

# SelfInformed

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*NASE Member Chris Allen owns an all-season terrain park for skiers and snowboarders.*



# Fast Ways To Market Your Startup

By Mindy Charski

If you're just launching a micro-business, you're likely in need of effective marketing strategies that can kick in quickly and won't decimate a limited budget.

Your options abound, but you'll be in the best position to use them if you first build an effective website, establish a social media presence, and hone your communications skills.

With those tools in hand, here are the top startup marketing strategies you should consider.

## Start Networking

Building a network can generate all kinds of rewards.

It was through networking, for example, that the Chicago-based startup Storymix Media was able to get featured on the local evening news, says Mike Fisher, who co-founded the company in 2011.

Storymix Media offers a video creation platform for the event market. The company can produce a wedding video from footage taken by friends and family, for instance.

"We got a lot of orders, and it gave us instant credibility," Fisher says about the news coverage that resulted from networking.

Social networks have made it easier than ever to connect with consumers and clients. Being active on sites like [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Google Plus](#) and [Facebook](#) can help you build relationships with swaths of people, including customers and prospects.

***Social networks have made it easier than ever to connect with consumers and clients.***

Through [LinkedIn](#), for instance, business strategist Maria Marsala found two strategic business planning clients, four coaching clients, four strategic alliances and numerous subscribers to her weekly e-newsletter.

Beyond just having a profile on the social network, Marsala, owner of Elevating Your Business, also replies to questions on [LinkedIn Answers](#) and participates in 50 [LinkedIn Groups](#). The latter are discussion forums populated with her ideal potential clients, like independent financial advisers, accountants and insurance brokers.

But purposefully, Marsala doesn't have a huge number of [LinkedIn](#) connections. Valuing quality over quantity, in 2010 she decided she wanted to meet with each connection in person or over the phone. Her number of connections ultimately dropped to 90 from 2,500.

Marsala suggests startups take similar care in building connections. She also warns new business owners not to spend too much time on social networking.

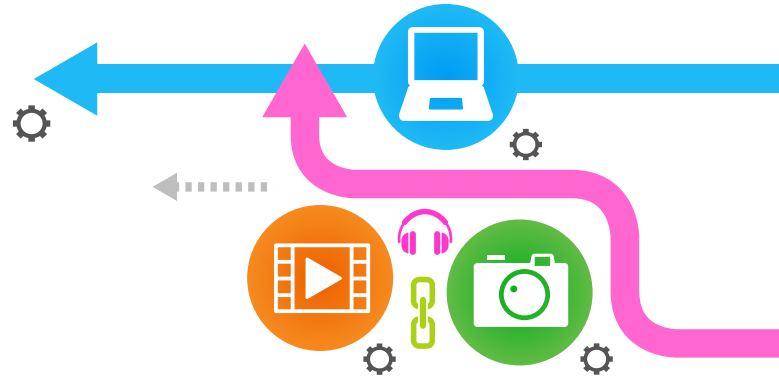
"The best way to use social networking to me is integrating it with what you're doing and using it to bring traffic to your website," says Marsala, who is based near Seattle.

In contrast, she says, the process time for getting business is so much shorter when you can actually speak with somebody face to face.

So, start setting up one-on-one meetings, attending local networking events, and participating in get-togethers hosted by business groups.



***Consider purchasing text-based ads on search engines.***



## Showcase Your Expertise

Find opportunities to give presentations to business groups and at formal networking sessions.

Also consider publishing your ideas through guest articles in relevant publications. Blogs and email newsletters are other options. Each time you publish online, include buttons that readers can click so they can share your writing on social media sites like [Twitter](#) and [Google Plus](#).

Creating videos is another way to demonstrate your skills. Posting them can also improve your website's ranking in search engines. And the videos don't need to be expensive productions.

Sushiism Restaurant + Social Lounge, a new eatery in Carrollton, Texas, has already started generating video content.

Not long after Siri Inoue opened the Japanese restaurant with her husband in late 2011, the two created a video of Inoue discussing an entrée. She has plans to feature more menu items and content, such as how to properly eat sushi.

The videos, which are posted on [YouTube](#) as well as Sushiism's website and [Facebook](#) page, enable Inoue to share information about Japanese culture and food etiquette, but that's not all.

"People can get to know who we are," Inoue says. "What kind of attitude we have, what kind of food we serve."

## LEARN MORE ABOUT MARKETING YOUR STARTUP

Check out these free online articles—exclusively for NASE Members.



*To create buzz about your business, think of incentives you can offer to spur referrals.*

## Get Others Talking About You

To create buzz about your business, think of incentives you can offer to spur referrals.

