



32 Creative Contest Ideas Your Business

Contests are a fun and inexpensive way to build buzz for your business. Everyone loves to win great prizes, especially prizes that they wouldn't normally give themselves, or are worth a lot of money. The media loves contests too, and if you do it right, your company can garner thousands of dollars in free advertising just by running a contest!

Secondly, everyone who enters the contest become a prospect for your business! Make sure you send contestants to your website where they must submit at least a name and email address to enter. In your rules, make sure you state that by entering, they are agreeing to receive email communication from your company.

The keys to running a successful contest are to make it easy for people to enter, make it newsworthy, have valuable prizes, (you can enlist other business owners to go in with you), spread the word, and make it fun! And don't forget to check the laws in your state before running a contest.

Here are **32 contest ideas** that will build buzz for your business and help you get noticed by the media and new customers alike!

1. **Ugliest Contest.** This is one of my favorites and can be successful for a variety of businesses: Have contestants submit photos or videos of their ugliest "blank" to win your service. For example, Therma Tru Doors is sponsoring a "[World's Ugliest Door](#)" Contest. Please don't use anything like "The Ugliest Mother" contest; it probably won't go over very well.
2. **The "Worst" Contest:** Reckless T-shirts, in Tempe, Arizona, sponsored hilarious "The World's Worst Casual Friday Outfit Contest" based off of the hit NBC show, "The Office." Grand prize was custom designed apparel, business cards, and even lunch! <http://www.recklesstshirts.com>
3. **Makeover Contest:** Makeovers are very popular and they can be used in a variety of situations. Utah's [LogoWorks](#) sponsored a contest like this for logos and gained tons of media exposure! <http://www.logoworks.com>
4. **Celebrate Special People Contest:** Nominate your special or deserving person to win a prize that they would enjoy. See below for some ideas.

5. **Mother's Day:** Enter a deserving mother or grandmother to win the prize of her dreams. The possibilities are endless: vacation, family photo shoot, gift baskets, jewelry, home makeover, Queen for a Day, etc.
6. **Father's Day Contest.** What father wouldn't want to win "[Father of the Year?](#)" like this one, along with an awesome cache of prizes?
7. **[Man or Woman of the Year](#)** This particular award was sponsored by a Chamber of Commerce, but who says you can't run your own? You get to name the criteria for winning. Makes a person wonder who you are and gets attention!
8. **Service Person of the Year:** Nominate a service person for special recognition. This would be an awesome way to recognize our brothers and sisters in the armed forces, or who are serving in the Middle East.
9. **Doctor, Dentist, and Lawyer, of the Year:** If your target market is Dentists, for example, have a contest for dentists to win Dentist of the Year. They can nominate themselves, or be nominated. Make it a big deal and hold a ceremony announcing the winner and inviting all of their friends, family and peers.
10. **Win a "Free" Giveaway:** Everyone loves to get free stuff, so why not sponsor a contest so they can. This is one you see all the time... For example, the NBC show "[Heroes](#)" is sponsoring [a NBC Heroes' Nissan Mobile Device Giveaway Sweepstakes](#) for a chance to win a car valued at over \$16,000!
11. **Win Free Flowers for a Year, or Free House Cleaning, Free Groceries, Free Oil Changes, Free Home Repairs, Free Photos, Free Manicures, Free Oil Changes, Free Lunches, etc.** Who wouldn't love free housecleaning for a year?
12. **Win a "Scholarship."** Recently an orthodontist sponsored a contest for local junior high students to win a [scholarship for braces](#). The students had to be nominated by a teacher or a counselor and had to have economic need. The contest not only generated the doctor free publicity, but enormous good will in the community, which turned into many new patients!
13. **Special Holiday Contest:** Contests for special or unusual holidays are a popular way to get noticed. For example, [May 6th is National Grump Out Day](#). Have a No grump zone, hold a laughing contest, have people submit their funniest or most embarrassing moment. For a list of unusual holidays, check out: [Brownie Locks.Com](#).
14. **Special Week Contest.** The first week in May is "[Be Kind to Animals](#)" week, sponsored by the [American Humane Society](#). Have contestants send photos of their favorite pet, sponsor a pet fashion show, or the most unusual pet contest.
15. **Special Month Contest:** May is [National Barbecue Month](#), National Motorcycle Safety Month, [National Smile Month](#), National Older American's Month, and it goes on and on and on. Since most people love to eat, you could sponsor a

barbecue cooking contest, or have people nominate their favorite barbecue restaurant. For National Smile Month, you could sponsor a best smile or worst smile contest (if you're a dentist) or have a smile-a-thon contest. Now that sounds like fun!

