Tues., Sept. 22, 2026 | 10:30 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

September 23

Reduce Your Risk, Protect Your Future - SBA Mitigation Information Session

SBDC Webinar

Wed., Sept. 23, 2026 | 4:00 P.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

Monthly Contractor Meetings

October 1

October ITD Monthly Contractor Meeting

Virtual

Thurs., Oct 1, 2026 | 8:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

November 5

November ITD Monthly Contractor Meeting

Virtual

Thurs., Nov. 5, 2026 | 8:00 A.M. MT | Cost: No Cost

[Learn More>](#)

DID YOU KNOW

Free Business Support Is Available to ITD DBE Firms

Project Solutions, Inc. (PSI), the Supportive Services provider for the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), offers no-cost business assistance to help certified DBE firms strengthen their operations, pursue growth opportunities, and build long-term success.

Available services include:

- Personal Narrative Assistance for firms applying for DBE certification
- Annual Business Reviews
- Capability Statement Development and Review
- Website Analysis and Recommendations
- One-on-One Business Consulting and Technical Assistance

Whether you are seeking certification, looking to improve your marketing materials, evaluating your business strategy, or working to position your company for future opportunities, personalized support is available to help you reach your goals.

Need help getting started?

Contact the ITD DBE Supportive Services team at dbe@projectsolutionsinc.com to schedule a one-on-one consultation.

Preparing a Personal Narrative?

Free assistance is available, along with recorded training and resources to guide you through the process. Access the workshop recording, presentation slides, and personal narrative workbook here: [DBE/ACDBE IFR Reevaluation | Idaho Transportation Department](#)

RESOURCES

Project Look-Ahead

The following links to the project look-aheads can be found on the [ITD Contractor Bidding](#) page.

- [90-day Contracts Bidding Look-Ahead](#)
- [18-month Contracts Bidding Look-Ahead](#)
- [LHTAC Leading Local Bridge Contractor Bidding Look-Ahead](#)

PROGRAM ANNOUNCEMENT

Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) has completed the reevaluation period for previously certified Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) and Airport Concession Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (ACDBE) firms based in Idaho. ITD is now accepting applications from Idaho-based firms seeking DBE or ACDBE certification, as well as interstate-certified firms seeking certification in Idaho.

What does this mean for firms wanting to be in the DBE or ACDBE program?

New Idaho-Based Applicants

Firms seeking DBE or ACDBE certification in Idaho, where both the business and disadvantaged owner reside in Idaho, may now submit certification applications through the [Certification and Compliance System](#).

- Firms must include a personal narrative describing how the owner has experienced social and economic disadvantage as outlined in [49 CFR 26.67](#).
- A workshop recording and instructions for preparing the narrative are available on the ITD DBE Program website: <https://itd.idaho.gov/civil-rights/dbe-program/>
- USDOT is in the process of updating the certification application to align with current requirements. If the form has not yet been updated when you apply, you may disregard questions related to race and gender, as they will not be considered in the certification determination.

Interstate Applicants

Firms certified in another state may apply as a new interstate applicant through the [Certification and Compliance System](#).

- Firms must provide documentation showing they have been reevaluated by their home Jurisdiction of Certification (JOC) after October 3, 2025.
- Firms must include all currently approved NAICS codes as part of their application.

Previously Certified Idaho DBE/ACDBE Firms

Previously certified Idaho-based DBE and ACDBE firms that have not yet submitted their reevaluation documentation may still submit the **2025 Reevaluation** application through the [Certification and Compliance System](#).

(Program Announcement continued on Page 8)

- Firms must include a personal narrative describing how the owner has experienced social and economic disadvantage as outlined in [49 CFR 26.67](#).
- A workshop recording and instructions are available at: <https://itd.idaho.gov/civil-rights/dbe-program/>
- Firms will not appear in the DBE Directory until the reevaluation has been completed and approved.
- Firms that do not submit the required reevaluation documentation may be decertified from the program.

What does this mean for project-specific goals?

- Projects awarded with a DBE goal prior to the program update on October 3, 2025, will continue with commitments to the firms identified at contract award.
- Any removal of a committed DBE firm must be approved by the Office of Civil Rights through submission of the ITD-5555 DBE Commitment Change Form.
- Reasons for removal must meet the requirements of [49 CFR 26.53\(f\)](#).
- Project-specific DBE goals are expected to return following completion of an updated DBE Methodology.
- The DBE Methodology will establish ITD's overall DBE participation goal and determine how that goal will be achieved through contract goals and race-neutral participation.
- Firms approved for certification may have their participation counted on current and future projects.
- The ITD DBE Directory is updated in real time and can be accessed at: <https://itd.dbesystem.com/>

Have More Questions?

