

4 creative ways to use free samples to grow your business

[Business](#)



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As a consumer, I'm a big fan of free samples. (And who isn't?) I love getting stuff for free, trying new stuff risk-free. Costco is a favorite store of mine for this reason.

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And, again for this same reason, as an entrepreneur I've been collecting creative strategies for using free samples in my business. You might want to try them, too.

In particular, small businesses can learn a lot about free samples from the world of SaaS (software as a service). Online software services have a variety of pricing models, but most of them offer something along the following lines:

- A one-month free trial
- Data for one domain at no cost
- A sign-up for the basic plan for free

Most SaaS companies know that people hesitate about signing up for a new service. But, offering a free trial means you can see what the service is like, with no risk. SaaS companies also understand that somebody already using their service for free is more likely to upgrade to a paid subscription than is a total stranger.

Here are four creative ways to turn free samples into bigger profits, whether yours is a SaaS business or not.

1. Free samples as part of your branding

This week, I am the proud owner of two huge boxes of cereals, thanks to a taste test last week at . Already, the brand is one of my favorites. I even found a flavor my wife and daughter would like, and discovered that I pay less at Costco than at my local store. That free sample probably sold me dozens of boxes of cereal over the months to come.

What is also amazing about Costco is how it has made free samples part of its broader marketing plan. There are times when we've gone to Costco just because our stomachs were getting grumpy and there was free food to sample while we shopped.

Even if the store had not sold me cereal this week, free samples are a form of in-store entertainment. Costco has probably sold us hundreds of dollars of various products, just by pulling us into the store for the samples.

Another example? The breakfast/lunch chain offers people a free sip of mango smoothie while they wait to be seated and a free “sucre à la crème”

while they pay (my kids love that part!). I wonder if some people go to Cora just for the freebies -- or maybe even subconsciously.

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2. Free samples as a customer bonus

My Australian friend found that she gets free samples when she orders her hair products. sends " 2 Free samples with every order." To the consumer, it's a nice bonus gift. It's like getting more than you paid for. For the company, it's a way to expand the number of products it sells to each customer.

Taking a page out of the SaaS handbook, once consumers use even a sample of a product, they are more likely to buy it than if they have to pay for a whole bottle just to try it. If each customer ends up buying one new product as a result of the free samples, the company has just doubled the value of each customer.

3. Free samples to kick-start a new business

Every start-up knows how hard it is to make waves in this era of information overload. Offering free samples is one way to get people to stop and take note. If I was to open a restaurant, I would have someone standing outside the door offering a free sample of one of the signature dishes to everyone who walked by, along with a business card or take-out menu or whatever publicity I had.

Bar a bar called Louie , creating enough buzz that people came out just to try its free cucumber martinis. They created so much buzz that people were talking about it in social media for days.

4. Free samples to sponsor an event

People build an affinity for events in which they participate. When my daughter and I ran this summer, we trained for a couple of months. When it was over, we took home souvenirs.

Sponsoring events is great branding, because you connect with your audience members where they are emotionally invested. So, what a great place to offer free samples: The official sponsors of The Color Run were and . Specifically, Fruit2O offered free drinks for hydration, which I certainly appreciated. And we saved a couple of the little cups; we still use them.

Sally Hansen, meanwhile, left an array of nail polish colors sitting out on tables for runners to try, post-run. I declined. But my daughter had fun plastering her nails with the samples.

Similarly, Artic Ease used a similar strategy at the run. Its cold wraps are designed to ease pain after an injury, but they work just as well on sore muscles after a really good workout. Although we had just run three miles that day, consider that marathoners run 26 miles. Imagine how sore *their* muscles are when they reach the finish line; imagine how grateful they are when someone provides relief!

In fact, to the Chicago and Philadelphia Marathons. How many runners went on to buy them at full price later, to use for training for their next run?

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Free samples are a versatile marketing tool. Here are those four ways listed to leverage them:

- Part of your branding
- A customer bonus
- A kick-start for a new business
- Sponsorship of an event

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There are many ways to leverage free samples to boost your business. You can probably think of more.