The Small Business TOOLKIT

A guide to help small businesses be better at what they do and not make the same mistakes that a lot of other businesses make.

Aimed at any small business owner who doesn't have all the answers to be successful!

Edited & compiled by
Paul Green

The Business Community®

The Small Business Toolkit

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A collection of articles for the small business owner – to help improve and enhance the success of any small business looking to grow

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Disclaimer – no responsibility can be accepted for any actions that you take as a result of the contents provided in this document. There is no guarantee that implementing any of the advice shared in this book will definitely ensure your business is successful or that they'll prevent your business from failing. They are presented as a guide based on the experience of the authors working with many different types of businesses and are provided as a choice for you to consider if they'll make an impact on your business.

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Foreword

This book intends to provide a reference across all pillars of business to help small businesses be better at what they do and not make the same mistakes that a lot of other businesses make. It's aimed at any small business owner who doesn't have all the answers to be successful. So that's you and every other business owner – right?

While it may not cover every single aspect of business, it hopefully hits the spot with the main issues that face a small business on a day-to-day basis. The contributors to this book have been chosen as they are leaders in their field of expertise and therefore best placed to share their knowledge with you.

Having worked with hundreds of businesses over the years since becoming an advisor to owners of small businesses, it's clear that there are fundamental mistakes that businesses make which can lead to the failure of that business. As you probably know, the statistics are against anyone jumping off the corporate rodent race and setting up their own venture being a success.

There were 5.82 million small businesses in 2019[1], accounting for three-fifths of the employment and around half the turnover in the UK private sector[2].

Unfortunately, 60 percent of those new businesses will go-under within three years, and 20 percent will close their doors within just 12 months[3].

The top 3 reasons for this lack of success are[4] –

- lack of cash
- no plan
- lack of clear value proposition

It would be great if you could take some value from the content of this book, even if it’s just one thing that leads to you heading in the direction of success.

Here’s to the continued success and growth of your business.

Your feedback on how useful you found the book is appreciated and any suggestions you have for improving future editions are welcome – just email feedback@buscomm.co.uk.

Sources

1. Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
2. Federation Of Small Businesses
3. The Telegraph
4. Hiscox

Section 1 – Strategy

Strategy needn't be a scary word and having overall plans and objectives of where your business is heading can have a significant impact on the direction of your business and the choices you make.

"*The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do.*" – Michael Porter

Creating a strategy for your business

Paul Green – The Business Community

Strategy can be a scary word for a small business. However, having a clear strategy for the direction of your business can help you make clear decisions about where you want your business to be. Putting together a strategic plan isn't as difficult as you may think – it doesn't have to be "War & Peace" and in some cases may even be condensed to a one-page basic outline of what you're looking to achieve.

So let's crack on and show you how to put one together.

Where we start may be considered a bit namby-pamby for a small business and you may see it as something for corporates; it's creating your vision and mission! Now I appreciate that you may have worked for a bigger company. Often the vision and mission statements can be pretty meaningless; possibly because they have been created for the wrong reasons and don't resonate with employees or customers.

Vision

Your vision should outline where you want your organisation to be or how you want to be perceived in the domain in which you operate – this could be an idealised view of the world from your perspective. It's a long-term view and concentrates on the future.

The vision should –

- be inspirational and about how you see the future for your business and industry sector
- reflect your core values and purpose
- be short and easy to remember
- make sense to everyone; especially if you have employees

Examples of vision statements –

- Microsoft (*at its founding*) – A computer on every desk and in every home
- IKEA – To create a better everyday life for the many people
- Disney – To make people happy
- Nike – Bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world
- Apple – We believe that we're on the face of the earth to make great products and that's not changing

Mission

Mission statements define the fundamental purpose of a business; briefly describing why it's in existence and what it does to achieve the vision. It's more practical than a vision as it could contain how the vision is going to be implemented.

A mission should –

- clarify your offer to the customer
- identify the core competencies of the business
- explain what you do and how you do it

Examples of mission statements –

- IKEA – Offer a wide range of well-designed, functional home furnishing products at prices so low that as many people as possible will be able to afford them
- Google – To organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful
- Nike – Create ground-breaking sports innovations, make our products sustainably, build a creative and diverse global team, and make a positive impact in communities where we live and work
- Apple – To bring the best user experience to its customers through its innovative hardware, software, and service

Values

At this point, you may also want to consider what you and your company's core values are. These can be used in conjunction with your vision and mission to help define your business and the unique elements of it. They are the fundamental principles on which your business is built.

It can take a while to define your vision, mission and value statements, but it's worth the effort as it will ultimately define why you're in existence, what you do, how you do it and some of the core values and competences you have as a business. In turn, this investment in time will pay you dividends going forward, making it much clearer for you to make business decisions based on these foundations.

While your vision, mission and values don't have to be shared, there is no disadvantage in doing so. It's another way of engaging prospects, customers and employees and aligning them with the purpose and intentions of your business.

It can also help your marketing message in distinguishing you from the competition, which nicely leads on to the next two elements of planning your strategy.

Competitive advantage

The chances are that what you offer has competitors or alternative substitutes for what you provide. Therefore you'll need a competitive advantage to distinguish yourself in your marketplace. Some call this a Unique Selling Proposition/Point (USP) – note this can be misleading as you may have more than one USP for your business or the USP may change depending on your prospect base.

It's also worth saying that your USP may be something you're taking for granted that you're not making obvious to customers or prospects.

Consider what pain you're easing or need you're fulfilling and what are the benefits of doing business with you over an alternative supplier? You need to stand out from the crowd and not appear the same (or a commodity) to your potential customer base.

Imagine if you were a shop on the High Street and a competitor opened up next door, what would you do to encourage people to come into your shop and not theirs?

Or, let's say you took the "header" off your website and swapped it with the "header" of your nearest competitor's website, would there be any significant difference?

Better still, if you can become the recognised expert or specialist in your line of business, won't this significantly enhance your position versus the competition?

Think about what your competition doesn't offer that you do; or what they can't or won't offer. It could be based on:

- size (being number 1 in your field)
- location (only one in your area offering what you do)
- value
- exclusivity
- any number of other factors that may be specific to your particular industry

One great way of helping you stand out is to offer a guarantee. This may already be something that you do but you're just not telling the world.

For example, if a customer is unhappy with the service you had provided, then presumably you'll offer a refund, undertake the work again at no cost or offer a replacement. You get the picture. Well – make that the guarantee! It massively increases the chances of someone doing business with you.

Ultimately, you're the unique thing about your business – so leverage that. Your story as to why you're in business is specific to you only. People buy from people they know, like and trust; it's a decision based on emotion. Connecting with people on this level will help you rise above your competitors.

Target market

This can be contentious for some and is covered elsewhere in other chapters within this book (probably because it's one of the most important things to consider in your business).

Unless you already have a particular niche, then you can more than likely sell to anyone. That is fine. However, it's extremely difficult to market to everyone. Therefore, it's beneficial to target your market within the millions of potential customers you could potentially serve.

The fear is that you'll miss out on opportunities by narrowing down who you're looking for. In reality, the opposite is true. The better "avatar" that you can create of your ideal customer, the easier it is to market your services and generate business.

Consider –

- turnover
- number of staff
- geography
- industry sector
- sex, age or ethnicity
- hobby/interest
- position within a company
- and so on

...or more than likely, a combination of these factors.

Think about how many new customers you want in a year, for argument's sake, let's say 20 – wouldn't it be easier to identify 100 prospects and target them as opposed to taking a shotgun approach to 1000s hoping for the best?

Pillars of business

The next thing to consider are the "pillars" within a business that constitute the makeup of all organisations. These cover all aspects of your business –

Finance | Sales | Marketing | Operations | Resources | Personal

Things to consider in each of these sections (this isn't an exclusive or an exhaustive list – there will be things that may be specific to your business or industry sector) –

- Finance
  - Turnover
  - Profit
  - Creditors
  - Debtors
  - Break-even point
  - Assets
  - Loans/Debt
  - Purchase costs
- Sales
  - Number of customers
  - Sales revenue
  - Sale pipeline
  - Salespeople performance
  - Average sale per customer
  - Pricing
- Marketing
  - Target market
  - Methods to market

    - Return on investment
    - USP
    - Competition
- Operations
    - Business systems
    - Business processes
    - IT support
    - Quality
    - Customer service
    - Health & safety
- Resources
    - Outsourced services
    - Staff
    - Legal requirements
- Personal
    - Your health/well-being
    - Work/life balance
    - Personal development

While there could be some overlap with these domains, the task is to consider each of these areas and focus on the following –

- Where you are now
- Where you want to get to
- How you're going to get there?
    - What are the "now" actions?
    - What are the "next" actions?

That's it!

This can be done over any period of time; for most small businesses looking 12 months ahead is fine. Because this should be a "dynamic" document i.e. reviewed and updated regularly (ideally monthly, worst case annually), then you're adapting the plan for any changes in circumstances. Actions should be regularly reviewed - they should translate into your regular "to do" list items.

So, for example, take your finances. Look at your current turnover, profit, costs and any other aspects you want to consider under this "pillar".

Then look at where you want to be.

The gap between now and then is what defines the actions you're going to have to take to achieve the objectives you have set.

To elaborate (over 12 months), take a look at the following table at a couple of areas that you may consider under the finance pillar.

Where are you now?	Where you want to be?	How are you going to get there?
Turnover £100k[1]	Turnover £120k	**Now Actions** Review current pipeline for opportunities to close **Next Actions** Identify new customers
Profit £10k	Profit £15k	**Now Actions** Look at where costs can be saved on current spend **Next Actions** Review suppliers Review pricing

Actions should identify who is doing what and by when and these are updated as and when you review your plan.

[1] This could be considered under the "Sales" pillar – it doesn't necessarily matter as long as all the aspects of your business that you want to cover are included somewhere in the plan.

SWOT analysis

As a final thing to consider in your planning, a SWOT (Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats) analysis can sometimes identify things that may have been missed, as well as complement the overall plan; providing an easy to digest overview of your business.

For those unfamiliar with this tool, it's a way of identifying your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats into an organised list and is usually presented in a simple two-by-two grid –

	Helpful for achieving objectives	**Harmful to achieving objectives**
Internal factors	Strengths	Weaknesses
External factors	Opportunities	Threats

Hopefully, you now feel more comfortable putting together a strategy for your business and feel that it's beneficial to do so. There are numerous statistics out there confirming the importance of a plan for the success of any business. And, as you can now see, it doesn't have to be an over-complicated process to be effective.

Even if this seems a daunting task as it stands, it doesn't all have to be done in one go – just break it down into the bite-sized chunks you're comfortable with and work on each section to create your plan over time.

Either way, the execution of any plan is the important piece of the jigsaw. You need to take action to move your business forward and which actions you take (and don't take) should be guided by your strategy.

You're bound to make mistakes on the way as pretty much every small business owner does. Having a plan should limit the number of stumbling blocks ahead of you, giving you clarity over the decisions you make. It will also save you time as your productivity should be improved only focusing on those actions that are in line with your vision, mission, values and where you want to be.

What have you got to lose? Get planning!

Paul Green – The Business Community

Paul has been an independent advisor since 2003 and has worked with hundreds of small business owners. He believes that any business can be successful as long as they get some external help along the way. Having someone from outside of your business look in is invaluable. You don't have to pay for this; there are more than likely people within your network who would be willing to offer this kind of support.

Failing that, Paul provides affordable business advice and coaching and will be able to help. He also offers training and business networking groups for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises).

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Setting up your business for exit

Bryan Walters – BW Consultancy

It may seem odd to be talking about exiting your business in the early chapters of this book! However it is a strategic decision about how you are going to exit your business. Maybe you'll just drop dead on the job – there are other options to consider!

Many business owners only start to think about the true value of their business as they approach retirement and begin to explore the possibilities of selling their company. But what they tend to find out is that the things that add value to the business are the very things that help grow a business successfully.

It's also, in many cases, the most valuable asset many of them own, in many cases far more valuable than a property. So whether or not you're considering selling your business, the sooner you take action the stronger and more valuable your business will be, should you wish to sell it in future.

And for some business owners the process starts on day 1 – but don't panic just yet, if you've only just made up your mind to sell or you're thinking about selling, there's much you can do. If you do decide you want to sell, you may have to become far less attached your business than you may be – right now it's your baby but you'll have to let go.

It's also useful to bear in mind that it's not necessarily what you're selling that's important. It's what the other person is buying that really counts; another reason to learn to let go.

And here are a couple of examples to illustrate the point (and if you can find out the potential buyers' reasons for buying, it can help increase the value – more on that a little later).

Example 1

I recently sold my small inbound Call Centre. I employed 5 part-time staff, had small offices, a bunch of computers and specialist software.

I sold to a larger player. The buyer had spare capacity and offices plenty big enough to house any additional members of staff that might be needed to cope with the additional business.

The key bit is when it came to valuing my business, what profit I was making was irrelevant; it's what was the value to the buyer. The only cost they would incur to deliver the revenues was one additional full-time member of staff. A big difference to 5 part-time staff, rent, office overheads, etc. So the price was negotiated on my gross fees – not what profit I was or wasn't making.

And what the buyer wanted was more clients. A very good match.

My reason for selling – very personal, a lifestyle decision.

Example 2

I had been working with my client for a number of years when the decision was made to sell. The business comprised 4 restaurants in a fashionable area of London with large(ish) administrative offices in the building which also housed one of the restaurants.

Using the principle of what were the purchasers buying we had a good root through our P&L (Profit and Loss) Account. The filed accounts showed a profit of circa £2.3m.

What wouldn't the buyer be taking on was the question?

The list we came up with totalled just over £1m! – and included items such as –

1. our Chairman's salary and expenses
2. the chances that any buyer big enough to take us on would be able to cover a reasonable proportion of administrative costs
3. the Chairman's partner was the Company Secretary – no longer needed

The final list came to just over £1m – which we could easily prove.

The business was valued on a multiple of 8 on EBIT (Earnings Before Interest and Tax) which we could prove was £3.3m versus the accounts figure of £2.3m and on a multiple of 8 this made a difference of £8m – not a number to be sneezed at!!

Reason for selling – the shareholders felt they couldn't take the Group to the next stage.

And the reason for buying was that our landlord of the building which housed our offices wanted to turn the building into a Boutique Hotel with a fine dining restaurant.

An interesting aspect to this deal (from an accountant's point of view) was that we were recommended to undertake Vendor's Due Diligence.

The chances are that when you come to sell your business, the buyer will want a good look at your books and records and much more, according to the size and complexity of your business. This is known as Due Diligence – a process normally undertaken by the purchaser at their cost.

By undertaking the process ourselves we would have to bear the cost if we couldn't sell the business. It also had to be undertaken by a reputable firm. We agreed and the sale process was now well underway.

We'd been getting ready for this for some time and we knew our books and records were in apple pie order.

However, there was still much more to be looked at. The following covers a number of different types of business and can be applied to most.

See how your business measures up! These are areas that might be looked at and as I said at the start, are also areas that should help your business grow and be ready for a sale at short notice.

Let's start with what could and does often go wrong once you've decided to sell and the Due Diligence process is underway –

- The books and records don't tie in with the picture you've painted
- You omitted to mention one or two salient points – such as there's a legal issue you're involved in – an HMRC investigation, etc.
- Your advisors have "misled" you as to your company's value and you're so far in, you feel you can't withdraw
- You get so wound up in the process, you forget about day to day business – far more common than you may think

Let's look at the various aspects of your business a potential buyer may look at.

And this is in no particular order –

1. Plant, machinery and equipment

Is it up to date and well maintained? Is it suitable for purpose? Is there technical support available for all items that are critical to the smooth running of the business?

Do you have a plant and machinery register – is that up to date?

2. Licenses

Make sure all your licenses are up to date.

3. Customers/Clients

Do you have a good number of customers or are you too reliant on one or two big clients? Buyers like to see good quality "blue chip" customers and will be concerned if they see an over-dependence on just a few.

Do you have a high proportion of repeat business or are you always looking for new business to replace lost?

How much of your turnover is based on contracts? Are any due for renewal? If so, try to tie up new deals before putting your company up for sale.

4. Competition

What market share do you have – in your area, region, nationally, internationally?

Why do people buy from you rather than your competition? Do you offer anything that your competitors don't? If so, make it the focus of your marketing.

If not, think about how you could differentiate yourself from the competition.

5. Products/Services

Is the marketplace for your products and/or services growing or contracting?

What are you doing to keep up to date and to address the changing needs of the market?

6. Structure

There should be a management structure with clearly defined responsibilities. If it’s a small business, it may be that one person does several things. That doesn’t matter as long as everyone knows what their responsibilities and what the levels of authority are. A potential buyer needs to know who to talk to where he/she might make a saving.

Are your employee contracts up to date and in line with current legislation?

An organisation chart would be helpful.

7. Systems

Are the processes that make the business work well both defined and effective?

Are you making the best use of currently available technology? This may be boring but it’s absolutely vital.

And an office manual/bible with the processes clearly defined is a great help.