Contact the ITD Office of Civil Rights at civilrights@itd.idaho.gov.

To learn more about the DBE/ACDBE program changes, review the USDOT October 2025 Interim Final Rule: <https://www.transportation.gov/mission/civil-rights/disadvantaged-business-enterprise/october-2025-interim-final-rule>

Giving Back: How to Support Your Local Community

■ *By Project Solutions Inc. Team*

Small businesses are much more reliant on local communities than their larger counterparts. Their neighbors make up more of their customers, more of their funding comes from local sources, and their employees are more often hired close to home, so when a small business succeeds, it can be a great opportunity to give back to the community that supported its journey. Luckily, the connection between business and their neighbors goes both ways, and small businesses have a unique capacity to create meaningful impacts that matter to the people who helped them succeed.



By actively engaging with their community, small business owners can cultivate loyalty and enhance their brand reputation while driving positive change and improving their neighborhoods. In this article, we will look at a few ideas that can give you a chance to ensure that your successes benefit the community that made them possible.

Supporting Your Community Supports You

It is important to recognize that giving back is not something that you do to support your community at the expense of your company. Rather, it benefits your business to do so. Being a positive force in your neighborhood can improve the lifestyles of the people in it, which gives you access to customers with more money and employees with more talent and higher productivity. It also gives you a chance to put your company's name on events that its stakeholders view positively, which increases brand awareness and improves customer loyalty. The benefits of giving back to your community can be immediately seen through people seeing your logo tied to a cause they support and becoming a customer, or they can be impossible to measure and only become apparent in the long term as your environment improves and your profitability improves with it, but they do exist. As we look at some ways to give back, it may be tempting to see that they cost money or time and discount them to protect your bottom line – and you absolutely should not feel pressured to do more than your business can handle – but remember that giving back to your community improves your business's prospects, so think of these suggestions not as sacrifices, but as investments in your own future as well as the futures of those around you.

Support Local Events and Organizations

Perhaps the most famous way for businesses to give back to their communities is by putting their weight behind organizations and events that matter to them. If you are looking for a way to start giving back and your business has the time and funds to do so, try looking for organizations you support around your business and get in touch to find out how you can help. Common organizations for this kind of support are nonprofits that operate in your area, schools, or community led events that support causes that align with your company's values. Many groups will be willing to give your company marketing in return for this support by listing you as a sponsor, including your branding in their material, or shouting you out at the event. This kind of support is a great way to put your money to work for the people around you while increasing awareness of your brand.



If, as you look at ways in which you want to help your community, you find that there is a lack of existing organizations supporting the causes you want to advance, you can also host events on your own. Staging your own events gives you more direct control over the ways in which your time and money helps your community, and this can create more significant changes over time. There may be other people around you who want to be helping but don't know how, so creating momentum by offering those people a chance to gather, show their support, and learn what they can do to help may snowball into the creation of more specifically devoted groups who can carry the torch for you.

Volunteer

A great way to show that your company is involved in its community using time instead of money is volunteering. As a business owner, volunteering personally can be extremely effective as it makes you feel more personal to the people around you and gives you a chance to develop connections, but including your business can increase your impact. You can get your employees involved by informing them of events and encouraging them to sign up to go together, or by creating events your company can do on its own to support its community. The effectiveness of these strategies will likely be dramatically improved if time spent at company-sanctioned charity events is considered work time that is eligible for pay or other rewards.

Outside of group events, you can encourage further volunteering outside of work by offering rewards for time spent volunteering with organizations that the company supports. These rewards can be monetary, like offering extra vacation time, or nonmonetary, like giving employees who do significant community work a shout out in company newsletters.

Donate

On the other hand, an effective way to support your community with money instead of time is through donations. Businesses usually have more funds to distribute than individuals, so giving money to causes you support on its own can be very helpful, but if you involve your employees or your community in your giving you can expand your ability to help and the opportunities to be recognized for it. This can be as simple as including donation links to nonprofits your organization is giving to in social media posts you make to give viewers a convenient way to follow your example.



More complex methods of involvement, however, can be even more effective. Offering to match donations made in support of a nonprofit that your company sponsors provides you with the chance to give that group more money than you could donate alone. Just like volunteering, offering rewards to employees who donate to causes that your company supports can be a great way to encourage giving and build team morale.