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Entrepreneurs

## The 10 Dumbest Things Businesses Buy

Christopher Steiner, 02.05.10, 05:20 PM EST

**Are you paying for this stuff? Then stop.**



Maryellen Kane, founder and chief executive of Olive Juice, a children's clothing company, was used to shelling out north of \$5,000 to man a booth for three days at industry tradeshows. That's big money for a company with just 12 employees and about \$3 million in sales.

**Top Tips: 10 Dumb Things Your Business Buys**

One day, when looking for things to cut, Kane had an epiphany: The booth space had to go. "Most of the time these shows are nothing more than a popularity contest, where a big space denotes a big footprint in the industry," says Kane, 42. "But there's little actual sales that come from these things and the shows end up costing companies way more money than they make them."

Kane still goes to shows but she doesn't rent the booth. Instead she walks the floor and networks with buyers. Want to get even better bang for the buck? Try a [virtual tradeshow](#).

**Top Tips: 10 Dumb Things Your Business Buys**

**Top Tips: 16 Marketing Maneuvers That Won't Break The Bank**

**Top Tips: 14 Ways You're Getting Ripped Off**

Small businesses are *always* strapped for cash. Yet plenty still spend their precious capital on stuff they don't need. Here are a few more fiscally responsible moves to consider making. For a full list of 10, see our [slide show](#).

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**The Greenest Gasoline?**

can now be had for less than \$10. So there's no reason to not have them for

all lights within an office building, says Alan Lysaght, a planning consultant for companies such as Molson Breweries and Standard Broadcasting. From rarely used bathrooms to cavernous cubicle dens, ensuring lights are off when nobody's around can cut electric bills by up to 40%, he adds.

#### Scrutinize Your Wireless Bill

CAMP, a roofer in Houston, took a look at its wireless bill and was able to negotiate rates that saved it \$1,000 a month on its 32 lines. Movie Cube, which runs rental grocery-store kiosks, knocked its \$25,000 monthly wireless bill down \$5,000 a month and sliced its \$100,000 monthly data bill by \$10,000. Most companies don't have an in-house staffer familiar enough with wireless billing to squeeze out these kinds of savings, but they can call a consultant such as Validas that will right-size their phone plan and deal with billing disputes.

#### Lose The Security Blanket

Jeanne Achille, chief executive of The Devon Group, a public-relations firm in Middletown, N.J., doesn't mind paying [Symantec](#) ( [SYMC - news - people](#) ) for software to keep her computer network free of viruses and hackers. She questions, however, the value of paying her voicemail supplier, [Avaya](#) ( [AV - news - people](#) ), \$40 a month for "protection" of the voicemail software on her phones. "When was the last time you heard of a small company's voicemail getting hacked?" she asks. Worse, she says, is that the service is difficult to cancel. Avaya told her that she has to give written notice of cancellation 12 months in advance. Avaya declined to comment on individual customers, but said that customers can cancel multiyear contracts as long as they serve out or pay for the current contract year's services.

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#### Ditch The Door-Stoppers

Just what are prospective clients doing with those fat catalogues you fling at them? Throwing them out, that's what. Most big department stores have stopped printing door-stoppers, and you should, too. Rag & Bone Bindery, which hand-binds books and photo albums, used to distribute catalogues like Sears in 1955. "We were printing them by the thousands, giving them away and

not knowing whether people were even looking at them," says owner Jason Thompson. The company now pours that money into its Web site--and is landing customers at a faster clip.

#### Be Leary Of Bought Leads

No sales lead, no sales and no success. That's why companies pay big money to companies such as InfoUSA to secure a pile of leads culled from industry databases. Olive Juice's Kane, however, has found the accounts she lands through paid leads to be much less dependable (and profitable) than leads she earns on her own. "It led me to bug a lot of accounts that weren't ready to buy," she says. "Our most loyal clients are the ones who found us or heard of us from raving fans."

[Top Tips: 10 Dumb Things Your Business Buys](#)

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