8. Suppliers

How secure are your sources of supply? Do you have any distributorship or agency agreements in place? What exclusivity do they give you?

And, if you’re dependent on manufactured parts check out delivery times, can you get them in time for a rush order for a major client?

Check stock levels.

9. Intellectual Property

Do you have any of your own design products? If so, is the IPR (trademarks, copyright, patents, etc.) properly protected? **This is vital. And be careful not to rip off anyone else's.**

Here are a couple of cases for music buffs.

"My Sweet Lord" sung by George Harrison & "He's So Fine" sung by The Chiffons – The court decided the My Sweet Lord infringed the copyright of He's So Fine and cost George over $0.5M. Chuck Berry clashed with the Beach Boys over Chuck Berry's "Sweet Little Sixteen" and the Beach Boys "Surfin' USA".

If this whole paper is heavy going, go to the "Songs On Trial" section of The Rolling Stone Website for some light relief.

Back to business.

10. Training

Is there clear evidence that the people in your company have been trained properly for their roles within the company?

Make sure there are training manuals, process manuals, etc.

11. The financials – very, very important

Many small and medium businesses have been structured with tax efficiency in mind. There may be a need for some re-structuring in the years prior to selling, so get good tax advice early. In any event, a strong Balance Sheet gives reassurance that the business is well managed and cash generative. In an on-going situation, this will be useful in securing funding for growth.

Similarly, a consistent record of good net profit (compared with similar companies in the same business sector) will impress your bank manager and prospective buyers alike.

This isn't a definitive list by any means and there are also things you should consider –

- Have a bloody good reason for selling, plus have a business plan to show what could be done – buyers may be suspicious of your motives otherwise
- Don't make yourself indispensable – a buyer may not want you hanging around too long unless you're the reason they're buying your company

For those of you just embarking on the journey of building a company, here are 4 things a great number of successful companies have in common –

1. A plan!!
2. Goals
3. Well trained and well-incentivised staff
4. Excellent advisors

And when it comes to selling your business, much as you may love your accountant and solicitor, make sure they're well versed in selling businesses – this is one time you don't want them learning at your expense.

Bryan Walters – BW Consultancy

With over 30 years' experience, Bryan works with small and medium-sized companies assisting growth through helping raise finance and then working with the owners to obtain maximum value at exit. To date he has been instrumental in raising close to £20m and has been involved in sales totalling in excess of £75m.

He has many years' experience in high-level financial management having worked with a diverse range of clients from a Covent Garden based group of restaurants, through one of the UK's best loved comic actors, a number of rock stars, to a major global Call Centre operator.

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Section 2 – Finance

Cash is key in any business and a lack of it is the top reason that businesses fail to succeed. Knowing your financial situation, how money moves in and out of your business is a critical part of running it.

"*Entrepreneurs believe that profit's what matters most in a new enterprise. But profit's secondary. Cash flow matters most.*" – Peter Drucker

Managing cash flow in your business

Wendy Tate – Bean Counters

We've all heard that old adage, "Cash is King"? The origin of the phrase isn't altogether clear. However, according to Wikipedia, it was used by Pehr Gyllenhammer, CEO of Swedish Car Group Volvo, following the global stock market crash of 1987.

So, what is cash flow? At its most fundamental level, it's a company's ability to continue to trade and this is determined by creating positive cash flows. It sounds obvious but cash is needed to pay suppliers, employee wages, debts to lenders and a certain amount will need to be available to reinvest in the business to ensure it moves forward. A positive cash flow, therefore, not only ensures a company can pay its debts as they become due, it allows for reinvestment in the business and can also return money to shareholders for limited companies.

Whether you're a sole trader, an SME or large corporate, such as Volvo, when it comes to running your business, one of the many challenges is managing the cash flow. Even a profitable business can fail by not generating a positive cash flow. I know that statement sounds crazy – did I just say a profitable business can fail?

The first step in managing cash flow is to calculate the liquidity of the business. There is a simple ratio to measure the immediate solvency of a business. In accountancy terms, this is referred to as the Current Ratio. This will show the extent to which the current liabilities are covered by cash in the bank and assets that can be converted into cash in a reasonably short space of time, for example, vehicles wholly owned by the business.

Current Ratio = Current Assets ÷ Current Liabilities

In general terms, the higher the ratio of current assets to liabilities, the better.

A recent report from Xero stated that 65% of business failures in the first five years of trading are blamed on financial issues. There are many tactics you can incorporate into your business model to combat this, stabilize the cash flow and grow your business.

Borrow money before you actually need it, by opening up business credit while your figures are good may prevent you being turned down later when you need it the most. It will also give you a buffer should you experience some cash flow teething issues in the early days while you're trying to get your business established.

It's important to continually review your business procedures to ensure your business is running efficiently. There are a few areas to look at here. Firstly, while it's wonderful to see high sales figures, it can prove stressful if payments for goods or services sold are made late, putting increased pressure on the business finances. The Chancellor, at the time of writing, Philip Hammond, during a recent meeting with FSB, CBI, Xero and others, has called for a cultural change citing that 50,000 small firms are put out of business every year, while a further 15% struggle to pay staff and other costs due to late payments.

It's useful, therefore, to know what the debtor days are for your business and to compare with benchmarked companies to see how your company is performing.

There will however be several factors that can have an influence on this including, but not limited by, the size of the debtor company; who in some cases will only pay you on their terms and not yours.

Debtor Days = Trade Receivables ÷ Annual Sales x 365

Example

Trade Receivables	=	£4,800
Annual Credit Sales	=	£38,500
Debtor Days	=	45.5 Days

There are several things to do to help reduce your debtor days –

1. Invoice promptly. It sounds obvious, but a recent study found that 22% of businesses wait up to a month before sending invoices
2. Keep a close eye on the time and materials used for a job and make sure your invoice reflects this. I suggest using a timer software like Toggl to ensure you invoice fully for your time. It's all too easy to forget how long you have worked on something especially if it's a long-term project
3. Do you need to use a Purchase Order Number on your invoices? In some cases, invoices won't be paid without one
4. Establish clear payment terms with your customer and ensure these are on your invoice
5. Make it easy for your customer to pay you, add your bank details to your invoice or better still a link to one of the many payment services like GoCardless, Stripe or PayPal
6. Build relationships with the people who are handling your account, although there should be no favouritism, you may get paid a little quicker if you have built a rapport with the person who is going to pay your invoices
7. Use proper accounting software, to ensure you can track who has paid you and who you need to chase – we'll come back to this later

If, after all of this, you're still paid late, as a last resort there is an act of parliament that will help when selling your goods or services to another business. The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 which was further amended in 2018 allows representative bodies to challenge contractual terms where these are deemed to be grossly unfair.

This legislation adds an implied term in business-to-business contracts allowing a fixed sum for costs plus interest that can be charged if another business is late paying for goods or a service.

This is referred to as “statutory interest” – the rate allowed is 8% above the Bank of England base rate for business-to-business transactions. It’s important to note that you can’t claim statutory interest if there’s a different rate of interest in a contract that you have in place with your customer. You’ll need to check this carefully before making any calculations.

Example

If your business was owed £1,000 and the Bank of England base rate was 0.5% –

The **annual** statutory interest on this would be £85 (1,000 x 0.085 = £85)

Divide £85 by 365 to get the **daily** interest – 23p a day (85 / 365 = 0.23)

Multiply the daily rate by the number of days the invoice is overdue.

In addition to the interest charges detailed above the company can claim an additional administrative charge to cover their costs, the amount is based on the value of the invoice –

- For Debts less then £1,000.00 the supplier can claim £40.00
- For Debts between £1,000.00 and £9,999.99 the supplier can claim £70.00
- For Debts over £10,000.00 the supplier can claim £100.00

Secondly, and often overlooked in the strategy of a business, is payments to suppliers. I have come across many businesses that don’t pay careful attention to this area, and in some cases, have shorter terms with their creditors on the purchase of materials than they offer to their customers.

Unless there is a significant amount of capital in the business, this will very quickly cause negative cash flow. In the long term, this could result in there not being enough cash in the business to purchase further materials to fulfil the orders received as well as paying staff and all the other overheads. So, what should you do?

You need to know what your average creditor days are to ensure that, where possible, it's higher than your debtor days, the formula for calculating this is below.

Creditor Days = Trade Payable ÷ Cost Of Sales x 365

Example

Trade Payables	=	£3,125
Cost of Sales	=	£18,750
Creditor Days	=	60.08 Days

Looking at both of these examples, the creditor days are already higher than the debtor days. However, there is more that could potentially be done. Of course, it's ethical to pay your suppliers as the bills become due and I'd never advocate paying late. The impact of this is two-fold – the company risks the potential late payment charges, reduced creditability and even legal action. The supplier's cash flow is adversely impacted and, as we have already discovered, could, in some cases, result in a business ceasing to trade. So, what else can be done here?

1. Meet with potential new suppliers, check out their prices, the credit terms they are prepared to offer and any bulk or early settlement discounts
2. Go to your current suppliers and try to negotiate a better deal based on the information received from potential new suppliers
3. Where possible, always ensure your terms with suppliers are longer than those you offer your customers

Thirdly, I wanted to touch very briefly on business growth and the impact it can have on cash flow. Despite growth being one of the most highly valued characteristics of a successful company, growing too quickly will have a negative short-term impact on cash flow. This needs to be carefully managed. When your small business is proving to be successful, it can be extremely tempting to expand as quickly as possible to cash in on the good fortune that the last set of sales figures are showing.

Rapid growth and increased borrowing go hand in hand with greater risk. This needs to be very carefully managed. Technology and software companies lend themselves well to rapid growth, something that can be achieved without a huge increase in overhead costs. Manufacturing, on the other hand, would require additional asset investment, as well as additional raw materials and manufacturing staff. If this isn't carefully managed, it could prove volatile for the future of the business. Creditors increase, product quality can, if not monitored closely, be impacted due to new less experienced staff and customer satisfaction goes down as a result, which in turn will see a dip in sales.

Before you make the decision to grow your business, take a careful look at the cash flow. Ascertain whether the business is fluid enough to pay the increased expenses which it will undoubtedly incur in the short term. Otherwise, this could leave the company with serious long-term cash flow issues from which it may not recover.

It's far better to be strategic when growing your business and to carefully risk-manage the impact this will have on cash flow. The aim of most businesses is to make a profit, so having looked at customers, suppliers and growth and discussing strategies to manage these areas, there's another thing a business can do and that is to embrace technology.

All too many micro and small business think that accounting software is something that only larger companies have a need for. They create invoices using a word document template and overwrite it with each new invoice. They collect their receipts and bills and hand the lot over to their accountant at the end of the year. In doing so they have little or no idea if something has gone awry with their accounts until their Accountant goes through the figures with them.

If it transpires that they have made a loss, it might be too late at this point to turn things around. The point of running a business is to make sure your revenues exceed your expenses and to generate a profit. This should not be something that is only reviewed at the year end. It's near impossible to accurately manage cash flow in this way. I can't state strongly enough that efficient cash flow management is critically important to running a profitable business long-term.

There are, as you'd expect, a plethora of accounting software options with both desktop and cloud options available. While it's possible to switch from one to another it's better to do a little research and find the best fit for your business. Traditional desktop software appears to be on the decline with cloud offerings increasing in popularity. With all kinds of add-on apps, tailored to suit each business's needs, the advantages of cloud software are numerous. Here are just a few –

- Manage your business on the move. Raise invoices as soon as the job is completed – no need to wait until you're back in the office
- Let the software send invoice reminders to your customers for you, it's a proven way to reduce those all-important debtor days
- Your dashboard gives you a snapshot of how your business is doing, so you can see your cash flow in real-time, allowing you to make timely decisions
- PDF copies of bills and receipts are held within the software, reducing the amount of paperwork you need to keep
- Software is always up to date
- No back-ups required, everything is securely stored in the cloud
- Easy to collaborate with your Accountant or trusted adviser

In summary, proper cash flow management is a key strategy that every business owner must master for long-term financial success. The right technology and the right business strategies can make a massive difference to your company. They'll allow you to spend less time worrying about cash flow and more time running your business.

Calls to action

- Restructure your terms with customers and suppliers to ensure your debtor days are shorter than your creditor days.
- Adopt proper accounting software to help you manage the day to day cash flow – you're more likely to see trends this way.
- Continually review your cost structure to find efficiency gaps and ensure that any necessary modifications are implemented in a timely manner.

If you don't feel confident in overseeing your cash inflow and outflow, you can always hire an Accountant and/or a Bookkeeper to do it for you. Regardless of who manages your cash flow, it needs to be done.

Wendy Tate – Bean Counters

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Wendy established Bean Counters in 2014, primarily to offer a cost-effective outsourced accounts department solution to small businesses. Bean Counters is a forward-thinking digital practice working exclusively with the Xero ecosystem.

Originally from a corporate background, Wendy worked for 13 years for a local marketing company; working closely with blue-chip publishers including the Financial Times, Money Facts, Haymarket and EMAP among others before moving to work for the Commercial Occupational Health Providers Association, where her role as Finance and Membership Manager led her to return to college to train in Accountancy.

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Essential tips for credit control

Paul Marks – Michael Paul Accountants

Credit control can be described as the process of *ensuring customers pay their invoices on time*, and the system in place to resolve the issue if they don't. Cash flow has been covered in another chapter of this book. Credit control is a vital part of controlling that cash flow.

Despite this, credit control is an area often neglected and given little priority. Business owners and managers can get tunnel vision, with their primary focus being on generating sales. While this is an important aspect of any business, it can be at the expense of ensuring that the funds generated from those sales are received in a timely manner.

It's important for businesses to have a good credit control system in place and not rely on the goodwill of their customers, assuming they'll pay within a reasonable time frame. What is reasonable to a customer might not be reasonable to you, as a business owner.

It may sound obvious, but the first step to implementing any credit control system is to decide on payment terms. An invoice can't be identified as late for payment unless the due date was known in the first place. Within 30 days of the invoice date is common. However, when deciding on payment terms for your business, it's very much up to you and could include payment on receipt of invoice and up-front or staged payments.

You don't have to take a blanket approach and terms can differ from customer to customer. In some cases, a customer may have their own supplier payment terms which differ from your terms. If there is no room for negotiation, you'll either need to accept their terms or decline their custom.

It's also worth considering whether to offer an early payment discount to encourage customers to settle invoices sooner rather than later. For example, a 5% discount if the invoice is settled in full within 14 days. Before offering early payment discounts, make sure the business can afford it and consider if it’s worth forgoing this extra income to assist with cash flow.

As well as setting payment terms, it’s important to decide on credit limits, which again may differ between customers. A credit limit’s the maximum amount a customer is permitted to owe your business. If they reach their credit limit and want to continue to trade with you, they need to make a payment towards the outstanding balance or renegotiate their credit limit. You may consider giving them a temporary increase if there is a specific reason why they have breached their limit and it’s unlikely to reoccur.

When deciding on credit limits, consider this question – could my business survive if the customer doesn’t pay? It’s not uncommon for a business to collapse because a customer who owes them money goes bust, with no way of paying its creditors. The higher the credit given to customers, the more reliant your own business is on their survival.

Once payment terms and credit limits have been set, they need to be communicated clearly to customers. Don’t rely on doing this verbally. If an issue arises, it’s your word against theirs. If a customer has genuinely misunderstood the terms, this is likely to create bad feeling with a potentially good customer, so always put payment terms in writing.

On this note, don’t try to hide terms or bury them amongst other text as if you’re ashamed of them. Be open and honest and state your business’s terms clearly from the beginning. This way, you and your customer both know exactly where you stand and there is very limited scope for confusion or misunderstanding.

If new customers are required to sign a contract with your business, include your credit terms in that contract. Payment terms should also always be clearly stated on each invoice and made clear when a customer places their first order.

Agreeing payment terms with your customers is very important but, if there is no system in place to monitor whether they are being adhered to, then the whole credit control process is being undermined.

This is one of the reasons why it's important to have good quality accounts software in place which is regularly kept up to date and operated by someone with the necessary expertise.

Unfortunately, many business owners see the financial record keeping side of their business as a necessary evil that they don't want to devote much time or money to because it doesn't add anything to their business. This couldn't be further from the truth. A good accounting package used properly, is an invaluable tool for continually monitoring the performance of a business and vital in keeping on top of credit control. At the click of a button, the software will produce a report stating exactly how much each customer owes, the amount which is overdue and a breakdown of the individual invoices which make up that overdue amount.

Many accounts packages can also send automatic reminders or statements to customers with overdue invoices. This is a great feature. However, it doesn't mean you can take your eye off the ball. Just because a customer gets a reminder, they aren't necessarily going to spring into action and pay, so you can't leave it all up to the system.

If a customer doesn't pay, then the debt needs to be chased. Don't be scared to do this or feel afraid that you might offend your customer. If they have agreed to your payment terms but aren't abiding by them, then you have every right to contact them and chase payment. This could be in the form of a statement, email or a phone call.