Storymix Media uses its production capabilities. When a wedding professional refers a client, the company will produce a short video with the vendor's logo and information. Storymix Media hosts it on [YouTube](#), and vendors can post it on their websites or in social media.

"They get free marketing and they have happy couples who get to use our service, and we get to make a sale, so it's really a win-win-win," Fisher says.

You should also encourage your customers to write reviews.

"Reviews are very profound, especially for small businesses," says Jason Hennessey, chief executive officer of EverSpark Interactive, an interactive marketing agency in Atlanta.

"When you look at 'Atlanta plumber,' and [Google](#) displays six plumbers, if two have a positive review, that's a competitive advantage."

Don't fret if you get some negative reviews. Openly replying to those presents an opportunity to demonstrate your top-notch customer service.

## GET YOUR MARKETING QUESTIONS ANSWERED

The [NASE Business 101 experts](#) can answer all of your marketing questions. The specialists will help you:

- Identify effective marketing techniques
- Create a budget for your marketing campaign
- Track the results of your marketing activities
- And much more

Our professional consultants are available 24/7 with a simple click of your mouse. And as an [NASE Member](#), you have unlimited access to the [experts](#) for free! It's just one of many resources that's included in your membership.

## Buy Targeted Advertising

Consider purchasing text-based ads on search engines like [Google](#) and [Bing](#) that pop up when users type in certain keywords. You can choose a daily budget and pay only when people click on an ad. You can even target your ads to people in a specific area.

[Facebook](#), which collects tons of data about its users, now offers a similar pay-per-click option.

"[Facebook](#) is a very cheap, effective way to drive targeted traffic to your website," Hennessey says. "They have all these pre-qualifiers that you just check off."

Storymix Media has had success buying ads on [Facebook](#). The company is able to target its messages at engaged individuals and filter even further, like by age and interests. Fisher says he can quickly learn which ads are working and which need to be tweaked. The strategy is measurable, too.

"We could say we spent this amount of money and we got this result from it," he explains.

Lastly, try giving daily deal sites a go if they make sense for your business and you can negotiate a good deal. Mega sites like [Groupon](#) and niche sites like [RapidBuyr](#), a business-to-business service, can potentially drive sales and give you exposure in a targeted area.

Inoue saw traffic to her website temporarily spike around the [Groupon](#) promotion she launched about two months after opening. The offer was \$20 for \$40 worth of Japanese fare. More than 540 Groupons were purchased.

"To be honest, [Groupon](#) really did bring us a lot of business," says Inoue.

But now, her focus is on building good relationships with those guests so they'll return even without a coupon.

"We hope," she says, "that they will." ■

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**Mindy Charski** is a Dallas-based freelancer whose favorite marketing vehicle, [Twitter](#), didn't exist when she started her business in 2004. She tweets under the handle [@MindyCharski](#).





# Ask The Experts

**Q:** *I am a majority owner of a new multi-member limited liability company. My wife is the other member and is a minority owner.*

*We want my wife to be eligible for health care expense reimbursements from a health reimbursement arrangement. Is there a minimum number of hours per week she must work as a part-time employee of the LLC to qualify under the HRA? What are your recommendations in regard to documentation of these hours?*

**A:** Let's go back a step and make sure we are on the same page with your HRA.

Only bona fide employees are eligible for reimbursements under an HRA.

If your wife is an owner or member in the multi-member LLC, then she is *not* a bona fide employee and cannot participate in the HRA.

Further, an owner of your LLC would not be compensated as a part-time employee, so there would be no minimum or maximum work hours at issue.

Now back to your practical questions. If you adopted the HRA to cover your family's medical expenses, then your wife needs to be a bona fide employee of the LLC, and you need to be the only owner of the LLC.

Regarding work hours and wages, the wages that you pay your employees need only be reasonable in connection with the services that they provide. If the sole reason for this employee/employer relationship is the HRA, then there is no minimum or maximum work hours required.

## GET MORE ANSWERS

The NASE's small-business experts are here to help you understand the ins and outs of operating a successful small business. And access to these professionals is free with your NASE Membership!

Just go online to the [NASE's Business Learning Center](#) where you can ask the experts questions about:

- Taxes
- Health care expenses
- Financial issues
- Employee relations
- Accounting rules
- And much more

The experts are available 24/7 and ready to help!

Simply documenting the actual hours your wife works will suffice. It is a great idea to keep actual time cards just like you would require of an unrelated third-party employee.

Just be reasonable and diligent. Those are the only real requirements.

Remember that as an NASE Member, you have access to a health reimbursement arrangement through [NASE HRA 105](#). Your HRA can be customized to your specific needs, adding maximum flexibility to your business, while saving significant tax dollars.

