Are you ready for prime time?

Here's something to think about: you can start marketing too early. Sometimes, you aren't ready for prime time, as they say.

Last week, I attended a networking event. There, I met two self-employed event planners. They were both very pleasant and seemed knowledgeable about the ins and outs of event planning. Both gave me their business cards. As I always do when I get back from this type of event, I went to their websites. At least, I tried to go to their websites. Neither website was up—one was "under construction" and the other was a placeholder from the domain registrar. Although both ladies had nice (professionally designed and printed) cards, they skipped a step. You should always have your website up before you hand out cards with the URL—even if it is a one page describing your business and providing contact info.

Later on in the evening, I met two women who are planning to open a yoga studio. They did not have cards, and they told me their website was under construction. For the life of me, I can't remember the name of the studio. One of the yogis told me they are considering doing a Groupon…the week they open. I told her that that I would not advise that since she wouldn't even have worked out any kinks.

Here is an article from USA Today about Groupon (Is Groupon a great idea for entrepreneurs?) Among the cons of using Groupon is that if you are not ready for the onslaught of business, you will end up turning away customers. Say the yogis get 40 people signed up, but the studio only holds 30, or their computer system has a bug and can't register new customers? Then those potential customers are going to be disappointed and chances are, won't be coming back (there are plenty of other yoga studios in the area).

The bottom line is that before you start any type of marketing, whether it be in-person networking or a traditional advertising/media campaign, you need to be ready for business. This means having your website up and running and all your business tools in order (e.g. invoicing, computer systems, ordering, etc.) People have limited time and resources and they will often not give you a second chance. Or they will forget about you. Or they will think you are an amateur.

Not only should you be ready for prime time before you start marketing, you should be ready for business.