

Making the right connections

Janelle Macri

FORMING networks and alliances with like-minded small business owners has paid dividends for Sherryn McBride, principal of home-based marketing consultancy business Marketing Talk.

After working in the corporate world for 25 years across a variety of marketing and market research management roles, Ms McBride started her marketing consultancy business in 2001 from her home in Shelley.

Marketing Talk assists small businesses and not-for-profit organisations with their marketing needs, conducting tailored marketing health checks by reviewing how a business presents itself, and tailoring marketing materials to create or better promote a company's image.

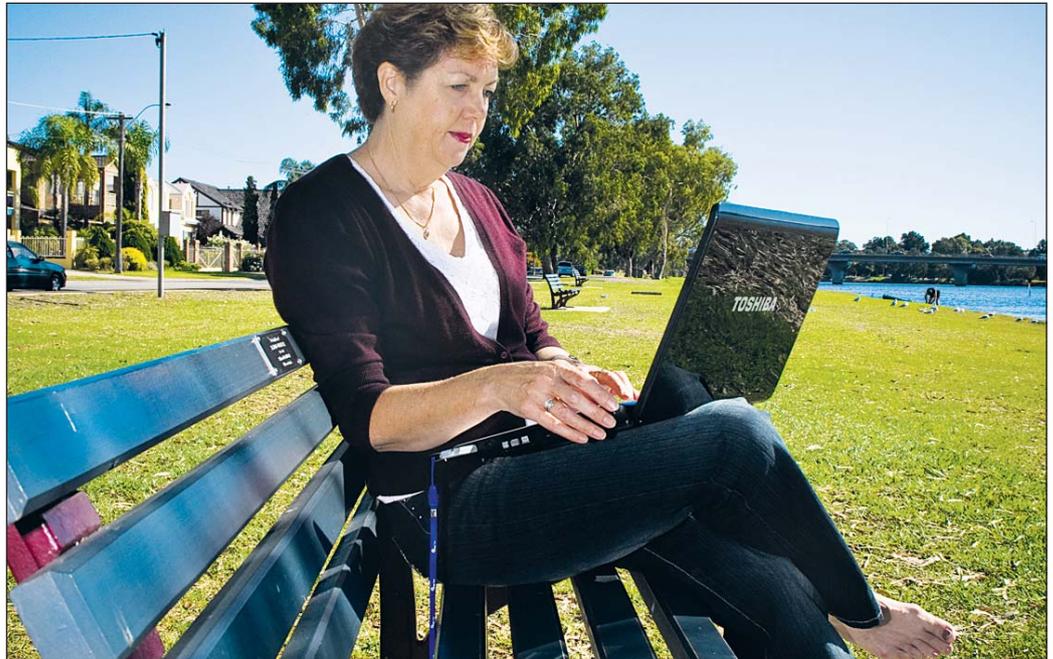
Ms McBride said that, while small business owners were very hands-on and good at their jobs, most were time poor and didn't know how to market themselves or their products, or make their business more visible in the marketplace.

She said business owners usually approached her about three to four years into the business, after they had all the logistics in place and were ready to grow their business or take it to the next level.

"They [small business owners] have good business ideas, but marketing is uncharted territory for them. They find it easier to outsource their marketing," she told *WA Business News*.

"People are good at saying 'this is my product', but find it difficult to translate that into a call to action."

Ms McBride said one of her biggest challenges when she started Marketing Talk was to not poach clients from her former employer, despite receiving many offers.



TIME ISSUE: Sherryn McBride says most small business owners are time poor and don't know how to market themselves or their products. **Photo:** Grant Currall

PROBLEM SOLVING

COMPANY: Marketing Talk.

BUSINESS: Marketing assistance to small businesses and not-for-profit organisations.

PROBLEM: Attracting customers to a sole-operated, home-based consultancy business.

SOLUTION: Creating alliances with like-minded and complementary businesses through networking.

To combat this, she decided to start afresh and find her own clients through networking and creating alliances with other business owners in complementary fields.

Teaming up with a graphic designer, a photographer, a web designer and a search engine optimisation specialist, Ms McBride formed a business network, with each business owner able to access each other's client databases and give and receive referrals.

An added benefit of this process for Ms McBride was the ability to

provide a website design service to her clients, using the members of the business network.

To form alliances with like-minded business owners, Ms McBride recommends looking within your own circle of influence, as well as attending networking functions through small business groups and local chambers of commerce.

"You've got to put yourself out there; you can't be shy, and if you're not prepared to do that you can't create alliances," Ms McBride said.

She also recommends vetting potential alliances first by going to their workplace and seeing how they work, asking for samples of their work and, if possible, speaking to some of their customers.

"Then you have a group like-minded business people you're happy to refer to your clients because you believe in the quality of their work," she said.

"It's vital to build trust. You can't refer on people whose work you can't guarantee."

Ms McBride believes Perth has a highly supportive small business community, with business owners keen to help each other out.

As a sole operator, she said working in isolation could be demotivating, so it was important to be part of peer networking groups.

"Perth is a small enough place that you can do this," Ms McBride said. "There's a camaraderie among small business owners and a willingness to help each other."