The saying "he who shouts loudest" is quite relevant here. Even customers with the best intentions of paying on time, may suffer cash flow issues themselves. If they have limited funds to pay their suppliers, who are they going to pay first? Those who are actively chasing and are going to continue to do so, or those in the background too afraid to speak up?

Although you should be assertive regarding overdue payments, don't go at it like a bull in a china shop. If your customer is experiencing cash flow difficulties, it's better to negotiate a payment plan than end up in an argument and lose the customer altogether.

However when you chase late payments, it's important to have a fixed process in place which is applied consistently. An example of this might be as follows –

- As soon as a payment becomes overdue, send a statement
- If the payment is still outstanding after 14 days, send an email reminder
- If after 30 days, the payment is still outstanding, then phone the customer directly

If your customer is another business, then you're entitled to charge interest on overdue amounts. There is a statutory interest rate set down under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1988, of 8% plus the Bank of England base rate. (This is covered in the previous chapter). If your costs are higher (for example if you're using a debt recovery agency), you can claim "reasonable" recovery costs. Letting your customers know you're aware of the Late Payment Act shows that you're on the ball when it comes to overdue debts and gives you a tool to use as leverage. For example, you could write to your customer stating that, although you're entitled to charge interest and compensation, if they settle the overdue amount in the next 7 days then you'll waive this right.

If, despite all your efforts the customer is still not paying up, then there is the option of taking legal action. This could be through the small claims court, a solicitor or a reputable debt collection agency. However, if you want to continue to trade with the customer, you need to consider the damage of taking legal action, on your relationship with them. Along with the cost and time involved, this normally makes legal action a last resort.

No business likes to turn custom away, but if you're regularly struggling to get particular customers to pay within a reasonable period, then consider whether you really want to continue to deal with them. The time you spend chasing payments could potentially be better spent elsewhere, such as finding new customers who will pay on time.

A part of credit control is also knowing when to give up. There may be times, particularly with smaller debts, when it's just not worth the time and potential cost of continuing to chase the debt. Frustrating as it is not to be paid for work you have done or products you have supplied, sometimes you have to take it on the chin, write it off and move on.

Calls to action

- Ensure you set payment terms and credit limits, and that these are communicated clearly to your customers.
- Use good quality accounting software for identifying overdue invoices and customers exceeding their credit limits.
- Have a system in place for chasing overdue payments and make sure it's adhered to.
- Review your customers' payment history. Is it worth continuing to trade with those with whom you're constantly having to chase payment?

As a final note, if credit control isn't something you have the time for or feel comfortable with, then you could consider hiring a bookkeeper or a virtual assistant to carry out the role on your behalf.

Paul Marks – Michael Paul Accountants

Making your business a success is your priority – taking the pressure off your shoulders is ours.

Michael Paul Accountants are a team of two ACCA qualified accountants embracing the latest technology which, along with our extensive experience, enables us to provide our clients with a service they love and that we can feel proud of.

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Raising finance – different sources of funding

James Blacklaws – JB Commercial Finance

While it can be a subject business owners don't always like to talk about, virtually all businesses rely upon a form of finance or credit at some point.

This may not be a traditional banking facility, but rather a credit line from a customer or some relief from HMRC regarding tax obligations. These are all forms of working capital finance.

The ways a business borrows money have changed since the great recession of 2008. Traditionally, businesses have gone to their own High Street Bank for support and, if they can't help, try another bank until they run out of options.

These same banks have reduced their frontline staffing year on year at a time when the SME marketplace needs their help more than ever. This has led to the growth of the peer to peer marketplace where lenders raise their funding from investors expecting a return on their capital. Peer-to-peer lending now accounts for (sources differ) approx. 20 – 40% of the total of all new business lending. When it comes to smaller unsecured lending, I'd imagine it's nearer half!

The beauty of these lending platforms is that they have utilised technology to make the processes as streamlined as possible for the client and (if involved), the finance broker. A client can approach them online at a time which suits and generally have a decision within 48 hours, without having spoken to a soul. This is a major contrast in dealing with a bank manager with delays due to diary commitments, voicemails going back and forth and an agonising wait for a "credit committee" to make a final decision on your lending application.

While the industry of commercial lending has considerably changed in recent years, the purpose of this chapter is to explain the different forms of finance available to businesses and the benefits for each. I have broken these down into two main sections – short/medium-term working capital facilities and longer-term working capital finance. There is some overlap between these sections, but I hope all will become clear as the chapter progresses.

Short/medium-term working capital finance

Overdraft facility

Most individuals and businesses will be aware of how an overdraft facility works. It's an agreed financial limit on a current account – a limit which a bank will allow a client to borrow up to at an agreed interest rate with interest charged on a daily basis.

These facilities are usually renewed annually (sometimes less, depending on circumstances) and subject to continuous review. This means that they are repayable on demand by a lender so they can be called in at any point for a reason determined by the lender. This is always a condition of an agreed overdraft facility and one often misunderstood or overlooked by clients.

Clearly this can make longer term planning challenging, as a facility can be withdrawn unexpectedly. This is why an overdraft facility should only be used as a short-term measure to assist cashflow unless your business has a continuous, and established, working capital cycle.

A bank will take a dim view of a client, especially a business which is continually in overdraft. A facility of this nature should be "swung" in and out of, with continuous credit and debit entries. As part of the annualised review, notes will be made of how many days in and out of the facility the client is.

If a "hardcore" position arises (i.e. the business is constantly in their overdraft facility), then a more suitable facility is usually a term loan (see below).

Invoice discounting/factoring

This is a facility which allows a business to raise finance against invoices which are currently outstanding. Factoring is when a business sells its invoices to a third party; the factoring company control the sales ledger and collects the debts on behalf of the client. Invoice discounting is an alternative way of drawing money against your invoices, with the collection of the debt still under the responsibility of the company.

One of the major cashflow problems for businesses involves the simple matter of getting paid for work. For many businesses, this can total hundreds of thousands of pounds while weekly bills such as salaries, rent and utility bills still need to be paid.

Factoring takes this issue away by allowing a business to raise up to 90% (generally, subject to credit history and sector) of the invoice amount as liquid cash. This is paid within days of issuing the invoice, sometimes immediately!

This can help businesses by allowing them to pay their weekly/monthly bills while still offering favourable credit terms to their clients. In fact, the ability to offer extended credit terms often can be a good unique selling point to allow a business to win new clients.

Sadly, these facilities still suffer a hangover from when they were not as regulated as they are today. Traditionally, invoice discounting facilities are viewed as expensive and difficult to get away from.

Indeed, many see a client using a facility like these as the first sign of a business about to experience significant difficulties.

The reality is that the marketplace has moved considerably. These facilities are now, for many businesses, a first point of consideration for working capital finance. They offer a slick, professional service and allow a business to grow as quickly as it likes and manage late payments accordingly.

Working capital credit facilities

Facilities such as these are a reasonably new addition to the lending marketplace.

While the standard bank overdraft has existed for centuries, these facilities offer a middle ground between these and some of the more medium-term facilities discussed later on in this chapter.

An agreed credit line will allow a business to draw down “lump sums” against a pre-agreed facility amount for a set period of time (usually reviewed annually) as and when they wish to.

This allows the business owner to control when they wish to borrow, and therefore the interest they pay.

The difference between these facilities and an overdraft is that borrowings here are still repaid on a monthly basis, so the capital is required to be serviced (although some interest-only options are available). This negates the “hardcore” position many overdrafts fall into as capital is repaid, unlike with overdraft facilities.

It’s also worth noting that the lenders who specialise in these facilities are often more lenient than overdraft lenders who are traditionally the High Street Banks.

Longer-term finance

Commercial mortgage

The commercial mortgage is the bedrock of commercial lending. Its simply finance undertaken to purchase a commercial trading premises by the business itself or the business owners personally (or on occasion, using a Special Purpose Vehicle – SPV). (An SPV, also called a special purpose entity (SPE), is a subsidiary created by a parent company to isolate financial risk. Its legal status as a separate company makes its obligations secure even if the parent company goes bankrupt).

Traditionally, a commercial mortgage is over a 15-year period but terms up to 25 years are available for suitable clients for the right deals with appropriate lenders.

While residential mortgages are available for up to 95% of the property value (known as the loan to value). With commercial mortgages, this is usually capped at 75%, sometimes less for certain industries, especially retail and hospitality, where 60% is the norm at the time of writing.

The affordability of commercial mortgages is based upon the profitability of the business and any other tenants who may be in situ in the property at the time of application.

This calculation takes into account business profits, rents received plus any other numbers in the accounts which can show affordability of the debt. A lender would expect debt coverage to be approximately 150% of the annual loan repayment.

For example, an annual loan repayment of £50,000 would be covered by a business who make £60,000 net profit before taxation plus an additional £15,000 from sub-letting part of the unit. This would give the lender enough confidence that the debt can be serviced with comfort.

There are other figures which could be factored back into the calculation to demonstrate income. These could be used to service debt including depreciation, amortisation, taxation and expenses linked to the business, which could be deemed one-offs and be unlikely to be repeated.

Business loans – secured and unsecured

This is simply a loan to the business which doesn't fit under the category of the Commercial Mortgage. It can be a loan secured against another property (a director's residence for instance), a floating charge over the business assets (known as a debenture lend) or unsecured altogether (except maybe against a director's personal guarantee).

The marketplace for unsecured loans has grown in recent years, with the growth of the peer-to-peer platform. Previously, these loans were only available from your bank. They would generally impose a cap as to how much they were prepared to lend before having to take formal security (such as a legal charge over a property).

As a general rule, this amount was between £25,000 and £50,000 depending on the lender and the quality of the client.

Now, matters have changed considerably with a host of lenders prepared to look at unsecured loans. These can be agreed quickly, without a lengthy application process and with funds drawn within days, not weeks, sometimes even hours! These lenders will look at deals from a nominal amount up to several hundred thousands of pounds, thus offering quick, easy funds to businesses who otherwise would have had to pledge personal assets to a bank to secure a deal.

This has altered the landscape dramatically and forced the High Street banks to make strategic decisions regarding how they approach this marketplace. A couple of them have retreated altogether, while others have attempted to meet the challenge head on by offering similar products, albeit rather harder to win approval for.

The future for this market is uncertain as it relies upon individuals and institutions to provide the finance for the lending. There are also steps being taken to regulate this marketplace further. Despite this, there is little doubt that the growth of the peer-to-peer lender has changed the business-lending marketplace forever.

Pension fund lending

A combination of factors has led to an increase in pension fund lending in recent years. These include:

- The UK Government releasing restrictions on private pensions (known as “pension freedom”)
- An increase in individuals setting up businesses and understanding the potential investment opportunities of their previous employer pensions

A private pension (usually a Self-Invested Pension Plan – SIPP but there are other variants) allows an individual to purchase a commercial property using available pension monies and, if required, commercial lending to “top up” the required funds.

This property can then be rented back to the individual’s own company or a third party for a fair market rent thus allowing the client’s pension fund to grow monthly.

There are a number of factors which require consideration here. The rules regarding pension fund lending are restrictive (and rightly so). By using funds this way, a client effectively forgoes the ability to use their pension pot for alternative purposes at retirement. Despite this, in the right circumstances, using pension fund balance this way is a highly effective way for a business owner to be able to make the most of these funds, both for individual and business purposes.

Asset finance

Asset finance is amongst the most common and widespread forms of business lending in the UK. It simply allows a business to borrow finance against an asset owned by the business. A majority of asset finance taken out is against a vehicle, either a car or a commercial vehicle such as a truck, agricultural vehicle or even a boat. However, it's not restricted to an asset with wheels.

Commercial machinery such as printing presses, computers and even fixtures and fittings (shelves, sockets, etc.) can also be used to raise finance for a business, either through refinance or for an initial purchase.

The amounts which can be raised against assets varies depending on a number of factors including the following –

- Type of asset (cars are easier to lend against than fixtures and fittings for instance)
- Age and condition of the asset
- The business's trading performance (as with all lending, the stronger the business performance, the more viable they are as a borrower)

A profitable business looking to purchase a commercial vehicle will have more options that an unprofitable business looking to raise capital against a machine which is several years old and well used.

This is a sector where it's certainly most advisable to consult a specialist broker. There are multiple brokers who only deal in the asset finance marketplace. Their knowledge will far exceed what an individual can access. The world of commercial lending can be muddy and, frankly, a mystery to the small business owner. There are many variants which can influence a lender's lending decision and without professional consultation, there is no real way of knowing if you're achieving the best deal possible for your business when it's looking to make a crucial decision.

I will always advise business owners to take proper, authorised advice when considering such a big decision.

Any Commercial Finance Broker you use should be registered with and authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (https://register.fca.org.uk). They should also be a member of the National Association of Commercial Finance Brokers (https://www.nacfb.org).

This ensures that you're dealing with a broker offering the correct advice as well as ensuring that you, as a client, benefit from the relevant protections being correctly authorised offers.

James Blacklaws – JB Commercial Finance

James, an ex-banker, is a highly experienced and fully Independent Commercial Finance broker, authorised and regulated by the FCA. With whole-of-market access, he sources funding and business loans for those wishing to buy commercial premises, or those looking for funds to develop their business.

James offers a personal, one-stop-shop approach to funding solutions. He is always on hand when you need him. He specialises in helping businesses declined by their banks; businesses looking to grow, survive and purchase commercial property.

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Reducing costs in your business

Martin Wallis – Auditel

Before we look at "how?", let's start with "why?". Should costs be a priority, or is the most important thing increasing the sales line?

Depending on margins, addressing costs can be every bit as good a way of increasing profit as growing sales. Let's say your margin is 20%, so that extra sales of £100,000 delivers £20,000 gross profit – often it needs less resource to reduce costs by £20,000 and achieve the same result.

What type of costs are we talking about? I specialise in "Indirect Costs" – sometimes known as overhead costs. We don't include payroll within indirects, but it's such a big cost to most businesses that I have to say something about it here.

How do you manage payroll costs within your business? Sometimes we focus on hourly rates and annual salaries, but that can be short-sighted. Here are some great ways to manage these costs –

1. Pay the right wage for the job – that way you'll have motivated staff who will be more efficient, you'll have fewer vacancies to cover by paying for temporary labour and the cost of recruitment will be much less.

2. Right-size your workforce. Procurement (which is what I do) is great, and getting the best price is vital, but often there's just as much to achieve by "right-sizing" in lots of areas. Cut out waste, and don't pay for something 52 weeks a year which you only need for a month. Does that apply to your workforce as well?

   Maybe you have some roles you don't need all year – dispatch staff at Christmas, or an accountant who is busiest in the days after month-end. Pubs, shops and restaurants are very adept at flexing work rotas to make sure they have staff at busy times so they can make sales, but just a skeleton crew at other times (think midnight at the supermarket). Lots of other businesses can follow the same principle with flexible hours, bank staff, or even hiring agency workers just for the busiest times.

3. There's also the opportunity to look at specialist roles. Do you, as a business owner, look after payroll or HR when there could be many more profitable uses of your time? Do you need a bookkeeper to work in the office? Outsourcing is a great way to save costs in lots of disciplines – the professional hourly rate is off the books, and only paid when needed, and very often the skill levels are higher than a small business could fund in house.

   Great examples include IT Support, Payroll, HR and book-keeping. Try and use your business network so that you can find outsource partners by recommendation, which can be much more reliable than those online reviews.

Now, let's have a look at some of the key drivers which should influence our procurement decisions.

Specification

Let's take a lesson from Goldilocks – the first bowl of porridge was too hot, the second bowl of porridge was too cold, but the third bowl of porridge was just right!

We should always make specification the starting point for purchasing decisions – after all, if we're not clear what we're purchasing we may end up with frustration, overspend and goods which don't really meet your business needs.

Let's think about a delivery van –

- Too small, and you may pay for driver overtime as the van has to keep coming back to base. Alternatively, you may incur costs from using a third-party carrier.
- Too large, and you'll have higher fuel bills, higher insurance and higher monthly lease payments.
- Just right takes into account the size of load, an optimised delivery route, and a realistic estimate of future growth.

Yes, we're back to "right-sizing" again, and for a van, that might mean your specification includes engine size, payload and annual mileage. It's always worth getting the basics clear before starting the procurement process. Often it's worth being a bit flexible as well – do you need a particular colour vehicle, or, for example, does it need to be new or could an ex-demonstration vehicle be cost-effective?

Technology

Changes in technology take place at an exponential rate, so how will new technologies influence your buying decisions?

Driverless vehicles are starting to become a reality, and here in the UK, we have vehicles which park themselves, vehicles with cruise control and vehicles which stay in lane and brake automatically on the motorway. Mobile phones are now much more than phones, keeping us connected day and night, running multiple apps and using QR codes to launch software or log location.

Individual businesses must decide how far the cost of extra technology is going to deliver opportunities or efficiencies. Can you see a clear benefit which you can monetise or are you being sold features and benefits where there will be a limited opportunity to obtain a return on investment?

Have you incorporated technology into your specification? Are you buying, or are you just being sold to?

Supply chain

One of the keys to effective cost management is to source through the right supply chains.