16. **Patriotic Contest:** Have contestants write a patriotic essay, or submit a patriotic photo, or nominate a patriotic person. This could be run in conjunction with a patriotic holiday such as Memorial Day or the 4th of July.
17. **“Best of” Contest:** [Newspapers](#) have been doing this for years for the simple fact, it works! Why do they do it? Because some of the “winners” buy advertising with them! This type of contest works great if you own a publication, or are an advertising or marketing company, but just about any company can do it.
18. **“Win Your Dream” Contest.** St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital is sponsoring a [“Win Your Dream Home” Contest](#). Your contest doesn’t have to be so elaborate. Maybe it’s a “Win Your Dream Night on the Town,” instead.
19. **Naming Contests:** One of my clients is launching a new product, but he’s having a hard time thinking of a name so we’re inviting the public to name it. The winner gets free product!
20. **World Record Setting Contests:** In honor of launching a new flavor in 2004, Snapple Beverages hosted a [“World’s Largest Watermelon Contest.”](#)
21. **Food Eating Contests:** I’m not a big fan of making a pig out of myself, but food eating contests are fun. From hot dogs to pizza, or jello, etc. You can have a lot of fun with this one! Did you know that [Nathans Famous Hot Dogs](#) has been running their world famous contest for over 93 years?
22. **Mud Mania Contest:** Scottsdale, AZ, has been the host of the [mud mania](#) contest every year since 1976. The original event was a promotion by a cleaning company to feature their cleaning product! Obviously it worked!
23. **Cooking Contest:** This could be run in conjunction with a special month such as “National Hotdog Month, or to specifically feature your brand or product such as the [Pillsbury Bakeoff](#) which has been a successful event for Pillsbury brand for over 40 years!
24. **The “Oldest” Contest:** This could become nostalgic. Host a contest for the “Oldest” pair of jeans, tie, suit, outfit, etc...
25. **“Hit Television Show Contest:** [Functional Fitness](#), a fitness training studio, in Gilbert, Arizona, launched a “Biggest Loser” contest piggybacking on the popular TV Show “The Biggest Loser.” Pay attention to what’s popular and have a contest about it. Some shows that come to my mind right now are: “What Not to Wear, and “Celebrity Apprentice.”

26. **Costume Contest:** Not only popular around Halloween, don't limit yourself to dressing up people. Have a dog or cat costume contest, baby costume contest. The more unusual the better!
27. **“Design Your Own” Contest:** Threadless Tees, has been hugely successful by encouraging people to create their own designs and have the public vote on them. <http://www.threadless.com/>
- 28: **“Hottest” Contest:** Scottsdale Jean Company, in Scottsdale, AZ, recently sponsored the “Hottest Mom” contest. The Winner would represent the company in advertising for a year. This contest, which was very controversial, garnered them lots of mentions on television, radio, and more--exactly what they wanted!
29. **Look Alike Contest:** How about dog owners that look like their dogs, celebrity look alikes, and cartoon character look alikes? Lots of fun!
30. **“Face of” Contest:** [Urban Kidz](#), a children's boutique in Scottsdale, Arizona, hosts the “Faces of Urban Kidz” model search contest every year. They ask parents to bring their children to compete to become the featured model for the store for the year. Winners receive a complete makeover, new clothes and a fashion portrait shoot, in addition to being featured in fashion shows, advertising, and television shoots. It's a huge hit!
31. **Mystery Contest:** These contests are popular with radio stations that play the first five notes of a song, and ask listeners to name the song or the artist.
32. **Scavenger Hunt Contest:** The *Contra Costa Times*, in Contra Costa, California, sponsored the [2009 Great Road Trip Scavenger Hunt](#) where they invited the public to find 20 items based on the clues that were given. According to the newspaper, the entrants loved the adventure, creativity, and camaraderie. Over 400 people entered with over 6,000 photos were submitted!

As you can see, as far as contests go, the possibilities are endless; you are only limited by your imagination. So now it's your turn! What other kind of contest would build buzz for your business? Email me at buzz@23Kazoos.com, and we may use them for a future article!

*Wendy Kenney is the author of the upcoming book “**Garage Band Marketing: Creative Marketing Strategies for Independent Business Owners.**” She is also the Founder of 23 Kazoos, a creative marketing agency that specializes in helping business owners build buzz through social media marketing, and creative marketing strategies.*

Wendy is available to speak to associations and groups about marketing for small business and social media. For more information go to [23kazoos.com](http://www.23kazoos.com) (<http://www.23kazoos.com>) or you may email Wendy at buzz@23kazoos.com.