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A brand guy speaking truth to power and teaching at NYU

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4 Marketing Tips For Small Businesses From 'Your Business' Host JJ Ramberg

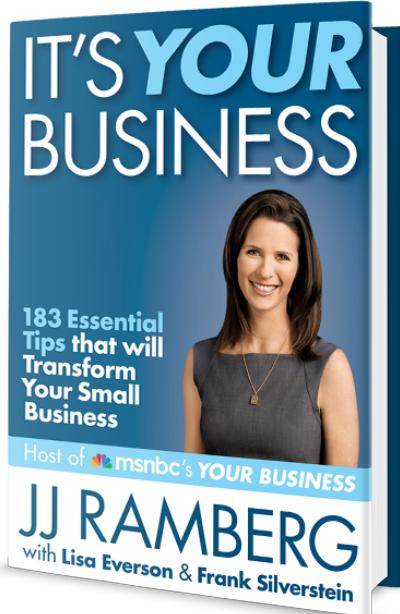
There is exactly one show on U.S. television that focuses exclusively on the needs of small business: "Your Business" on MSNBC. Host JJ Ramberg has just published a book titled "[It's Your Business: 183 Essential Tips That Will Transform Your Small Business](#)." JJ has unique insight on small companies, having seen hundreds of them in the 6 years that she's hosted the show. JJ was kind enough to answer four questions for me and share four exclusive marketing tips.

Q: How did you become a small business guru for MSNBC?

“ JJ: My career has bounced back and forth between small business and journalism. I started as a journalist at NBC but left to get my MBA at Stanford. After that I joined an Internet start-up and then returned to CNN as a business journalist. Next, I left CNN to start my own company, [goodsearch.com](#). So, when msnbc was looking for a host for their new small business program *Your Business*, I had experience as both an entrepreneur and a journalist.

Q: Being an entrepreneur means taking on a bunch of jobs that have nothing to do with why you started a business. Which of these is the most daunting?

“ JJ: This is different for every small business person, but I think that the one aspect that more people complain to me about than any other is the financials. Many of the people I've spoken to are intimidated by the numbers and as a result, don't make the time to really dive into them.



Q: How are small businesses feeling about the economy now?

“ JJ: Small businesses are definitely feeling better than they were a few years ago. That said, there is still uncertainty about the future. I am currently working on a couple of stories on some Bay Area based small businesses in the tech sector. While they are certainly not representative of the rest of the country, it is a pocket of optimism.

Q: Can you give an example of a distinctive small business from the show?

“ JJ: One of my favorite small business owners that I've interviewed is Ray Petro who started [Rays MTB](#), an indoor mountain bike park in [Cleveland](#). Spending all his savings and putting himself into debt, Ray took a gamble on an idea he had to create a place for people to mountain bike during the winter. He rented an old warehouse and, with the help of friends, started to build trails. Early on, Rays became somewhat of a mecca for mountain bikers as nothing else like it existed. Now, because of the strong loyalty around Ray's MTB, companies often come to him to advertise and hold event to expand their own brands.

Here are 4 Marketing Tips from [It's Your Business](#):

Hire Staff Who Match Your Target Demographic

If you have people on your staff who fit the demographic of your target, you've got yourself a constant focus group and guerilla marketing team.

When his company was just starting out, Blake Mycoskie of [TOMS](#) created a loyalty-inspiring internship program. Every summer he hired about 20 students who did whatever Blake and his team needed them to do – write copy; deliver shoes; host events etc... Each of these interns was in the TOMS demographic and in addition to getting cheap labor for the summer, Blake also had a group of 20 people who were fanatic about the brand and spread the word to their friends – providing the most effective marketing you could ask for: word of mouth. They also came up with great ideas to help grow the business amongst their peers.

This is not limited to students. If you're hiring temporary help and the job does not require a specific skill, consider hiring someone in your target demographic. For example, if you're selling diapers, don't necessarily go to the local college to get your summer help, find some local moms who want to work part time. If you're selling products to baby boomers, hit up retirees, many of whom would love an internship.

Market Your Company By Marketing Yourself

Every time you give a speech, you're getting your company's name out there – this helps you get customers, partnerships and if you're interested, perhaps even an acquirer. So, how do you start? Who's going to ask you to speak?

Shari Boyer, CEO of the LA-based cause marketing company Good Solutions Group says here's how you do it:

- **Develop several abstracts:** Write descriptions of topics that are timely, appealing and demonstrate your expertise.
- **Update your bio:** Make certain it positions you as an authority in your field and includes a professional headshot.

- **Research opportunities:** Start with regional business organizations, alumni groups, or local chapters of national/international industry organizations that meet regularly. Chances are you may already be a member of one such group, which gives you an advantage.
- **Partner with a colleague:** Sometimes it's easier to pitch a panel discussion with several viewpoints than a solo presentation.
- **Pitch with knowledge:** Before contacting the appropriate organization, know the basics about the speaking opportunity such as booking lead-time, length of speech, and previous speakers/topics to make sure you're on-target.
- **Have a video:** It's helpful to have a video of yourself speaking on your subject, whether you're speaking just to the camera or from a previous engagement.

Create a personal story to connect with customers

How do you make your company stand out in a saturated market where everyone is providing a similar service or product? For example there may be five nail salons within a couple of blocks and most customers don't know what makes one different from another.

Often a personal connection or shared values with the owner of the business will bring the customer back to your business. [Charlena Miller](#), a marketing consultant from [Portland](#), Oregon says sharing your authentic 'story' is a good vehicle for making that connection. For your story to be most effective, it should have two key elements:

Part A: What inspired you to start this company?

The first part of the story should talk about your passion for your work. Why did you pick this business? Is it a family business? A hobby? A talent? Something you came to in order to answer a personal problem? Why does what you are doing mean something special to you?

Part B: What difference do you hope to make in other people's lives?

The second part of the story should talk about your customers. What do you want them to experience? Are you saving them time? Are you making them feel better about themselves and to enjoy life more? What are the customers' needs that you are meeting?

Once you have answered those questions, you can craft your story by mixing the best parts of each. One note of caution – while people are interested in your short story, they may not be interested in your novel. So, try your story out on a couple of friends, and potential or current customers, to make sure it's compelling before putting it out there for the world!

Share your marketing costs

Wholesalers and distributors often have co-op advertising funds that they can use to buy ad space in conjunction with your business.

Steve Strauss, author of [The Small Business Bible](#) remembers a billboard his father, the founder of California based Carpet World, had along the San Diego freeway. The billboard said "Elegance Underfoot – Carpet World," and in the

corner it said “featuring Ban-Lon Carpets.” This was a win-win situation: Ban-Lon got visibility and Carpet World got a full billboard for half the price.

FULL DISCLOSURE: The excerpts from “It’s Your Business” in this post are used with permission. I appeared on “Your Business” with JJ Ramberg in 2009. I received a free galley copy of “It’s Your Business” for review purposes. I have no other affiliation with or financial interest in MSNBC or JJ Ramberg.

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