Every industry not only has multiple suppliers but multiple types of supplier. Think about mobile phones – there are the main networks (Vodafone, EE, O2, Three) and you can buy from them direct. Other brands use the same infrastructure and arguably deliver the same, or even better service, such as Virgin, Tesco and Asda, with satisfaction surveys rating them higher than the networks themselves, costing less and offering better customer service. Finally, you can use third-party resellers such as Carphone Warehouse to enter a contract with the main network.

Often, we see products being purchased from the "wrong" supply chain – printer paper from a cleaning company comes to mind – the cost was high, but it was convenient. That may be a good decision for a one-off, but once it becomes a regular purchase, the extra margins in the supply chain soon start to add up.

For many smaller businesses, Amazon appears to be the answer to a lot of procurement challenges, as it's a source for a wide variety of products, mostly at competitive prices. We see a lot of businesses where staff spend hours each week buying online, and while they'll often get good pricing, it's often no better than using more traditional supply chains.

There are a number of disadvantages though, such as inconsistent specifications, unclear returns policies, and above all, staff time spent researching and ordering goods along with managing the paper trail for individual transactions – order forms, receipts, expenses, etc. Once that time is taken into account, the true cost of online purchasing may look much higher.

So how can we tell which is the right supply chain in a given situation?

- Does it offer best cost, or very close?
- Are the goods or services fit for purpose? Consistently?
- Do you get what you need when you need it?
- Does it integrate into your organisation easily? (No soft costs, maybe added services)

Price & tariff

Once we have identified clearly what we need, and perhaps a short-list of potential suppliers, how do we go about securing the best price?
Often the first question is about the type of purchase – is it a one-off or a repeat purchase?

For a repeat purchase, you're looking for a supplier who not only offers great prices right now, but has good continuity of supply as well as giving price sustainability. Are you able to group together a number of products so that your total spend is more attractive to suppliers and they are willing to reduce their margins? How long will they commit to hold prices for?

One of the best-known stationery companies sends monthly promotional leaflets which offer great prices for pens, paper and other key items for the office. The problem is, the prices go up the next month to be replaced by different promotions. Very few customers keep track of the best value product. That gives the supplier a great margin opportunity. Again, are you buying, or being sold to?

Regularly tendering your requirements will help your business to achieve consistently good pricing. How you assess a tender is up to you – maybe it will be all about price but you can always introduce a scoring matrix to capture other key features. Examples include quality and delivery lead time. Bringing value-added features into the equation can help you move more towards a strategic partnership with key suppliers.

The considerations for one-off purchases can be different. Typically, a lot of companies will adopt a "three quotes" approach. Increasingly, that is based around an internet search, but this can be misleading. Shopping on Amazon means that ‘the price is the price’. Also, we’re used to comparison sites for insurance, energy and travel. There are many goods and services, as well as many suppliers, where it’s still far more effective to interact and negotiate.

Perhaps you’d rather do business with a local company, maybe a supplier you have traded with for years? By all means, use the internet to research the prices which are available but it often works out better to use that as a negotiating point with a supplier you know and trust, rather than relying on online reviews for a company you don’t otherwise know, but offers great prices.

Finally, here are a few war stories

If a price sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.

Stretch wrap is used to protect and hold goods on a pallet, and a well-known brand asked us to buy it cheaper for them to help reduce their distribution costs. We had to concede that the price they paid was better than anything we could find elsewhere, but then we went and looked at the product itself. It didn’t weigh as much as it should, and it didn’t stretch as much as it should, so what appeared to be a great deal actually meant they were using many more rolls than they should have needed. In addition, the goods were not so well protected, with the risk of costly damages.

Goods which are not fit for purpose create business costs, however good the deal appears.

Look at the small print.

I have lost count of the number of contracts I’ve looked at which tie customers to their suppliers without giving them protection against price increases. The practice is rife in several sectors, from energy to waste management, but some of the worst excesses are found in photocopier contracts. Look out for the terms which allow the supplier to increase prices.

Don't think that 'the worst will never happen' because there are too many suppliers looking to take advantage of schools, charities and businesses. Ask for the clauses to be taken out and fixed prices or an agreed increase for inflation to be put in instead – you're not being difficult; you're just protecting your business.

Small print is small for a reason – make sure you read every word!

Give great direction to your team. Over the years, most of the poor purchasing I have seen has come about through poor management. What do I mean by that? The organisation has let the people on the ground get on with buying what they've always bought, without giving them the tools, the training, the empowerment or the motivation to do a better job.

Building great teams will help to build great procurement!

No business gets it all right!

I truly believe that there shouldn't be a single business which gets the best price for everything. Nine out of ten is a great score in procurement and cost management. So why is ten out of ten not always desirable? Because the time and effort it takes to get there could always be used better somewhere else.

Nine out of ten is great, though because it says that –

- All the key buying decisions are made well
- All the key buying decisions are reviewed regularly
- There are processes in place to ensure that there is great value as well as a great price
- There's a great team doing it – knowledgeable, motivated and empowered

With that in place, your business will go from strength to strength.

Martin Wallis – Auditel

Martin Wallis is a Specialist Procurement Advisor for Cost Management Consultants Auditel UK. For over 15 years, Martin has been helping medium-sized enterprises to reduce costs and increase profitability, creating £millions of enterprise value.

Over the years, he has bought everything from Minibuses to Mobile Phones, and from Paint to Polo Shirts.

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Tax Planning in its simplest form

Roger Eddowes – Essendon Accounts & Tax

Nearly everyone who has their business up and running will want to make sure they're claiming expenses to reduce their tax bill.

However, there are a number of rules that need to be followed.

The expense must be incurred wholly and exclusively for the purpose of running the business.

If the expense has a dual purpose i.e. personal mixed in with business, it won't be allowed by HMRC e.g. as an accountant, I can't claim the cost of my suit as it has two purposes – one is business but the other is to provide personal decency.

Another example is if you decide to extend a business trip abroad for leisure purposes, you can only claim for the business days, not the additional leisure days.

There are some expenses that HMRC will disallow, namely entertainment, so all invoices should be kept just in case HMRC open a check or an enquiry into the accounts and the expenses.

As you're getting your business up and running, it's entirely possible that you've incurred business costs prior to forming your limited company. You can claim "pre-trading" expenses for things like –

- Computer equipment and software
- Domain name registration
- Office rent
- Business insurance
- Stationery
- Accountancy costs
- Travel costs

Should I operate as a sole trader or limited company?

That is a frequently asked question and the answer is, “it depends”.
Operating as a sole trader is the simplest and cheapest in terms of compliance costs. An annual tax return is prepared, to summarise the sole trader accounts with the profit being subjected to both income tax and national insurance. If there are two or more of you involved in the business then you may all come together and form a partnership with profit allocations being taxed as if you were a sole trader.

Operating through a limited company, however, gives the flexibility of when to extract the profits into the personal hand and the realms of income tax. So, for example, you may earn a huge profit one year and nothing the next. With a limited company, you could take 50% out each tax year, maximising the use of tax-free allowances and the tax brackets. Your accountant would be advising you as to the best way to extract the profits from the company. There are basically two ways, either through pay or by dividends. Each method has a different tax consequence so the accountant should be advising you on which is the most beneficial – which may be affected by other circumstances. Indeed they may throw into the mix a company pension contribution to reduce the profits. It won’t necessarily be the same for each business owner and so it’s important to seek the right advice.

Also, the flexibility of having a limited company enables you to set up a brand and bid for work that maybe you wouldn’t be able to get if you were just a sole trader. When setting up a company, you’ll need to decide on –

- the name – this must be unique and can be quite fun – but not if nothing comes to mind!
- a registered office address – we do recommend that this isn’t a personal home address and at our accountancy firm we offer our office address as an option
- the shareholders

- the directors – these are the people whom the shareholders appoint to run the company on their behalf and indeed it may be the same people! As a director, you're legally responsible for the company's activities. All decisions must be for the benefit of the company and not an individual

Once a company is formed, it will come with a certificate of incorporation and documents called the memorandum and articles of association. The latter is effectively the company rule book.

Each year the company must file both accounts and a confirmation statement at Companies House (note – these are two separate documents, and a corporation tax return at HM Revenue & Customs).
For small companies, you'll be pleased to know that you don't need to file the profit and loss account, (the balance sheet still does though) so no one can see a list of your income and expenditure.

There are various filing deadlines for these documents but once the company is into its second year, the accounts filing deadline at Companies House is 9 months after the period end. The tax return filing deadline at HMRC is 12 months and then, to make it confusing, the corporation tax is due 9 months and one day after the period end.

As I say, it can be confusing and indeed daunting so that's why I'd always recommend a limited company appoints an external accountant to guide them along the right path.

We're often asked if a business should register for VAT. Well, you don't have a choice if your turnover exceeds the threshold. We recommend that you use accounting software to help determine whether you're over the threshold or not. (For the 2019/20 tax year, the VAT registration threshold is set at £85,000).

A common trap is to use the turnover for a set accounting period or calendar year. When assessing the need to become VAT registered you must calculate the turnover on a 12-month rolling basis (the last 12 months from any point in time). If you don't register within 30 days you're likely to be subjected to a penalty.

If the threshold isn't breached, you may still become VAT registered and, of course, there are some plus points –

1. You may claim back VAT suffered on purchases if you have a valid vat invoice
2. You tend to get credibility in the marketplace if VAT registered

Yet, on the downside you might –

1. Price yourself out of the market if your client can't recover the VAT element of your invoice
2. You have more paperwork to do, although this is mitigated by good accountancy packages

There are various schemes in place which your accountant can discuss with you, such as the flat rate scheme; but with small companies, I at least recommend that the cash basis is looked into.

Under the invoice basis the VAT payable to HMRC every quarter is calculated by taking off VAT suffered on purchases away from VAT on sales invoices but with the cash basis the VAT used in the calculation is on invoices that have actually been paid.

VAT is often a tricky area and your accountant will be able to advise and if necessary, help you complete and file the returns.

Roger Eddowes – Essendon Accounts & Tax

Roger trained at Edward Thomas Peirson & Sons in Market Harborough before working at Hartwell & Co, followed by Chancery, as a partner. He started Essendon Accounts & Tax with Helen Beaumont in 2014. Roger loves 'getting his hands dirty', working with emerging, small-to-medium and family businesses to ensure they receive the best possible accountancy advice.

Using an extensive network of business contacts to leverage the best guidance and practical solutions, he has been called a Business Godparent due to his caring, hands-on approach. Roger loves walking his dog and, during the holidays, enjoys taking time out on his boat which he has moored on the Isle of Wight. For the future, he has aspirations to retire on a luxury motor yacht and sail off into the sunset.

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Money matters for business and life

Rob Harris – Your Financial Friend

A 22-year-old young man plucked up his courage to make his first ever very nervous cold call. His heartbeat reached a crescendo as he walked into the shop. The year was 1965. In his bag he carried a book purchased from W H Smith entitled "Teach Yourself Insurance". On hearing the mention of the word insurance, the shopkeeper threw his hands in the air and assailed the young insurance salesman with the words, "No! We don't believe in insurance – the Lord will provide!".

Reeling from the verbal rejection, the young man fled the shop in turmoil. He had given up a secure job and income to break free and do his own thing – run his own business. The chance to dream big and find fulfilment. That young man was, of course, the author of this chapter of the book.

Was that the end of the dream? Crushed and defeated? Certainly not – fifty years later I am still here, having grown through years of change and challenge and experience of the world of investment. I became one of the first-ever Independent Financial Advisers in 1986 when that title was first created. Now, I am no longer a financial adviser, but a financial educator and commentator, a teacher, coach and mentor in things financial.

As for 1965 and my first cold call with the shopkeeper, no less a person than St. Paul the Apostle of the Bible came to my aid. In a letter he had written 2000 years ago to his young friend Timothy, Paul wrote – "It was right and proper to provide for widows and those of one's own family". This revelation turned the negative into a positive and fuelled the fire of my conviction that my mission was right.

Onwards and upwards I went!

As a reader here, you're likely to be a dreamer, a creative, an entrepreneur or one who finds the need to generate income somehow? So with good intentions and hope here you are! You've learnt to turn all the negatives and rejections in your business life into positives and hold your vision in focus and move onwards and upwards?

Are all your eggs in the one basket of your business? Learning to invest is another small business in the background – taking little time but offering opportunity.

Some recent students of mine have achieved returns of between 8.51% to 12.41% over just 12 months. Investors in gold-backed funds have seen growth of 54% over the last 10 months (as of January 2020). Of course, such investments rise and fall in value but then small businesses do as well?

Like the Dutch entrepreneurs of the early 17th century who created the first stock exchange, you also need funds to set up and grow your business. You could start by inviting friends and those who know and trust you to invest in your business? Form a Limited Company asking your accountant to create a class of share which still leaves you in control. As a limited company ask friends and those who know you to grant loans providing them with contracts attracting loans at interest.

Thinking in this way about your own business opens the door to thinking about the world of investment and how it works. Come with me to the Stockmarket and take a look. The knowledge you'll gain can be supportive of business ideas and be so useful when it comes to pensions, ISA investments and ways of making your savings and money make money for you.

You may not have employees in your business working for you yet. However, once you invest in the Stockmarket through your savings, ISA holdings or pension funds, your money employs people to work for you through your ownership of shares in companies in which you invest.

The second word in Stockmarket is “market”. Just like an everyday market where you peruse the street stalls and choose who to buy from and what to buy, so the Stockmarket is a market too. The Stockmarket is accessed online nowadays.

That’s right: you get into the Stockmarket most easily by going online into an Investment Supermarket – just like Sainsbury’s, Tesco or Marks and Sparks where you have aisles filled with different types of goods on the shelves. The aisles and shelves of the Investment Supermarkets are filled with many different types of investments.

Go to your local market and you should find almost everything under the sun available for purchase. Come with me to The Stockmarket and you can find every type of investment available for your savings.

You can invest by buying the shares of individual companies or granting loans at interest. You can buy shares or grant loans by placing your savings into funds pooling your money together with many other investors.

Investing in individual company shares is very risky for those with insufficient funds who can’t diversify their holdings across many companies to reduce risk.

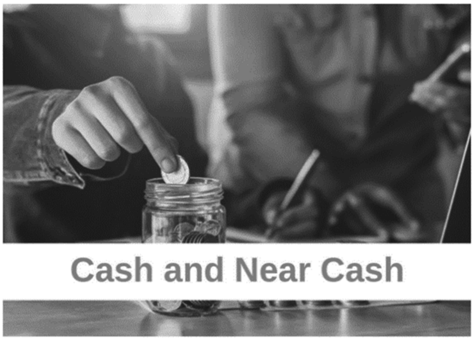
Here we concentrate on learning about “pooled” funds. This is where your money is pooled with that of many thousands of other investors.

The money of all the investors is entrusted to the daily management of a fund manager. With so much money, the fund manager is able to invest across a wide number of shares or loan deals. This reduces risk. If some shares/holdings fall in value, the remaining shares/holdings may rise in value.

Pooled funds are known as Unit Trusts or sometimes OEICs (Open Ended Investment Companies). So-called money purchase pension funds holding stocks and shares are also by nature pooled funds.

You can invest lump sums or set up regular monthly savings.

To make it simple, we can group the traditional types of investment available together under four separate headings like this –



Cash and near cash

Is your money in the bank or building society safe? Certainly, many believe so. Subject to changing compensation levels in case of bankruptcy, it is. You'll get £100 back for £100 deposited. However, the value of your savings isn't necessarily safe. If the interest you earn doesn't keep up with the rising cost of the things you want to buy, then your £100 taken out later might only buy say £96 worth of goods in the shops. That's why we need to invest.

You can explore near cash holdings such as Certificates of Deposit, Floating Rate Notes and Time Deposits or even consider National Savings but none of these will yield a potential capital gain as well as interest while you're invested.

When you invest in pooled funds (Unit Trusts and OEIC's), your fund manager will normally buy your investment back from you, when you want to sell, turning your holdings into cash. He/she must therefore have ready cash to be able to do so.

The cash needed to redeem your holdings is often stored in a so-called Money Market Fund which sometimes can be a place for you to place your savings when interest rates there are higher than in your high street bank.

As we approach the Stockmarket, I suggest three golden rules to remember –

- Firstly, always invest where you can potentially make your original investment grow – that is, make a capital gain; while also receiving interest (dividend or yield). Always earn these two kinds of return on every penny you invest!
- Secondly, in today's fast-changing financial world, never invest where your money is locked in or not liquid enough to allow instant withdrawal. Remember, bricks and mortar locks your money in.
- Thirdly, always remember that the risk of any investment depends on the changing economic, social and political events surrounding the type of investment you hold. Always question when you read or hear that one investment is low risk and another is high risk. It's no such thing!

So, if money held in cash loses its value and investment in direct property, such as buy-to-let, is battered by nasty tax erosion, where to next?

Fixed interest investments

There are essentially just two main ways in which you can invest through the Stockmarket. Lend your money at interest or buy ownership of companies by purchasing shares. You can lend your money to the UK Government, global governments or to business enterprises through stock exchange quoted companies in the UK or worldwide.

