While you don't have to be a marketing guru to get your products into the hands of target customers, you do have to know a little something about what it takes to pique interest and generate demand for what you’re selling. If you’re having difficulty doing this, it might be a good idea to find yourself an expert and invest a little cash in your marketing initiatives.

One such partner might be Agency Ingram Micro (AIM), which offers end-to-end marketing services to vendors and their channel partners. AIM’s bill of fare includes roughly two-dozen services, including brand consulting, creative collateral, data analytics, digital signage, market research, peer-to-peer networking, print advertising, and video production.

The agency’s approach is to help technology companies leverage marketing to establish themselves in the market, recruit new customers (and keep existing ones happy), expand team knowledge and resources, and increase sales.

Having an ally such as AIM has been a boon to business for many Ingram Micro SMB 500 solution providers, a group that’s collectively growing by leaps and bounds.

The Ingram Micro SMB 500, compiled by Ingram Micro’s Business Intelligence Center and U.S. SMB Business Unit and business strategy firm The 2112 Group, recognizes the sustained growth and business performance of SMB-focused channel partners.
The third annual SMB 500 shows the group growing at a compound rate of 43 percent, with the highest-ranking channel partner posting a three-year annual growth rate of nearly 625 percent. The annual ranking is based on the performance of more than 20,000 small-business solution providers operating under the Ingram Micro umbrella, and shows partners growing at rates three to four times the channel industry average and well above the channel average for SMB-focused resellers.

When it comes to marketing materials, the landscape changes from year to year, but some principles remain tried and true over time. Here are four tips for making your marketing the best it can be.

**Blend conventional with modern**
New marketing vehicles are emerging all the time, but technology-purchase influencers and decision-makers continue to rely consistently on traditional content types.

According to a 2014 Technology Content Survey Report from Eccolo Media, the field of marketing materials has grown from five in 2008 to 16 last year, and now includes blogs, Webinars, social content, e-newsletters, podcasts, infographics, and more. But among the 500-plus respondents to Eccolo’s survey, white papers are still the most frequently consumed by 49 percent, brochures and data sheets by 46 percent, case studies and technology guides by 36 percent, and video/multimedia files by 35 percent.

That’s not to say you should ignore newer marketing vehicles such as blogs, social media, and e-newsletters. Technology influencers and decision-makers are paying more and more attention to these content types, especially during the early phases of the buying cycle, and you should leverage them to your advantage. The key is to find a balance between the old and new.

**Focus on quality, not quantity**
As it turns out, you don’t always have to use glitzy, high-tech delivery vehicles to get your value proposition across; nor do you have to produce huge volumes of content. But you should generate content strategically and follow certain guidelines while doing so. According to Eccolo survey respondents, high-quality white-paper content avoids marketing hype and provides specific, unbiased information that helps companies improve their businesses and solve problems. When video is your medium of choice, the content should be relevant, well-produced, and entertaining.

**Know your target market and the sales cycle**
You should never assume that what works for one kind of customer—SMBs, for example—works for them all. Marketing pundits suggest creating buying personas by researching the specific needs, challenges, and objectives of targeted customer types. Then map your marketing materials appropriately.
At the same time, customers seek different things at varying points of the buying cycle. Eccolo found that organizations in the pre-sales phases prefer white papers, blogs, and infographics. In the mid-sales part of the buying cycle, defined by Eccolo as the period when companies are actively identifying solutions and evaluating technology providers, the preferred content type is case studies. And in the final sales phase, when businesses are finalizing their solution choices and making their purchase, they rely most on technology guides.

One common trap that technology providers fall into is failing to continue providing customers with marketing materials even after they’ve made the sale. It’s not just prospective customers that rely on you for content; it’s existing customers as well, and their post-sale preferences trend toward white papers, case studies, and technology guides.

Engage the audience
Customers, whether prospective or existing, want to feel involved in the content they consume. So be sure to embed audio, video, hyperlinks, and graphic elements in your marketing materials. One caveat: Don’t throw out meaningless data to buyers; be clear about the purpose of links, for example, and the value they can get from acting on those interactive components.

Beyond that, have fun. And always remember that it’s up to you to communicate your value proposition as clearly and powerfully as you can.
ABOUT the Ingram Micro SMB 500 Program

Ingram Micro SMB 500
The Ingram Micro SMB 500, facilitated by The 2112 Group, tracks and studies the performance of the top U.S. solution providers in the Ingram Micro network servicing small and midsized businesses to provide actionable intelligence for improving sales, revenue, and profit of all companies in the go-to-market value chain.

For more information about the Ingram Micro SMB 500, visit www.IM-SMB.com/smb500.

Ingram Micro, Inc.
Ingram Micro Inc. is the world’s largest wholesale technology distributor and a global leader in IT supply-chain and mobile device lifecycle services. As a vital link in the technology value chain, Ingram Micro creates sales and profitability opportunities for vendors and resellers through unique marketing programs, outsourced logistics and mobile solutions, technical support, financial services, and product aggregation and distribution. The company is the only global broad-based IT distributor, serving approximately 160 countries on six continents with the world’s most comprehensive portfolio of IT products and services.

For more information, visit www.IngramMicro.com.

The 2112 Group
The 2112 Group is a business strategy firm focused on improving the performance of technology companies’ direct and indirect channels through our portfolio of market-leading products and services. We leverage proprietary intelligence with qualitative research, market analysis, tools, and enablement programs. By looking at the technology market from the viewpoint of vendors, partners, and end users, 2112 is uniquely positioned to develop go-to-market strategies that are beneficial to all parties from both a channel and enterprise perspective.

For more information, visit www.The2112Group.com.