

Don't pay to play the game of marketing: here's what to do instead

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



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My company manufactures premium quality audio products. The bulk of our sales comes from customizing products for brands to sell and give away to their employees, fans and customers as promotions and giveaways. Getting in front of our target market audience is difficult, and we invest a lot of time and resources into creative marketing efforts. Because of the importance of marketing to our company and the potential of a successful campaign to an early-stage product-based company, we're flooded with marketing "opportunities" on a daily basis. These include things like:

- " For only \$10, 000 (and product costs) you can put your product in the hands of celebrities through our event gift bags."
- " Be a part of the upcoming XYZ comedy sequel movie. Pay \$5, 000 to have one of your products seen in the movie."
- " We're throwing a large company party with hundreds of execs and people who may be interested in purchasing your products in the future. For a sponsorship fee of \$20, 000, you can have your name and logo in front of these decision makers at the event."

- “ Have an Instagram and reality television star tweet about your product for a special rate of \$7, 000.”

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I'd be willing to bet that your company has received something along these lines as well. These heavily pitched opportunities are rarely, if ever, worth your time and money- always be skeptical when receiving an offer or sales pitch to pay to market your business.

Instead of throwing down \$10, 000 so Kim Kardashian can throw away your product after an event instead of taking a picture of it on Instagram, here are my beliefs and some of our marketing efforts that we focus on instead:

Growth-based endorsements in niche markets

Being a celebrity in today's world can mean many different things. From YouTube stars to popular Instagram accounts, someone doesn't have to be a movie star to have a strong and loyal following. Our best “ endorsement” isn't a billionaire athlete or reality television superstar; it's competitive eater . He wears the customized pair of headphones we sent him during interviews, talks about them to his followers and wears them when getting prepared for events. For the cost of a set of headphones, we've developed a great relationship with Eric and others that most brands neglect because they're too busy trying to get the attention of celebrities who already endorse 1, 000 other products.

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Products over sponsorships

Event-based marketing does present good opportunities to raise awareness for your company, but it rarely requires a large financial investment. Events do need paid sponsors, but they're also looking to enhance the experience of their paid attendees. Instead of paying \$10,000 to sponsor a popular event, like SXSW, we'd rather give away \$10,000 in product. Not only are we creating loyal customers by getting them to try our products, we can unload extra inventory and giving away products at retail price is a less expensive investment than spending thousands in cash on a sponsorship.

Creative discounts

Find ways to use creative discounts to market your business while influencing sales. After a purchase is made on OrigAudio.com, we send their product along with a \$10 gift card they can use themselves or re-gift to someone they think would enjoy our products. The cards cost around 40 cents apiece and since our cheapest products are around \$20, use of the gift card rewards our current fans, creates new ones, and increases revenue.

Market directly to decision makers

Since marketing is expensive and an area of waste in many companies, your efforts should be as targeted as possible. Instead of marketing to a large crowd, get in front of decision-makers who have the ability to purchase your products. For example, we sent a free customized pair of headphones to our top 200 corporate customers to drop a hint about what they can purchase their employees for the holidays.

Not every marketing opportunity is a scam or a waste of money. If you are strongly considering going all in on product placement in a movie or being a vendor at a music festival in Brooklyn, find others that have participated in the past and ask them about their experience. Nearly every time we have dug into an event, including an actual music festival in Brooklyn that markets to us every year, companies that have participated in the past have told us to stay away because it's a waste of money.

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When marketing for your startup, always be wary of even the most exciting opportunities. Don't get caught up in a sales pitch and lose sight of what's best for the long-term growth of your business.