The Fixed Interest route means you, or your pooled fund manager acting for you, lends your money to governments or companies. In the fund supermarket you walk up the fixed interest aisle. On the shelves are bundles of fixed interest funds offered by a good number of fund managers, all wanting you to choose to invest with them.

Each fund offered will have a Fact Find Sheet where you can read all about it! Remember – each deal your manager agrees to will simply pay interest and return the capital to the fund at the end of the loan term. The fund may have as many as 50 or more loan deals included.

Particularly look for the current yield (interest rate). If the rate seems very low, then the risk is likely to be reflected by the credit ratings of the holdings. So, if 100% of the holdings are shown as triple AAA credit rated, then the likelihood of a failure to pay interest or return the loan capital when due is very small.

Suppose the rate seems tempting and attractive, a yield say of 4% or higher? Then look for the credit rating again. You'll find ratings of BBB or lower. This means the probability is that at least some of the loans your manager made for you could fail to pay back the loan or interest when due. You employ your fund manager to research and balance the possibility of risk and reward.

How can your manager make a capital gain in this market for you? Suppose the yield (interest) on your chosen fund is a variable yet reasonably stable 4%pa ongoing and interest rates at the bank fall? Those with money on deposit at the bank want to move their money to a better interest rate and so choose to buy into your fund. Now there is a demand for the investments your fund holds. Supply and demand means the price of your holdings rise making your original savings grow – a capital gain is made.

So two kinds of return are achieved, affected by the political, economic and social events surrounding your investment. The receipt of interest and a capital gain.

Equally though, if interest rates in the bank rose then your capital could fall as people sell your fund holdings to go for greater safety by holding money in the bank once again.

Where to next?

Property fund investment

Investing in commercial property provides potential for regular income and growth of your savings, capital growth as property prices rise, if they do, and rental income from the fund's tenants.

Your fund manager will purchase shops, office blocks and industrial units. Your fund can be limited to the UK or property across global markets.

What percentage of your money would you be happy with in say retail (shops)? What percentage in office blocks and then industrial units? Current High Street worries for the retail trade against online sales might be of concern if your fund has a big percentage of retail ownership?

These funds are supported by foreign investors who are sensitive to the rise or fall of sterling as a currency. They lose when sterling falls against the investors home currency. This caused the inability of many such funds to allow investors to redeem their holdings in 2016 when the UK voted for Brexit causing sterling to crash.

There is a clause in the fund details which allows the manager to defer buying back your investment so your funds could be locked in for an unspecified time. Property takes time to sell and convert to cash.

It's true of all pooled funds, especially those using illiquid assets in the mix, that circumstances can arise where the fund manager is unable to redeem an investor's holding immediately – a concern which has been growing in the industry.

In the long term, in the past, equities have always provided greater gains for investors than any other asset. Let's take a look.

The equity market

Shares or equities allow your fund manager to buy part ownership of the companies in which he invests your money. As the manager has a mountain of money to invest from many investors like you, he can buy many shares across many sectors of the market.

You can choose between passive or actively managed funds. Passive funds simply seek to follow an index like the FTSE 100 Index up or down, while an actively managed fund has your manager hopefully poised to pick the best options. You pay more for the active manager so many prefer the lower costs of passive funds.

Go up the equity aisle of your online fund supermarket and you'll find funds investing in UK shares – large companies and small and specialist, or go global to Europe, Japan or even China. Technology, gold and precious metals, emerging market equity funds – an endless supply of opportunity to speculate and accumulate wealth.

The content here is designed to open the door into this world for you and so isn't comprehensive. You'll need to learn more before taking advantage of some of the ideas and outlines given here.

How do you choose a financial adviser if you need one? How can you invest to maximise tax free returns? How can you have the government add to your savings through generous tax contributions to your investment? How can you reduce risk? How can you make profit in all market conditions? Is gold a good investment? Bitcoin?

Like life in general, investment has its ups and downs, so profits are not guaranteed. You need to understand more of how prudent investment can be profitable and how to reduce the risk of financial loss. Knowledge is power and knowledge of the world of money is the power to build a secure financial future and benefit.

Rob Harris – Your Financial Friend

For more than 30 years, Rob dedicated himself to giving professional financial advice to all kinds of individuals, businesses and corporations. Time and again, his clients confirmed how delighted they were that their savings and investments prospered so well. Now he shows you how to take control and make the ongoing right decisions for yourself!

The markets are in unprecedented uncertain times. You need Rob now more than ever – so you're able to preserve, protect and grow your money, ISA funds, pensions and portfolio!

Never make the mistake of referring to Rob as a "financial adviser". He will make clear he isn't. Rob will explain that he is very different. He's a financial friend, educator and commentator – hand in hand with you all the way.

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Section 3 – Sales

Without sales, a business has no revenue. So once again this function is critical in growing your business and being successful at what you do. Often it can be a scary thing, particularly if you're new in business – to be in front of a prospect and go for that order!

"*Sales are contingent upon the attitude of the salesman – not the attitude of the prospect.*" – W. Clement Stone

Understanding the basics of sales

Julie Futcher – The Sales Manager

“Sales”! It’s interesting how such a simple word can evoke so many emotions, from fear through to “yes, bring it on!”. Wherever you sit on this scale, if you’re running your own business, you need sales. Without this, there is no revenue.

Now at this point, you might be sitting there saying, “Doh, we knew this Julie”, and if that is the case, I am very glad to hear it. However, just because we know it, it doesn’t mean that things happen.

In this chapter, I will be taking you on a journey, a sales journey. I aim to help those of you who are scared of sales to overcome this fear and help those of you who embrace sales to brush up your skills to become more effective.

What does the word “sales” mean to you?

This a question that I ask in all the training sessions I deliver and I always get a mixture of responses. From the people that embrace sales, it evokes a challenge, the ability to fulfil their dreams with the financial gains that are available. I had one person who got so excited about being in a sales role that they did a great impression of Bruno Tonioli from Strictly Come Dancing. They jumped up, waved their arms around hardly able to contain their excitement and when they went to sit down, missed the chair and fell on the floor!!! Thankfully they weren’t hurt, but it gave the whole group a giggle.

On the opposite side of the fence, there are people who are so scared of this word, that they sit in front of me doing a great impression of a frightened rabbit! Why do they feel that way? It’s because they see sales and salespeople as hard, pressuring, non-caring people who are only after somebody’s money. This is usually because they have been at the receiving end of this type of sales approach.

The truth is, that in today's world, people won't buy from a salesperson who pressurises them into a sale. If they do, they won't buy anything from them again.

Today's successful salesperson knows that it takes a lot of hard work to bring in new business and what they want to achieve is a customer who comes back to them time and time again. They know that if they push somebody into a sale, they won't see them again and more importantly, they won't receive business from that person's family, friends or network.

"So how do we achieve this approach?" I hear you cry. Well, the first step is to get our minds into that of the buyer.

Why do people buy?

There are 4 fundamental reasons why people buy –

- Need
- Want
- Issue
- Problem

Think of your own circumstances. What do you buy that you need? I'm sure that you'd say food, clothing, a place to live, etc. You may be thinking that handbags, chocolate, gin are a need and depending on what type of day I'm having, I might agree with you, but the cold hard facts are that they are not a need, they are a want – sorry!

Apart from needs and wants, people will also choose to purchase if they have an issue or problem that arises. You could argue that these are actually a need but let's look at an example; your car breaks down and you can't use it for a couple of days, but you live on a bus route that takes you to just outside your office door. Here is the difference between needs and wants, you don't need to get the car fixed because you have alternative transport, but you want to get it fixed because you prefer to travel by car.

People buy because of the 4 fundamental reasons I have detailed above, and, for the sales process, it's imperative that we fully understand what these are.

How do people like to be treated when they buy?

How do you like to be treated when you buy? I'm sure that, if I had a group of people sat together there would be a myriad of different responses to this. Some people like to be left alone when they buy. Others like to have people attending to them. Most people want to be treated with respect – not to feel pressurised to buy a product or service.

There are a few responses that I hear that are universal, and these are –

- Give me a choice and let me decide, but make a recommendation
- Listen to me
- Make me feel special
- Help me to resolve my need/want/issue or problem

For me, the last point sums up what I feel sales is all about; it's about resolving problems! I feel that Sales Departments should be called Problem Resolution Departments because this is what they do!

There is one last point to remember. People what to know why that product or service is right for them. It's called the WIIFM factor (What's In It For Me?) and is something that is in every buyer's mind.

Let's tie this all together! If we can understand what a person's needs, wants, issues or problems are and can tell them how to resolve this in a way that satisfies the WIIFM factor and make them feel special, they'll buy from you!

That all sounds very simple doesn't it? Some of you may be reading this and be thinking "yes, it's what I thought and that's what I do". Great! You may not wish to read the rest of this chapter, so feel free to move on! For the rest of you that are sitting there thinking "OMG! How do we do that?" then, grab a drink, a note pad and prepare yourself, for I am about to share this with you!

The secret to success

I'd like to share with you the best sales technique in the world! I believe that it's so good that it should be called a Sales Superpower! It's the equivalent of me handing you a super-hero cape! Are you ready? It's ....

Listening!

Listening achieves two things –

- It helps to make the customer feel special
- You easily find out their needs, wants, issues or problems

Let's look at why this is the case.
Think about when you've met somebody for the first time and they sat and listened to you. They may have asked you questions about your life, business, family, etc. Now think about how that made you feel? I'm sure you'd agree with me that you thought they were very nice and warmed to them. Now imagine how your customer would feel if you took an interest in them and listened to what they say. Good huh?

Listening is imperative within the sales process, but unfortunately, it's something that people pay little attention to. When I first started out in sales, one of my managers said to me, "Julie, you have two ears and one mouth, please use them in that order". The best salespeople I've worked with over the years have been extremely good listeners.

During this process, if you also asked the right questions, you'd identify their needs, wants, issues or problems and because you were listening to them, they would feel very comfortable in talking to you about them. The types of question that aid this process are open questions as they encourage conversation. These questions that start with the words –

- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- Who?
- How?

Closed questions, the ones that elicit a "yes" or "no" answer, have their place and are great for clarifying and confirming but when used too much within a conversation, can make it very difficult. They can create a conversation that's like wading through treacle.

With this approach, we'll eventually come to a point where we understand what the customer needs and have started to build a rapport.

WIIFM – what's in it for me?

What we need to do now is explain to them how our product or service can help them. In other words, we need to answer the "WIIFM" question! When we do, the customer can fully understand how we can help them and, if done in the right way, they don't feel pressurised or feel that you're trying "push" them into a sale.

There are many sales techniques that you can employ at this stage, but for me, I like to keep things very simple. My approach is to tell them what I do and how it helps them.

Let me give you an example –

I recently spoke with a business owner who wanted to help his sales team improve their outbound telesales skills. He was finding that they were struggling to get past the receptionist to speak to the decision-maker. When they did get through, they were not getting the results from the calls he wanted because they would hit an objection and then give up.

What I said to him was –

"I'd recommend my Effective Telesales Skills workshop. This workshop is designed to help them get around the gatekeeper, quickly engage the decision-maker and to show them what to say within a call to achieve the objective. This means that their calls will be far more effective, and you'll achieve the sales that you're looking for."

As you can see, I've given him a solution to his problem, but he will see what's in it for him. If we do this well, then the final part of the sales process "clicks" very nicely into place.

Ask for the business

In my long career in sales, I have seen many people reach this part and everything goes wrong, I've even done it myself. The reason? They don't ask for the sale, meeting, quote, or whatever they want to achieve. This seemingly simple part is the one that causes most angst and during my discussions with many people it comes down to fear of being pushy. One thing to bear in mind, if you have clearly told the customer how you can resolve their problem using the WIIFM approach they'll be expecting you to ask for the business.

There is a knack to it though, you need to ask in a very simple way, that you're comfortable with, and then you need to "shut up"!

The art of "shutting up"

There is an art to it! It's employing silence and a lot of people are scared of it and what they'll do is keep talking. I have seen people talk themselves down on price and out of a sale by doing this. I'd be lying to you if I said that it's not uncomfortable when you first do it, but, believe me, it's imperative you do this. You need to give your customer an opportunity to think things through, to reflect.

I recall one situation that happened to me a few years ago. I'd gone to visit a Managing Director of a medium-sized business to discuss sales training. He had not long been in situ and had been appointed because the business was struggling. The meeting went very well and towards the end, he asked me how much I was going to charge. When I told him, he got up and started walking around the room, shouting (yes literally) about his budgets or lack of them, how tough a time he was having getting the company sorted out and that I needed to remember this. Throughout this, I sat there and said nothing (mainly because I couldn't believe what I was seeing) and after about 5 minutes, he sat down, looked at me and said, "Well Julie, if I was in your shoes I'd charge the same".

Suffice to say – I walked out with the business!

Shutting up takes practice, but try it, it's quite liberating!

So, there we are, my whistle-stop tour of what sales is! You may learn to love it, you may not but hopefully, you now understand that sales is about problem resolving and helping people to understand how you can resolve their need, want, issue or problem.

Julie Futcher – The Sales Manager

Julie has nearly 25 years experience within a sales role, both in business to business and business to consumer. During her career, she has successfully trained many individuals to sell by developing their own style but using tried and tested sales techniques. She understands how daunting it can be to have to pick up the telephone or meet with clients/customers face to face with the view of interesting them in the product or service that is being offered.

Julie established The Sales Manager to support and train business owners to increase their revenue. She also provides a sales support service which provides telesales/telemarketing, assisting in managing sales staff, help with setting and managing KPI's as well as one to one coaching.

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Closing the deal

John Milner – Alium Consultants

Over many years there have been countless words and theories written about the sales process. Books have been written, courses run and thousands of sales professionals, both new starters and “old hands” alike, have been on training/refresher sessions, to learn and update themselves on the latest tricks of the trade and methodologies of sales.

So why is it, that after all this investment, so many salespeople get right to the important end of the whole process and then fail to close the sale?!
It’s the most logical thing to do and what’s more – the prospect or buyer (whomsoever it happens to be) is expecting it.

The traditionally taught sales process consists of several stages, as outlined below (although this can vary depending on the “sales school” involved) –

- Establish rapport/relationship with the prospect.
- Establish decision process/hierarchy
- Assess prospect needs/identify need to purchase/pain points
- Match features and benefits to above – prove and agree with prospect
- Handle objections
- **Close**

The close

The close should be as easy as a simple question, like one of these –

- *When should we start?*
- *How should we get started?*
- *Where should I send the contract for signature?*
- *How would you like to pay for that?*

Or some other incredibly simple question. Why is it so simple?

Because everything has already been done!

You've got a qualified prospect with a problem, understood and agreed the problem, suggested a good solution, confirmed that it was a good solution, and answered any questions. This is called "a match". You should only ask for the order when you (both) agree you have reached this point.

After all, what is there left to discuss?

Just in case you're not sure whether you have reached agreement, there is a technique called **"the test close".**

The test close

Again, it's deployed by asking a simple question, such as –

- *So how do you feel about what we have discussed?*
- *Are you happy with everything?*
- *How does all that seem?*

If you get a positive answer, then move in for **the close.**

Of course, there are several types of closing "technique".

The alternative close

Considered by many as the easiest of closing questions, it offers the buyer, or prospect a choice i.e. of delivery date or colour, etc. Just make sure the choices are both attractive to the prospect and of a minor nature. Otherwise you risk introducing doubts and uncertainty into the prospect's mind and you'll find yourself back at an earlier stage of the sales process mentioned earlier.

An example of questions could be –

- *Would you like us to deliver next week or the week after?*
- *Would you like us to deliver this in blue or red?*
- *Are you looking to pay for this outright, or are you going to take advantage of our leasing arrangements?*

The staged close

Often used in large value or complex project sales.

Agreement can be reached by offering a series of closing questions on minor aspects of the sale. By gaining agreement on multiple minor points, you can naturally come to gain agreement on the major, overall decision. A saying to help you remember this – *"success by the inch is a cinch, by the yard it's hard"*.

The direct close

The most obvious and in a way, simplest of all. Just ask for the business –

- *Would you like to go ahead?*
- *Shall we agree an order for 10?*
- *We can go ahead straight away then?*
- *Can we deliver that next Monday?*
- Or simply – *What is your order number?*

Having said this is the most obvious close, by way of an example of how easy it's to omit this part of the process, I will recount one of my own personal experiences, right at the start of my sales career.

I had just recently started working in IT Distribution, in the telephone sales team, when I happened to take a call from a long-standing client in the telecoms market (now a well-known mobile phone service provider).

The buyer related a long list of parts they needed to buy and I dutifully wrote everything down accurately. The value of the proposed order came to around £100K – considered a large order at that time.

I was so caught up in the euphoria of taking such a large order, at such an early stage of my sales career, that, when we had exchanged all the details of the order, I thanked the buyer and put the phone down!

Only when I passed the order to the administration staff was it pointed out to me that I had needed to ask for an official order number – without which, all I presented was a useless piece of paper!! I sheepishly rang the buyer back, who had fully expected the call from me eventually and enjoyed my embarrassment very much indeed! A lesson learnt from then on. Always ask for the order number – it's expected.