To learn more about the NASE HRA 105, check out this [free online webinar](#). ■

# Member Spotlight

## All Season Snow

*Chris Allen has been an NASE Member since 2005. He owns Twelve60 Enterprises LLC in Palmerton, Pa.*

### Tell us about your business.

Twelve60 Enterprises LLC is a terrain park specialty company made up of three subdivisions.

Park 1260 is an all-season terrain park open to skiers and snowboarders of all ages and abilities. The park has a turf (carpet)-based setup of two 90-foot runs and at least two features set up at any given time. The turf works great with a late fall snow as well as with water on a 90-degree summer day.

Twelve60 is our training division through which our nationally certified coaches offer year-round training.

1260 Designs is our terrain park and feature development division. We have many years of experience in design, development, fabrication, maintenance and management of resort on-mountain terrain parks.

### How has the NASE helped your business?

The NASE provides valuable information and resources that help me with the business on a regular basis. It is also nice to feel like someone has your back as a small-business owner.

### What obstacles have you faced in running your business?

I think we've faced the typical obstacles that any small business faces. Since we started Twelve60 from scratch, most issues are based on lack of financing. We have to figure out different ways of making the most out of what we have and putting as much as we can back into the business.

### How do you market your business?

Right now we only use social networking to inform our followers of upcoming events. In the future as we expand, we will be looking at ads in magazines, on relevant websites, and at relevant regional shops.

### What's the best thing about owning your own business?

The best thing about owning my own business is the satisfaction of knowing that the success or failure of the business is in my hands, and that there's no limit to the potential of the business or my part in it.

### Any advice for your fellow NASE Members?

Follow your passion, do your research and learn from your mistakes. The NASE provides a ton of great information on dealing with common hurdles and roadblocks. ■

## GET PUBLICITY FOR YOUR BUSINESS!

Your business could be featured in SelfInformed's Member Spotlight or in another NASE publication. Let us know you'd like to be featured and tell us more about your business on our [Publicity Form](#).



# FEDERAL SELF-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

## Encourages More State Adoption



By Kristie L. Arslan

Legislation that passed in February did more than just extend the federal payroll tax deduction. It also made changes to the **Self-Employment Assistance (SEA)** program.

This voluntary program allows states to pay a self-employment allowance to unemployed individuals who are in the process of establishing businesses and realizing the dream of self-employment. Currently only Delaware, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington have adopted SEA programs.

The NASE has **previously expressed** a desire to see these types of programs extended and embraced by all 50 states. We have called upon Congress to help pass legislation that would assist all states in launching self-employment training programs for residents.

These training programs should be available free to all unemployed citizens—providing them with an avenue to create their own job if they're unable to find one.

### CHANGES TO THE PROGRAM

The legislation passed in February included several important changes to SEA.

1. It made federally-financed unemployment benefits available to the program.
2. The legislation directs the Department of Labor and the Small Business Administration to provide technical assistance to states that are interested in establishing the program.
3. It includes \$35 million to help states administer the SEA program. This is a huge incentive for states to participate. Previously, each state absorbed the costs of developing and maintaining its own program.

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?

In most cases, an individual must be eligible to receive regular unemployment insurance under state law.

Those who have been permanently laid off from previous employment and are deemed by the state as likely to exhaust unemployment benefits are eligible to participate in the SEA program.

Individuals may also be eligible even if they are already occupied by full-time self-employment activities, such as training, business counseling and technical assistance.

### SEA IS A POSITIVE STEP

At the state level, the voluntary SEA program can translate into real opportunities for budding entrepreneurs to launch their businesses and become engines of economic growth.

The NASE hopes that states will embrace the SEA and use the new funding streams to quickly implement a program.

The NASE is a fervent supporter of federal small-business programs that have a proven track record of efficiently aiding very small businesses and the self-employed.

These programs currently include:

- The SBA Office of Advocacy
- Small Business Development Centers
- The SBA Microloan Program

We hope to add the **SEA program** to that list should it prove to be positive for business owners. ■

**Kristie L. Arslan** is president and CEO of the NASE and provides critical insight to policymakers on issues affecting our nation's self-employed. You can contact her at [advocacy@NASE.org](mailto:advocacy@NASE.org).

You can help promote the **Self-Employment Assistance program**.

Visit the NASE's **Legislative Action Center** to tell your member of Congress that you support the Self-Employment Assistance program.



**For inquiries:**

**National Association  
for the Self-Employed**  
Communications Office  
325 7th Street, NW, Suite 250  
Washington, DC 20004  
(202) 466-2100  
[editor@nase.org](mailto:editor@nase.org)