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Stick to your strengths to weather storm

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With gas prices at an all-time high, the housing market in a serious low and headlines touting the "R" word incessantly, what's a small-business owner to do?

As a former athlete, I'd like to share with you some advice my tennis coach gave me during a challenging match. He said, "Do one thing and do it so well that no one else can beat you at it."

So in my case, instead of trying to change my game to accommodate my opponent's strengths, I focused on what I did well, and won.

When it comes to the marketing game, for every loser, there's also a winner:

Follow these guidelines to stay on the winning side during a down economy.

Focus

Stay focused on your core competency. Remember the focus and tenacity that got you where you are today and embrace it again. Use this challenging time to better your business by focusing on your business. Capitalize on the experience you've gained over the years and use it to perfect what you're already doing well.

Advertise

While everyone else is changing their game and pulling back their ad budgets, now is the time to take advantage of discounted ad rates and prime positioning.

When everyone is spending money on advertising, it's hard to negotiate great rates or ad positioning. Now that the market has softened, advertising representatives are eager to fill space and willing to negotiate.

Pitch

Pitch your story to the press. In a sea of doom-and-gloom headlines, even reporters are looking for something positive to write about. Identify what is unique and positive about your business and tell your story.

Evolve

As time and technology change, so should you. Review your tools and techniques and use this time to improve both. Ask yourself if there is a more efficient and effective way to manufacture your products or serve your customers. What new technologies are available that can support your growth efforts? With change comes opportunity, so be sure to embrace it.

Discover

Now is the time to discover new ways to market your business. If you haven't yet tapped into "social media," there is no better time than the present to learn it and live it. "Social media" refers to the plethora of online forums such as blogs and message boards as well as social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace. It opens up new ways to tell your story. It's inexpensive yet hugely powerful. It levels the playing field and creates new opportunities to reach not only your target audience, but new audiences as well.

With the economy teetering on recession, now is the time to take a close look at your business and how you're marketing your business. So get back in the game by focusing on what you do well. Play to your strengths and win.

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