To use a cooking analogy – get all the ingredients and the preparation right at the beginning, follow the cooking process correctly and everything should naturally turn out well.

There is however one problem with this analogy – not all ovens are the same!! Buyers go on courses too!! So some back-up techniques are needed in case of bumps along the way.

For example, what if the prospect says 'no'?

There can be several possible answers, but the most common are –

- The prospect isn't the decision-maker
- The prospect tells you that he or she "wants to think about it"
- You missed something, or the prospect was not fully honest with you about something

There are ways and methods of dealing with any one of these, but each involves going back to the previous stage in the sales process. In other words, treat each as an objection and deal with whichever is presented as a reason not to proceed.

So, for example, if the prospect tells you they are **not the decision maker** –

Try asking the question – "*but, if the decision was yours to make alone, would you agree to move forward?"*

If the prospect tells you that he or she would not move forward even if the decision was only up to him or her or gives an insight that implies the same thing in not so many words, then you can be fairly sure that your prospect won't be very convincing to the other people who may or may not be involved in the decision.

Asking this question also gives you an opportunity to find out why your prospect isn't convinced and to explore that.

If the prospect says something like "I need to check with someone else," and he or she isn't convinced, then the game is over – although you can still find yourself investing some or even a lot of time, chasing the prospect around until you learn that for yourself.

So be sure to ask this – "and, if the answer is no?", then treat it as an objection. Try to learn what about the offer isn't acceptable, then work to resolve it – and try to close again once the issue seems resolved.

If, on the other hand, the prospect tells you that he or she would move forward with the deal if it were just up to him or her. Then suggest and agree a follow-up plan. Tell your prospect that you understand that he or she needs to check with whoever they need to check with, but schedule a follow-up call or meeting at a specific time sometime within the next week or so.

This way, the prospect knows that they need to get the checking done and pick up where you left off. If you've built up credibility throughout the process, your prospect will respect your follow-up meeting and will definitely make the effort to check with whoever he or she needs to check with.

If you feel it's appropriate, you may also offer to meet with the other decision-makers collectively. This way, by getting them all together, there can be no ambiguity or misrepresentation and you can get a definitive decision there and then. You could even justify this by offering to relieve your prospect of the burden of having to explain everything that you went over with him or her. This also solves the problem of having your prospect sell for you by proxy, which is never as effective as if you did it yourself.

If you did all of that, then the **"I need to think about it"** objection can be managed in a simple, straightforward way. Simply review the professional closed questions that you already asked and were answered by your prospect.

You could say something like –

"*I am surprised to hear that – I thought we had discussed all of the issues already. Is there something about the situation behind the problem that we forgot to address*?"

If the answer to this is *"No"* – then continue with something along the lines of –

"So, as I understand it – we have discussed and understood the issues for you here, we agree that our solution solves the problem, it fits within your budget target and you have confirmed to me that you're happy in me and my team to successfully deliver – then please help me understand what is it that you wanted to think about."

It may seem a bit long-winded and you can couch the question in your own language, relevant to your own product or service, but what you're attempting to do is re-qualify every aspect of the discussion points you have had so far.

By gaining the prospect's agreement at the end, it leaves them no room to object or hesitate. That is unless there is a "hidden objection", or something they have held back in discussions so far.

The question above should smoke this out.

Some final pointers on closing

- Always ask for the business – if you don't, then effectively, you're working for your competitor
- Always close with a question that demands an answer. Don't close with a statement
- Don't mistake any hesitation as a refusal – it's natural sometimes for people to hesitate before making a decision

And one really important rule –

Once you've asked for the order – **SHUT UP** – and wait for the answer.

Closing isn't an event. This isn't the time or place for fancy techniques or tricks.

- If what you did before you attempted to close was professional and complete – as outlined here – the close will be either a simple question, or you'll have some things to work on before you close – but things that are well defined and easy to work through because of the relationship you established during the first phase of the sales process.

When you work through the sales process correctly, closing should be nothing more than the logical conclusion of everything that has gone before.

Suggested actions –

- Before any sales call, do research on your client, their products and/or service
    - Their website is a good place to start, but LinkedIn is also good

- List out features of your own product or service that you think may prove relevant during discussions
- Make sure you have all necessary paperwork with you for the meeting (including a copy of any pre-submitted proposals)
- Be sure of your own production and delivery capabilities
    - The last thing you need is to have to defer a close because you can't commit to a delivery date!!
- Through being fully prepared – relax and be in control of the process
    - **Sales need not be frightening. It's the lifeblood of your business**

Closing the sale doesn't have to be just about business deals.

It applies equally to negotiations of any kind. Why not practice on the kids!!?

John Milner – Alium Consultants

When the opportunity came about to set up his own business, John decided there was an opportunity to help SME business owners gain a quicker, more effective presence in international markets, based on his own experiences, gained from within a multi-national distribution group. He has more than 20 years under his belt and many happy customers. He works with business owners to help them make a success of exporting, enabling them to win and retain new customers quickly, while minimising the costs and risks, often associated with breaking into new markets.

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Section 4 – Marketing

Marketing is the method by which businesses get the message out there to prospects of their value proposition which subsequently (hopefully) leads to a sale. It's important not to limit yourself to too few marketing channels but also to understand which ones are working and giving you a return on your investment.

"*Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half.*" – John Wanamaker

How to put together a marketing strategy

Andy Sarson – APS Marketing Consulting Services

Marketing is probably one of the biggest issues for people running or starting small businesses mostly due to their marketing strategies not delivering the results they expect. People have said to me things like – "I've placed some ads but had no response." So, their efforts and money invested isn't delivering the footfall, enquiries or sales they need. That approach seldom works; hence you need a well thought through marketing strategy.

Let's take a step back – marketing isn't always strictly done to a set plan – indeed, every time you speak about your business, it's marketing, any conversation you have is a great opportunity to promote your business and increase sales.

A marketing strategy is a business's plan for reaching people and turning them into customers of the product or service the business provides. The marketing strategy of a company should contain the company's value proposition, key marketing messages, information on the target customer and some other high-level elements.

It provides valuable information to help build the marketing plan, which is a document that lays out the types and timing of marketing activities. A company's marketing strategy should have a longer lifespan than any individual marketing plan as the strategy is where the value proposition and the key elements of a company's brand exist. These things ideally don't shift very much over time.

A marketing strategy helps you focus and identify the different ways you can talk to your customers and concentrate on the ones – your target audience – that will help create most sales.

It can help tell you what to say, how to say it and who to say it to in order to generate more enquiries, and because timing is critical too, it will tell you when to say it.

So, you know what your business is, you've got your branding and logo, now you need to find customers. Even if you offer the best products or services in the world, it won't help if your potential customers can't find you – so you need a great marketing strategy to match.

Successful Strategy

Marketing strategies are often confused with marketing plans, as one feeds the other and it's not unusual to find the strategy and the marketing plan together in a single document, however I would not recommend that. The transition between the two can be blurry. A marketing strategy covers the bigger picture of what the business offers. The marketing plan is how the business will get across the key message – the platforms used, the creative, the timing and so on. The marketing strategy can also be contained in the corporate value statements and other strategy documents.

A marketing strategy doesn't come from just anywhere, at least it shouldn't. It should grow out of a company's value proposition. This is something that summarises the competitive advantage a company has in its market and usually provides the key message for all marketing.

Sainsbury's, for example, are a discount retailer using "Live Well For Less" and its business operations and marketing centre around that. A company should never create a marketing strategy from scratch. The correct recipe is to start with the value proposition and refine the key marketing message(s) from that.

Once the value proposition is concisely stated, the hard work is done. Any marketing asset, from a print ad to a social media campaign, can be evaluated by how well it communicates the value proposition. To further analyse marketing efforts, market research may be added to the marketing strategy for the purpose of identifying untapped or refining the target audience(s). Finally, an overall goal for the marketing strategy should be set, with all the subsequent marketing plans responsible for delivering on it. These can be concrete, bottom-line goals such as increasing sales or something less direct like climbing the ranking of trusted providers within the industry.

To have a successful marketing strategy will depend on how well you understand who your actual customers are for your products/services, what they need and how you can encourage them to buy from you.

A common error made by many is that there is some kind of 'one-size-fits-all' marketing strategy that you can follow and expect great results, whatever your business. This is simply not true since all businesses are different, and all have different requirements.

Before choosing which elements to fit in your overall marketing strategy, you need to think carefully about your target customers. What is their demographic? How old are they? Where do they live? What online services do they use? How do they look for your product or service?

To find out more and achieve that all-important knowledge about your customers does take time, however, regular and relevant two-way communications helps you learn a lot. Targeted market research builds a more detailed picture of customer segments with similar needs and helps you to understand how to target the people who will be interested in your offers, services and products and not waste time (and money) on those that aren't.

Being clear about this detail will allow you to develop a targeted and more effective overall strategy that focuses on the channels most likely to produce results for you.

There is a "but" here, you'll also need to understand how your market works – where do your customers find out about your offers, services and products, for instance? Your strategy should cover how you measure up against your competition and new trends to expect in your market.

With a deeper understanding of the market you'll be working in, you can decide how to package and present, what price to charge and how to take your products and services to market – whether online, via direct retail to the public or via agents and distributors, as a supplier to other businesses, or a combination of channels.

Small businesses – know your USP

Small businesses, in particular, have a distinct advantage when finding and filling a niche. Differentiate your offering. This can be in terms of quality, service or product type, or offering something not available in the mass-market.

Focus on quality and exclusivity. Take every opportunity to highlight the benefits to your customers of buying from a smaller operation. Include the message on all your marketing materials; even the packaging, such as –

- Are you family-owned?
- Are you eco-friendly?
- Do you use a handmade process?
- Do you provide bespoke goods or services?

Also important for a small business is strengthening ties to the community – maybe your locally sourced products have less environmental impact, because they have travelled fewer miles. Tell consumers if you’re supporting the local community or being environmentally friendly.

Good website

If there's one thing that will put people off your business, it's having a badly designed and hard to navigate website. Think about it – you're going to be pushing people to your website to find out more and if it's hard work for them, they'll go elsewhere.

Don't make this basic mistake. You can get a good quality website without breaking the bank at the start. Keep it simple with information relevant to service or product, how to contact you and where you're based. It might be useful to get help with this.

Understand SEO

One of the most important ways of steering web traffic to your website is through Google searches. Even as Google changes the search algorithms, keep your page keyword optimised to make sure you rank as high as possible on searches.

Having your site show up on the first page of results hugely increases your chances of click-through, so it's worthwhile investing to make sure that's where you are.

Google My Business is a particularly useful FREE tool for local businesses with a local customer base. When people in the local area search on Google for the product or service you provide, this is a great way to help your business appear near the top of that search.

When potential customers see your profile and accompanying good reviews (relates to Quality Customer Service) at or near the top of the list, your business automatically gains credibility and will be trusted more … however all this takes time so don't expect instant results.

Quality customer service is vital

A vital selling point for any small business and crucial to the marketing strategies success is exceptional customer service, as large chains or manufacturers struggle to compete with this, so that's one of your prime focuses. Customers value buying locally from someone they can trust, offer a friendly face, be flexible and approachable.

Part of your strategy should include keeping your regular customers informed about your products, services, offers, and news about the business. Do this as a monthly/bi-monthly newsletter via direct mail or preferably the more cost-effective email option. Also look to attend local events; even if not exhibiting, perhaps sponsor?

Now create your marketing plan

Your marketing plan will explain how to put your strategy into action. It will help you to set marketing budgets and deadlines, but it will also nail down how you're going to 'speak' to your target customers – this might be through traditional advertising, online through your website, blogs or social media, via offline networking and going to events, through direct marketing, and so on. *This is where you might look to hire expert help to ensure the options you select reach your target customers.*

Crucially, it will also help to tell you when to talk to your customers, as timing marketing activities to fit their buying cycles will save you money and maximise sales.

Finally, your marketing plan should outline how you follow up sales and what you're doing to develop your offer. As with any plan, it's flexible, so everything you do should be measured and reviewed to see what works and what doesn't and allow you to change should the market dictate.

Andy Sarson – APS Marketing Consulting Services

Andy offers a full range of affordable marketing services supporting small businesses, including marketing strategies and planning, project management, marketing reviews, campaign management and marketing consultancy, mostly in Northamptonshire and surrounding counties.

His 25+ years' marketing industry experience, gained at marketing agencies and large corporates, gives him an advantage to offer "big marketing agency" experience at an affordable cost to smaller businesses by delivering a sound marketing strategy, followed by a costed plan with the right activities to reach your target audience to achieve the best possible ROI.

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Harness the power of your network

Jacky Sherman – Asentiv

Your contacts are the most valuable asset in your business. Look after them and they'll repay you time and time again.

A few years ago I got ill, really ill, and couldn't work for the best part of a year. Now if you're a small business owner you'll know what that means. No work, no clients and no money. More than that, I came back to the business thinking "Oh no I've got to start all over again"…

…except I didn't. I had built around me a solid inner core of people in my business network and I turned to these people for help. I made about 8 phone calls about being back in business and running a re-launch event and those people between them put 50 people in a room for me in less than a month. What was that worth to me?

It was priceless.

Your relationships are the engine that powers your business. They are built from the interactions between people and we each have our own preferred way of doing this. The good news is that your way will work as well as any other as long as you stick to some general principles. Here I want to share with you my top FIVE principles for developing productive business relationships.

1. Treat every interaction as networking

Every time you speak to, phone, email, text someone or comment on their post on-line, you're influencing your relationship with them and they with you.

To increase these opportunities, get out and about in your chosen business communities. This may be attending general networking events, joining membership organisations, industry-specific seminars or on-line groups.

Formal networking events are designed to make meeting and relating to new people easier. Choose one with a style that suits you. Some factors to consider are – is it a large or small event? Is it structured with an agenda or are you expected to just mingle and make your own introductions?

Take the same approach on-line. There are many special interest groups you can join to get to know people. The key is getting to know people rather than simply broadcasting what you have to sell.

Once you've met someone, even if it's just online or through a phone call, they have entered your network. You can choose whether to make that positive and deepen that relationship or not. So don't leave it to chance.

Follow the rest of these principles.

2. Surround yourself with givers

Two social research findings underpin this principle.

First Dunbar's number. Robin Dunbar, a social anthropologist, found that humans appear to be psychologically limited to about 150 meaningful relationships at one time. Our brains have evolved to cope with being part of a small close-knit group on the African savanna and we try to replicate that within our bigger populations today. I'd also observe that we have deep close relationships with a much smaller group. Think of those people who you talk to every week or even every month. It's likely to be a lot less than 50.

Secondly, Adam Grant's research on what makes people successful in business noted that all really successful people were high givers. However, he also noted that the least successful people were also high givers. The difference was the successful ones look after their own interests too. So, if you psychologically can only deal with a small number of relationships, choose your closest relationships to be other successful givers. That way you can each look after your own interests as well as each other's.

3. Make it easy for others to help you

Let's be honest, in the busy life of business people, if it's hard to help you, most people either can't or won't make the effort. On the other hand, if you make it easy for them, most people will gladly help. So how can you make it easy for them?

Be open to letting others help you. A major reason that some high givers are unsuccessful is that they don't allow others to help them. This can be interpreted as arrogance but underneath, it's usually because needing help evokes feelings of vulnerability.

A good tip is to remember that people like the people they help more than the people who help them particularly if they are high givers by nature.

There are three reasons for this –

1. Being helped can make you feel obligated and that can be a pressure especially if you feel you can't return the debt.
2. Unconsciously, we reason it out to support our own ego. "I'm a good judge of character and I only help people I like. So as I have already helped you, I obviously like you".
3. Still stroking our own ego if we have been party to the solution we have a vested interest in seeing it turn out to be successful.

Match your request for help to their resources. Sounds obvious but if the person you're asking doesn't have the expertise, skills or contacts you need, they won't be able to help. So get to know a wide range of people you can count on for differing things –

- Expertise and knowledge you don't have
- Support for when things get tough
- Challenge you to make the difficult decisions
- Celebrate your success
- Give you access to places, people or materials that you need

Then keep your contacts up to date with what's happening in your world now and what you plan for the future. Remember to ask for the help you need. Talk to them about how they can get involved.

4. Be there for them in return

Now you want to be surrounded by high givers and so do they. So what will make others want you in their network? They'll want your help in return, so if you're not already a high giver, then become one.

Relationships are two-sided and successful relationships are balanced, with both parties getting from the other what they need.

So make sure you're up to date with what others need. This means investing time in listening to what is going on in their world right now as well as their plans for the future. Then ask what you can do to help.

A word of warning here. Beware of being over-enthusiastic and stick to real help that you can manage with the resources you have. Apply the old adage and under-promise and over deliver.

Avoid getting into a strictly tit-for-tat relationship. "I've found you £50,000 worth of business so now it's your turn". There will be times when a particular individual can help you more than you can help them and vice versa. In a secure relationship, both parties will be comfortable that each is inputting different levels of help at different time as they know that in the long term it works out.

