




A small business guide to strategic partnerships



More and more, brand partnerships and marketing collaborations are becoming go-tos for up-and-coming small businesses.

Why? Because teaming up helps drive growth by increasing the reachable customer base and sparking innovative ideas that benefit both companies.

A man and a woman in business attire are looking at a book together in a modern office setting. The man, on the left, has long brown hair and wears glasses, a dark suit, and a tie. The woman, on the right, has short blonde hair, wears glasses, a light blue button-down shirt, and a plaid skirt. They are both looking down at a book held by the woman. The background shows a modern office with a wooden table, a bar area with bottles, and a staircase with a metal railing. The lighting is warm and focused on the couple.

Read on for three ways to partner with the right businesses and get tips on how to collaborate the right way.



1

Double up on marketing campaigns

From twitter take-overs to shared email blasts, a marketing partnership increases the reach of your company's message.

► **Start with a company you admire or ask peers for their recommendations for innovative business partners. Then do your research to ensure their brand vision matches yours and the brands will mesh.**

- Who are their audience members and what is their demographic?
- Does their web content lure you in and make you want to learn more?
- Have they won any industry or marketing awards?
- What is their growth rate?
- Are you simply a fan of what they do or would your brand realistically fit with theirs in a way that makes sense?






- ▶ **Once you're firm on a company that aligns with your brand, find a point of contact there. Use LinkedIn to determine if you're already connected with any employees; if not, look for someone with a title in the marketing or sales department.**

**Then, write your collaboration proposal.
You'll want to :**

- Introduce yourself and your company
- Note why you are drawn to their company
- Mention that you'd like to collaborate
- Ask for an initial meeting or phone call

Keep your proposal short but informative. Once you're ready, reach out to your point of contact via email. If you don't hear back within a week, send a follow-up message before moving onto another potential partner.

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- **Once you've connected with a potential partner, host an informal brainstorming session to riff on ideas before setting the partnership in stone.**

This offers a glimpse into working with their team and seeing how they think. One meeting will likely reveal whether the partnership is a good fit.



- ▶ **Once the partnership is solidified, begin tailoring the campaign. Aim to target the most effective marketing channels for both companies — if one brand has 50k Instagram followers and the other has 50k email subscribers, create a campaign that engages both audiences.**

For example, the companies could host a giveaway that crosses both platforms: one brand's Instagram subscribers increase their chance to win if they sign up for the other's email newsletter, and vice-versa when email recipients follow the partnered Instagram account.

Be sure the business you partner with has a strong sense of your brand message, your audience and your ultimate campaign goal — and you know the same of them.



The more aligned you are up front, the more successful — and powerful — the ultimate campaign.

Tips for executing a successful campaign





Additional Co-marketing ideas:

- Host a two-way interview via Facebook Live with key players from each company
 - Create a short video with both brands detailing the collaboration and send it to the email subscriber list
 - Create a Twitter giveaway that motivates followers to engage and re-tweet on the launch of the campaign
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2

**Kick off an
industry
event
together.**

**Take a break from digital
efforts and step into real time with
a co-branded in-person event.**

- ▶ **A live event is not only engaging and fun for your customers, but it also creates a buzz that attracts a fresh customer base.**

Note: Online partnerships are quite different from in-person collaborations. For real-time events, it's even more important to look for partners with a similar company culture or brand personality. This will make the in-person meet-up feel cohesive and logical for attendees.





- **First, establish what the live event will accomplish, then consider ways to bring entertainment and engagement to it.**

For example, an Instagrammable pop-up shop with products from both brands or a joint panel discussion that tackles a relevant trend in your industry.

▶ Lastly, when executing a knockout event, be sure you're clear on the “whys:”

- **Why** should people want to come?
- **Why** are these two brands in it together?
- **Why** will they attract an audience?



Create a social campaign with an associated hashtag to build excitement around the event. For example, announce and invite guests via an open Facebook page, push it on Instagram and snap preparatory photos on Snapchat.

At the event, encourage guests to post with the event hashtag to further boost each brand. For added incentive, create a giveaway where one lucky poster wins a gift package from your companies.

Tips for executing a successful event





3

Create a collaborative end-product.

**When a beloved local ice
Cream shop meets an esteemed
Local chocolate shop,
beautiful things can happen.**

- **Think of ways to enhance the product or service that you offer.**

What are smart tie-ins you can make with other businesses that have a similar demographic?





- ▶ **Start with a company or product you're passionate about and work from there.**



Does a company you admire have a best-selling item or offering that would meld with one of yours?



**For example,
a partnership
could look like
the following:**

- A coffee shop employs a well-known local artist to design a limited-edition mug set.
- A yoga studio creates a shared membership package with a neighboring pilates studio.
- A women's clothing store hosts a seasonal sale with a popular online accessories store (a great way to employ Tip #1 and Tip #2).

Each example allows both brands to put their best foot forward and provide a new, exciting offering to their customers.



Think about local businesses whose product or service provides something complementary to yours. **How could you serve each other and the community?**

A homegrown collaboration not only connects you with local kindred spirits but also boosts communal commerce and reinforces goodwill.

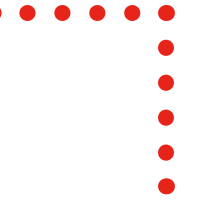
Tips for a resonant co-market- ing effort





Takeaway

Strategic partnerships can greatly bolster your business by increasing customer awareness and reaching new audiences. By being open to opportunities and trading insights with other sharp minds in your industry (and beyond), you'll open unexpected doors — and potentially an entirely new customer base.



**To learn more about brand collaborations and
smart marketing for your small business,
visit the Staples Business Resource Center.**