5. Invest in a CRM database

A severely practical principle this one. If you're in business for any length of time and are active in your business community, you'll quickly meet lots of people. Keeping track of your relationships with them all will become more and more difficult. While your inner core may remain pretty robust there will be an ebb and flow across the 150 odd people you relate to.

Developing relationships is time-consuming and it's easy to go networking and constantly be adding new people rather than building productive relationships with people you already know.

A good Customer Relationship Management system that lets you keep track of all your contacts will help. You may have a system that tracks your customers. Well, add in your other contacts too. You need a system that keeps you aware of where you are in each of these relationships, measures what you have done for them as well as what they have done for you.

This can be invaluable for analysing what works but also planning going forward how you can deepen and strengthen the relationship.

Apply these principles and you'll find that not only is your networking repaying you time and time again but that you're actually enjoying the company of pleasant like-minded and successful people.

Jacky Sherman – Asentiv

Jacky is a relationship marketing specialist who offers a range of solutions to grow your business through the power of your network. She helps people create lasting business relationships that result in significantly more referred revenue. She does this through training and coaching them to develop a strategic referral marketing plan and then apply it in their business.

Jacky is able to give those people new knowledge about networking and referral partnerships, immersion in the techniques over time until they become a habit, saving them huge amounts of time, as well as training their network alongside them.

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The importance of a CRM system and how to choose one

Ashish Kumar – Web Alliance

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system helps businesses to manage the customer relationships and associated information. It enables businesses to serve customer needs quickly and effectively, streamline business internal processes and improve the profitability of the business.

Things to consider when selecting the right CRM system for your business

1. Analyse your business first to know what features and functionality you'll need from the CRM system.
2. Is the user experience easy enough or overly complicated to use?
3. Are data security and GDPR compliance elements present?
4. Make sure the proposed system easily integrates with other applications in your business.
5. If going for off-the-shelf, then choose an industry-specific CRM if available, rather than selecting the generic one. This will give you more flexibility.
6. Check to what extent, customisation is possible. Is there any training documentation available when you need it?
7. CRM deployment – Cloud vs. on-premises (if there is a real reason for on-premises; otherwise go for cloud, as it will give more freedom).

Types of CRM systems to choose from

When it comes to a selection of a CRM system, you can evaluate it from two different angles, one is flexibility & expandability. The other is based on functionality and the complexity needed for the business.

First, let's look at flexibility –

- **Off-the-shelf solutions** – Ready-made software can be rented from the cloud, normally you must pay for each license and it can be very hard to customise

  Advantages

    - Instantly available, no waiting time involved
    - Saves time on development and testing
    - Cost effective – initially

  Disadvantages

    - The time is saved during the building process but lost in learning the software
    - Changes the working style of your operations according to the software
    - Hidden charges which may be revealed later
    - You never own the software and sometimes need to buy your own data when you decide to migrate to another system

- **Managed solutions** – A half-way house between custom and off-the-shelf solutions

  Advantages

    - Partly customisable and semi-flexible, better than off-the-shelf where you can't really do much but not as flexible as a bespoke system

  Disadvantages

    - Depends heavily on the services available
    - You never own it. Sometimes you even have to pay to get your own data

- **Customised/bespoke solutions** – a CRM that follows a business's current working style so that they don't have to learn new software

  Advantages

  - Developed according to client's specific needs
  - Client owns the software and the data
  - Expands and changes with client's business
  - Can be built in stages
  - Provides client with flexibility and portability

  Disadvantages

  - Comparatively time consuming to develop
  - Can be costly – initially

The other way to select the CRM system is based on the level of complexity and the objective of business as to what they would like out of the CRM system –

- **Operational CRM** – This type of CRM gives you all your customer interactions. These are also known as sales CRMs. These are useful for businesses that are spending lots of time to organise their customer communication. These have very effective sales processes with conversion tracking reporting, etc.

- **Analytical CRM** – This is used at the next level within business and helps in customer retention and continuous improvements, data mining (a statistical analysis to find the pattern and relationships in data), persona building, sales forecasting, etc. So, this is ideal when businesses want a better understanding of their customers and want to work on the retention, KPIs and want to build a strategy based on intelligent business data

- **Collaborative/strategic CRM** – This is used to share the data across teams and achieve the complex reporting based on various facts. This is useful for improving communications between different departments, document management and sharing, customer retention and strategy building

So, now we've learned the various CRM systems to choose from, now let's see what an effective CRM system can do for the business. These days the CRM software isn't just a client management system, it can manage the business as a whole and make it more effective and profitable.

Effective business software can –

- **Streamline the entire business** – In the early days, CRMs were just used on the customer management front but nowadays they can manage all the departments including enquiries, quotations, jobs, appointments, reminders, tasks, invoicing, connection with accounting package to avoid duplication, KPIs, graphical reporting and customer feedback

- **Improve productivity** – once all the departments are communicating effectively, finding the information as and when needed; as well as serving the customer efficiently; plus when the time recording is improved – the profitability of the business can be seen to be positively affected

- **Improve customer experience** – with an effective CRM, the customer interaction can be improved drastically by using the following elements of the software –

    - Offer client portals – invite clients to access the part of the CRM which is known as client portals so that your client feels in control and engages better with the business.
    - Use Apps – CRMs can be served as an App if a business needs it. For some businesses Apps are more beneficial than

others, if the business needs their client to come on the portal regularly then Apps are the ideal option to go for.
- Improving business relationships with customers.
- CRMs can organise, automate, and synchronise every aspect of customer interaction.

- **Track the performance** – CRMs can easily enhance a positive atmosphere in the business and can introduce a positive sense of competition among employees

    - Positive team building – a CRM can improve the team spirit of the business and can work very well within and across the department.
    - Better employee engagement – employees will feel more connected and engaged as now they play as a team rather than their own game.
    - Competitiveness among employees – with individual and team performance reporting positive competitiveness can be generated among the employees.
    - Key Performance Indicators – KPIs can play an important role in uplifting the morale of an individual and for the team and drive them to perform even better in future.
    - Goal setting and rewards on achieving those goals – in most of the CRMs, you can set goals and provide rewards when individuals or teams achieve these goals.
    - Improve accountability – when businesses use CRMs, every member of staff is accountable for their own actions so they can be held responsible for their actions.

- **Allow integration with other systems** – a CRM can only be a success if it can communicate effectively with other available components of the business to avoid duplication and improve profitability.

- Website – a CRM should be able to connect to the website in order to auto-insert the leads and enquiries and allow customers to sign into the portal section.
- App – if a business needs their customers to come to the CRM multiple times a day, then an App version of the CRM could be a great idea.
- Accounting package – to avoid duplication, CRM systems should communicate to the accounting package and synchronise with the books itself without businesses having to manage duplicate entries in the accounting package.
- Calendar – the CRM can easily synchronise with Outlook and Google calendars and other systems the business may have.

- **Act as an effective marketing tool** – The CRMs have inbuilt marketing tools to get in touch with their prospects and if needed can interact with 3rd party marketing systems, such as Mailchimp, etc., so that businesses don't have to manage their mailing lists at multiple locations and subscribed statuses at each location.

- **Portable and device-independent** – Since there is more than 50% mobile usage across all online platforms, CRMs must be device and location independent and can be accessed from any device and from any location.

  - Device-independent – no matter what device a user has, a CRM should cope with it and optimise the display for that device.
  - Mobile-friendly interface – on mobiles the content should be tailored, and the reduced version of the display should be used to improve the customer experience.
  - Location-independent – in the early days of MS Access, CRMs were location specific and could be accessed from within a specific location but not anymore. Cloud-based software is now fully secured and location independent.

- Get back business control remotely – businesses can be in more control as they can access the CRM elements from any location they want even when on holiday.

- **Improve communication and sharing of resources**

    - Cloud-based systems are now location-independent and can be accessed from any physical location because data resides securely in cloud servers.
    - Access control – access levels can be defined very easily so that the user will access what they're supposed to and not what they shouldn't have access to.
    - Audit trail – in case of any mishap, audit trails can lead back to the individuals responsible for that mishap.
    - Automatic backup of your data – the server can be set up to back up the data on a regular intervals, so, in the unlikely event the data can't be recovered from the regular backups, there shouldn't be any loss to the business.
    - Better control of business data – the business owner feels much better now with regard to the security and integrity of their business data than before, where no control measures were put in place to protect the business data.

- **Safeguard business**

    - Everything is behind a secure firewall to protect the data.
    - GDPR compliance.

- **Produce a meaningful graphical report** – Reports are a vital tool for growing the business and the CRM should provide graphical reports in accordance with the business's requirements so that businesses can use these reports to depict the pattern and grow their business.

- Graphical reports make sense – graphical representation is very easy to understand and easier to interpret compared to the list formats.
- Data presented easily and clearly – huge amounts of data can very easily be presented in terms of graphs.
- Detect trends over time – when it comes to detecting trends, CRMs can be very helpful. They have all the data within the system and what is needed is just to represent the data in the required format, so that businesses can make use of these trends and potentially grow their business.
- Facilitate immediate actions – CRMs can be highly useful to alert the business to take immediate action before it's too late.
- Data can be used as a tool to grow your business. If businesses get hold of information in a timely and accurate fashion, then they can take actions which can take the business to the next level.
- Any desired report can be produced – I'll simply put it this way, once the data is in the CRM system, then it's not rocket science to produce a report from it in whichever shape or form the business wants.

Ashish Kumar – Web Alliance

Ashish's mission is to help businesses achieve their personal and business goals by building effective, manageable software solutions to suit their current working style and enable the business to develop.

Based in Northampton, Web Alliance is a software development company delivering IT solutions and consultancy since 2006. The team is highly skilled and their focus is on you and your business. They design and deliver bespoke software with a world-class service.

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Designing the perfect marketing material

Marie-Louise O'Neill – Lovely Evolution

We've all heard of the term "marketing", but you may not fully understand what it really means and how it's important for your business. In simple terms, marketing is the process of getting potential customers and clients to be interested in your products or services. And in order to do this, you need to figure out what your customers need and value.

Marketing involves researching, promoting, selling, and distributing your products or services.

It covers –

- your brand (logo, colours, design style)
- how you communicate (tone of voice and method)
- designed materials
- pricing of the products/services
- market research
- consumer psychology
- measuring effectiveness
- communication strategy

Your marketing materials create the first impression of your company to your potential customers. Every time a customer visits your website, your business page on social media or looks at your flyer, they are forming an opinion about your services.

When they are ready to buy, if you have made a good impression, they are more likely to buy from you.

Think about it in this way – when you walk past a shop front that has faded signage, the paint is peeling and the floors just inside the door looks a bit dirty, it would make you think twice about going inside.

If there's a shop selling the same products nearby and the frontage looks well maintained, you can see a special offer on an A-board just outside the door with a limited time offer that you don't want to miss out on – which shop would you pick?

Are you putting off your potential clients?

Well you could be. Are you welcoming customers in with your social media posts that lead them to your well-maintained website? Do you have a leaflet to hand out at your networking meeting with a relevant and in-date offer? When someone looks at your business card and then clicks on your LinkedIn profile, do they have a consistent title and message?

Take some time to review your marketing so that you can make the changes, stop losing leads, and attract them instead.

Target market

The first step to designing the perfect marketing material is to know your target market. The more specific and detailed in identifying your ideal client, the better.

There is a saying that if you want to appeal to everyone, you appeal to no-one. If you try to target "everyone that is breathing with skin", the message will be generic and forgettable and you'll be wasting your time and money.

The way you'd communicate to a 30-something mum is completely different to a retired man who plays golf. For example, the "low fat" cereal Special K targets women who are conscious of their weight and health.

The language and imagery used on the packaging and advertising are repeating the same message so that it appeals to that demographic. Carlsberg, on the other hand, has a different aesthetic and target market, that is more male and sports orientated.

"*You can be the ripest, juiciest peach in the world, and there's still going to be someone who hates peaches*" – Dita Von Tease

When you can really drill down and be specific about who your ideal client is, the more likely it is that you'll speak directly to them in your marketing, be more memorable, and attract them.

You can have more than one ideal client profile but try and be clear about who they are and where they hang out.

Here are some questions to ask to get you started –

- What specific needs or problems do they have?
- Are they active users of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or other social media channels?
- Where do they work or what do they do?
- Age bracket?
- Male or female?
- Where do they live?
- Are they single, married, have children?

You can also review who your best clients are and what qualities do they have? Why do you like working with them and how are you best qualified to work with them?

Branding

Every time you're communicating, you should have your logo used consistently to build brand recognition and trust.

Yes, there are plenty of cheap and cheerful ways to producing a logo – you can even do it yourself. However, although you'll save money in the short term by going the DIY or budget route, you'll certainly "get what you pay for".

A decent designer or agency won't only produce your bespoke logo that appeals to your target market but can also suggest complementary fonts, colours and imagery that forms your brand palette and will be used in your marketing.

Your brand is much more than just the logo. Your brand is made up of the fonts, colours, image style and tone of voice used across your marketing. When all of your marketing is laid out together, it should look like it's part of the same family. If one or two pieces don't look like they are part of that family, it can confuse or even damage your brand and the message you're trying to convey. Sort out that black sheep!

Purpose

What do you want your marketing to do for you and your business? Are you trying to inform customers about your business or maybe advertise a new service or event that's coming up?

Consider what you want the audience to do when they read that flyer or click on to your website. Don't forget to include a call-to-action to prompt them to take action. It sounds obvious but is often left off or not made prominent enough. Be clear about what you're asking them to do.

Message

Once you have your target market in mind, and the purpose of the marketing material, you can work out the message. Having a consistent message across all your marketing for a certain length of time helps to reinforce the message. An advert needs to be repeated at least three times in a row for it to start to be effective.

Be personal and use messages that talk about the customer and their needs. Appeal to their emotions (pain/pleasure) and offer a solution to their problem. Always be asking "What's in it for them (the client)".

Lead with the benefits to them, not the features. Apple has sold millions of computers, phones and accessories because they appeal to the way it makes people feel, not just what the product can do.

"*People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel"* – Maya Angelou

Using a copywriter to write the content of the materials ensures you speak to and attract your target market and is money well invested. You can also recycle that content across your website, social media, leaflets, etc. to reinforce that message.

Grab attention

BOOM! You have only 3 seconds to grab someone's eye when they are browsing the internet or scrolling through their social media. A bold front cover on a brochure is going to increase the odds that your potential client will stop and look. If it sparks their curiosity and interest, they are more likely to turn the page to read more or click that link. Plain and simple words can help get straight to the point.

Use of colour

Everyone sees and interprets colour in a different way. Fashion, personal taste, and cultural associations also influence the impact of colours on each of us.

Did you know that in Japan, white is the colour of death? But in Western cultures, it represents purity and has been a popular colour for wedding dresses for the last few hundred years.

The shade, tone, lightness, darkness or brightness of the colour also impacts how we respond to colour.

For example, a bright acid lime green has a high energy and fun vibe, and a dark forest green could be seen as serious, eco-friendly or calming.

Fun facts –

- We judge a product within 90 seconds
- 62-90% is based on colour alone according to a study titled "Impact of color on marketing"
- 84.7% of consumers say that colour is the primary reason they buy a particular product

Take a moment to look at your current logo and brand and think about what colours you're drawn to wear, or which is your favourite colour. Often these colours are the same for business owners as you probably chose your favourite colours to be included in your logo.

Now take a look at the list to see what those colours mean.

Here some general associations for the various colours (I couldn't help but organise them like a rainbow) –

Red	Orange	Yellow	Green
energy	fresh	optimism	natural
hunger	engaging	positivity	fresh
passion	energetic	warmth	calming
power	visible	energy	reliable
attention	confident	creativity	energetic

Blue	Purple	Pink	Brown
spirit	deep	romantic	dependable
technology	creative	youthful	earth
honesty	regal	soft	outdoors
reliability	fantastical	feminine	conservative
data	thoughtful	playful	

Black	Grey	White
strong	security	purity
formal	intelligence	cleanliness
classy	solid	innocence
dramatic	gloomy	precise
death	conservative	simplicity
		clarity
		hope

Now you have a better idea of what colours can mean to people, you can use it to your advantage. Use a bright, energetic colour to attract your reader's eye to your call to actions. If you want to instil a sense of authority and expertise over the product or service you're offering, dark blues and greys are good colours to use predominantly.

Red brings a sense of urgency, often used for clearance sale signage as it draws the eye. It's a stimulating colour and a firm favourite with fast food brands as it can raise heart rates and stimulates appetite. Think of how many brands that use red in their branding and advertising!

Colour combinations

When picking out colours to use in your marketing, it's important to consider how the colours go together. It can be tempting to throw lots of colours together in a 'more is more' theory, but if you don't have a natural eye for colour combinations, the outcome can be off-putting, chaotic and hard to read or look at.

There is a way to cheat! Here are some tried and tested 'formulas' to creating colour combinations.

Analogous – pick colours that sit side by side on the colour wheel. For example, yellow, light green, dark green.

Complimentary – these are contrasting colours that sit on opposite ends of the colour wheel. These include, blue and yellow, green and red, etc.

Triadic – three colours that are about equidistance and spread across the colour wheel. Blue, red and yellow are a good example of this combination.

If you need help picking out colour combinations to use as a palette in your marketing, here are some resources that can help you get started –

- https://color.adobe.com/create/color-wheel
- https://www.canva.com/colors/color-palette-generator
- https://imagecolorpicker.com

Fundamental design principles –

- Line things up and follow an invisible grid
- Don't overcrowd the design. Make use of white/negative space
- Charts, graphs and infographics are better than tables of figures
- Use good quality photography from stock libraries or experienced photographers
- Use vibrant or striking images

- Use large headline text with smaller paragraph text
- Use contrasting or pops of bright colours
- Keep the design simple and easy to read and look at. Less is more!
- Follow a hierarchy in the size of text and objects, so it's easy to understand the important things – the what, where and why, etc.
- Make sure the text is readable. If it's too small, people won't read it

Is it time for a change?

Don't be afraid to evolve your marketing over time. Review your marketing materials and strategy at least once a year and ask the following questions –

- Has your audience evolved over time?
- Has your company's focus changed over the years?
- Have you adapted to new technology?
- Does your marketing and brand represent who you are as an organisation?

Marie-Louise O'Neill – Lovely Evolution

Marie-Louise specialises in logo and branding evolution; keeping your brand fresh, up to date and ahead of the pack. With her help, your brand will evolve over time, reflecting the changing nature of your marketplace but always keeping your core brand values at heart.

She offers a comprehensive range of visual services – from logo design, social media templates and website design in the digital space, to printed brochures, adverts, banners and packaging. She's equipped with a breadth of design knowledge and more than 15 years' industry experience.

And if you are a small business creating your own marketing, she offers support, training and bespoke templates in Canva. In a couple of hours, you can get a better understanding of how to create consistent content that doesn't hurt the eyes of your potential customers!

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Is branding important for your business?

Mark Coster – Pixooma Design

The short answer is – Yes – it's a vital component to a successful business. So there you go, no need to read any further! But if you've got questions or aren't convinced that branding is utterly central to your business success, then read on and I'll explain…

The myths of branding

Myth 1

"Branding doesn't apply to me – I'm a small business/start-up."

Lots of small business owners think **a brand** is something you create when your company gets bigger, and so it doesn't apply to them yet, but it's relevant to **EVERY business,** not just the likes of **Apple and Nike,** and you'll see why as we go on.

Myth 2

"It's just a logo and I can get one from the internet for a couple of quid."

Yes, you can get a logo "designed" for a small fee, but that isn't the whole story with branding – it has a much wider scope than that. And as for what result you'll get from your bargain-basement logo website, well that's another story…

Myth 3

"Branding" is what huge expensive agencies do – I can't afford that!"

It doesn't have to involve a swanky London agency with a name that sounds like a firm of solicitors, and nor does it have to cost you a lot of money – just a bit of forethought.

So let's deal with a key issue first of all – what do we mean when we say 'branding'?

What is a brand?

Quite often when people say 'branding' they really are just talking about the company's logo. But its scope is much bigger than that. They might mean the company's colour scheme – which is closer, or the style of their advertising (yep, getting there), but it's much, much bigger than even that.

In fact, the description I like most is –

"Your brand is what people say about your company **when you're not there**".

And that actually has nothing (directly) to do with logos, colours or anything else. It's how people "feel" about your company. Think of some of the big brands you know – how do they make you feel? Hungry, excited, disgusted, depressed? We all have companies that we love and those that we hate, and not all of it will be based on logic or limited to our experience with them directly – we may never have actually used them.

Take Apple for example – it inspires a wide range of emotions, but its customers are incredibly loyal. It doesn't matter whether you believe they make fantastic, pioneering products or just piggyback existing technologies and charge ridiculous prices, the truth is that it would be impossible for every one of their products to be the best in its class. Yet they inspire absolute devotion in some people. Some of their customers have bought into their brand so much they'll queue overnight for the latest iPhone, despite being able to get one the next day just as easily.

Harley Davidson has such a clear market and loyal following that some fans even have tattoos of the logo on themselves. Can you imagine many people that'd get a tattoo of the Asda logo, or Shell, or Google?

These are extremes, and you probably aren't worried about reaching these dizzying heights of brand loyalty, but you can apply the same basic principles that they do, without needing a huge marketing budget.

The key is consistency

You can't directly control your "brand" as it's the feeling your customers have about your business, and even those that have never (and will never) use your service. BUT you can *indirectly* influence it and your best chance to do this is with "consistency".

Your product or service needs to be consistent

Now I'd argue that it should be consistently the best service possible, but Ryanair is proof that you can have a successful business where you arguably have a terrible (but fairly consistent) reputation amongst your staff and customers, but the customers keep coming. Why? Because they constantly advertise some of the lowest prices for flights. Whether those prices are achievable or not is another matter, but the headline price is what attracts them. Does it inspire true "loyalty"? Probably not. And if the price is your only brand message, you could be in trouble as there is always someone prepared to go lower.

So I'd advise providing a good, better or best service rather than take Ryanair's policy, but whatever level you aim for make sure you can achieve it consistently.

Think of those times you've visited a shop/hotel/garden centre or anything else and your first experience is amazing, but a subsequent visit's terrible. As a customer, you want to know what you're going to get, and this inconsistency damages its reputation for you. Not only that, but you may well tell other people as well, which weakens the brand further.

Your message(s) need to be consistent

It's not just about using the same strapline everywhere – like Nike's "Just Do It" for example. Everything else you say in your marketing needs to have a consistent approach, not just in "what" you say, but also "how" you say it – this is your tone of voice.

What message do your adverts (TV, radio, online, print) say about your business? What subconscious impression are you trying to convey? If you appear to be all cuddly and family-friendly one minute, but aggressive and contentious the next, this change in style will confuse people and they won't know what to believe.

Your corporate identity needs to be consistent

Your corporate identity (or visual identity, or corporate style) is the thing most people think of as branding – it's the things you can actually direct control. It's your business cards, your website, leaflets, magazines, adverts, exhibition materials, building signage, vehicles, social media and everything else that people can see, touch and feel.

That doesn't mean everything needs to look identical – that would be dull. But everything should look like it's from the same "family", i.e. like it has come from the same place. This means defining a set of design styles (fonts, colours, graphics) and ensuring that everything refers back to them. Again not identical, but two adverts from the same business should have a strong style that links them – especially if they are part of a single marketing campaign.

Finally, your imagery needs to have a consistent style. And even here you don't need to be so prescriptive that everything looks monotonously identical. You might say that all of your images should contain people; that they should never be looking directly at the camera; and that they should be mainly images of families enjoying life outdoors.

Alternatively, you might simply say that the imagery should be bright and engaging and that it should not contain anything contentious. You also need to consider whether you'll ever use illustrations and if so what style(s) they should be as well. Using a mix of colourful, detailed 3D illustrations, sketchy line-drawings and simple flat icons is a confusing mix of styles that detracts from the message you're trying to convey.

Your communication needs to be consistent

You might want to define how quickly you'll respond to email enquiries, you might use the same phrasing when you (or your staff) answer the phone, and you might want emails to be written in a specific style.

A strong brand is a reliably consistent one.

No matter how much you define each area, and how tight the restrictions are, it should amount to one thing – someone who deals with you knows exactly what they're going to get. Every single time.

If you're really quick to respond to a sales enquiry the first time they ring, but then mid-project they can't get hold of you for weeks on end that will damage your credibility and your brand.

Where do you start?

Well in most cases your brand starts with your corporate identity, and that all starts with your logo. And when it comes to logos there are some key things you need to consider –

1. It must be a **Vector file, NOT a JPEG**. Lots of people get this wrong. A JPEG of your logo is fine for some uses, but if that's all you have, you're going to have problems. Unlike a vector file, it'll become

blurry and pixelated if you enlarge it, and it simply isn't versatile enough.

2. Your logo should be simple, versatile, and appropriate. This way it'll work in a wide variety of instances. And it's best to avoid trends as these will date it very quickly.
3. It doesn't HAVE to say what you do, in fact, often it can be better to not do so, especially if it makes it complicated.
4. It doesn't HAVE to have an icon or image at all, lots of big brands just have text-based logos.

What does all this cost?

Whether you're creating a new logo, brochure or a website there are always a number of options.

Do it yourself

If you have the skills, the right software, and creative ability, go for it! It'll mean no cash outlay, but be aware that it will take you a long time and you may not explore the same creative options a professional would.

Use a budget service

There are lots of online services that cater to a wide range of design needs. but research them carefully. You may not get a good result, the service may vary and you'll be liaising with someone remotely or using an interactive system. This means you'll need to provide a lot of input to get the result you want. And often cheap services charge extra for lots of things that would be standard from a traditional agency.

Use a professional

Again, always do your research, look at reviews and seek recommendations. A good agency will work with you to carefully understand what you need, they'll probably also challenge your brief in order to get a good result and will be focused on you and your needs first. And of course, if you can find one that offers a 100% Satisfaction Guarantee, then even better!

Do your research

There are lots of great design professionals from freelancers to large agencies, but over the years I've heard a few scare stories from my contacts when they've dealt with other designers and although rare, this highlights some rather dubious ways of looking at branding and how it's important to do your research and get recommendations where possible.

Inventing new work

In one story I heard, a contact had commissioned a web designer to create a new website, but the designer said they didn't like the company logo and it should be changed.

To me, this is totally irrelevant. Whether you do or don't like a company logo is none of your concern as a designer, unless there is something fundamentally and objectively wrong with it that should be fixed. To me, this approach suggests the designer was looking to create extra paid work for themselves which I believe is utterly wrong.

Getting it the wrong way around

In another, a website was also being designed and when it was near completion they suggested that they could change the logo to make it match the new site better.

This is the wrong way around. The logo is a key part of the branding and shouldn't be changed on a whim – all future materials should complement the logo, not the other way around. Can you imagine Shell, Apple or Microsoft changing their logo because they had a new website designed?

Building A Trusted Brand

Everything people see and hear about your business influences how they think about your company (i.e. your brand). Choose the elements that are most important to you and do them consistently. Well thought out and consistent branding is the foundation that can be built on as your company grows and it helps give people reassurance that you're serious and stable as a company. Then the rest is up to you to deliver a product or service that meets your customers' needs.

Mark Coster – Pixooma

Mark has spent nearly 25 years as a graphic designer, working for a number of large organisations and national brands. Most people start their own business so they can just do more of the things that they're good at, but he wanted to operate as a larger business would from day one. He has maintained excellent levels of service and put in processes and procedures that help him provide an efficient, proactive service. Judging by his many 5* Google reviews (the most in the UK for a creative agency), it's working!

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Is social media worth it?

Samantha Cameron – Samantha Cameron Social

Social media allows you to network 365 days a year – perfect if you're regularly attending networking events and are making connections through your social media platforms. What better way to stay in touch and continue to show these connections what you do and how they could benefit from your services, products or business than by using social media?

Whether you use Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest or Snapchat, (I could go on there are over 60 different social media platforms available) an online presence is an ideal opportunity to allow your followers and connections to get to know you and your business better.

There can be a love-hate relationship when it comes to social media. As business owners, we know we should be utilising these free online tools to help us promote not just ourselves but also our business. However, many factors can stop us from maximising our social media, from not having the time, not having the inclination to even do our social media or not knowing what to put on our social media. It can become stressful before we even start just thinking about it.

Consistency

Being consistent with your social media is key and an important factor to growing your social media presence. How often are you posting to your social media platforms? Once a day, a couple of times a week or just when you have the time? I recommend posting daily to your chosen platforms as this won't only help you grow your social media presence but also your brand and profile. Why should you post daily? I'm not suggesting posting for the sake of posting and don't worry if you don't have the content to post daily, my tips further down will help you create your social media content on a daily basis will allow you to start to deliver content that will offer value and gain engagement.

The fear factor

Many people have a fear of using social media for many reasons, not having the time, unsure of what content to put on their platforms or even what platforms to use to suit their business/industry or their target audience/client/customer. It can even come down to worrying about what other people will think about your social media content. Will you upset this person, will you say something that will be taken the wrong way, will your customers/clients like your content? I always say to people, “It’s *your* social media and *your* content. If someone doesn’t approve or like what you’re posting, they have the option to unfollow or remove their connection”. The delete/remove/unfollow function is always an option.

Don’t over complicate it

Over-complicating your social media can cause you to start panicking, especially when you need to think about what content to deliver and can also feel that it’s taking up a lot for your time, possibly away from your other tasks with your business or spending time for you or with your family. By not over-complicating your social media and ***“Keeping It Short and Simple”*** (the KISS method), this will ensure that you’re not spending hours on it and you’ll become consistent with your time spent on your social media platforms.

Profiles

Social media profiles are an opportunity to show others who you are and how your business can benefit them and others. It takes just three seconds for someone to decide from any social media profile if they are going to deal or work with you.

When was the last time you looked and updated your social media profile?

- Do you have a banner/cover photo on your profile (applies to Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) that tells others what you do or how your business can benefit them?
- Is your profile photo an up-to-date photo of you and just you? Ideally a professional headshot, and one with a blank background. Not one of your cat or dog, with your family or you wearing a hat and sunglasses. Show people the real you and help people to find you.
- Is your bio/headline telling others what you do and how your skill helps people's businesses? Again, don't over complicate this but think outside the box and stand out from the crowd. They don't need to know that you're the director of your business or the name of your business.

People buy people

Just because you run a business doesn't mean that your social media content is an opportunity to constantly sell, sell, sell. People buy people and people want to get to know you from a personal perspective. Have a balance of content that is personal and about your business/industry but ensure that it's engaging.

We don't want to be sold to – especially from someone we really don't know yet.

What do you do when you're walking down the High Street and someone walks towards you trying to sell you something? You walk in the opposite direction. Social media is no different. Your connections will switch off from you in the same way. However, by building relationships and trust with each other, you'll see them buying from you eventually.

Making friends

Are you connecting with new people within your social media profiles regularly?

As a child, we're happy to talk to anyone until we're told by adults not to talk to strangers or to be quiet on more than one occasion. This means that, as adults we struggle to speak to people and also we may struggle to connect with people we really don't know that well. After all, our parents told us not to speak to strangers.

However, that person wanting to connect with us could be our next big client or introduce us to that next contract.

The biggest mistake made when connecting with people is turning them off straight away.

How you can avoid doing this and my top tips to making new connections –

- Don't start by sending your new connections a sales pitch message.
- Don't start by inviting them to like your business pages straight away.
- Don't add them to your Facebook groups without asking first if they would like to join.
- Connect with those who you have mutual connections or friends.

- Watch out for fake accounts.
- Build relationships with those you've connected with.
- Don't start tagging others in your posts unnecessarily. However, tagging others who are relevant to your post will help gain more reach and interaction.

Images and photos

Pictures tell a thousand words and so can the images and photos that you're using to accompany your social media text. You don't need to be a designer or photographer to create amazing images or take amazing photos. Cameras on our mobile phones are so advanced that we can get perfect photos. There are also free stock image websites available such as Pixabay, Unsplash and Pixlr, giving you access to thousands and thousands of images to help you with your social media content. Remember to be careful when thinking of using an image you've seen on the internet. Just because it's out there in the World Wide Web doesn't mean you can use it. Many images have copyright against them.

When using your own royalty-free images and photos, adding your business logo onto your image will help you build your brand amongst your social media platforms. Your business logo becomes you, your brand and people will start to connect with you the more you use your logo. Use your logo PNG file to do this, if you're unsure if you have a PNG/translucent logo then there are companies out there that can transfer your logo to this file for you. Apply your logo to one of the corners of your image and then start getting it out there.

What image sizes should you be using on your social media platforms? Square images/photos work on all platforms ideally for Facebook and Instagram timelines. Landscape is perfect for both LinkedIn and Twitter and portrait for Pinterest. However, don't stress about formatting images to this size for this platform and that size for another platform, work with what you have until you feel comfortable about posting.

Hashtags

The thought of using hashtags can literally send people into panic, "where do I use them, how many do I use and how on earth do I use them?". Don't worry – you're not alone.

Hashtags are words or phrases that can be used in social media posts after using the hashtag symbol "#". They allow you and others to search for topics by using these hashtag words and also see what is trending. There are countless hashtags out there. Do you have your own hashtags?

Hashtags can be used throughout social media platforms but are more commonly used on LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter. Different social media platforms have suggestions for the amount you use per platform.

The recommended currently is –

- Twitter – 2/3
- LinkedIn – 3
- Instagram – 15/30

You might be thinking what about Facebook? Having lots of hashtags on a Facebook post can look messy so people tend not to add them.

This does mean that there is nothing stopping you from using them. Using the odd one to promote an event or maybe a national or awareness day is perfect.

Standing out from the crowd

There is no rhyme or reason around social media, what content works, which is the best social media platform to use, when is the best time of the day to post and what hashtags should I use.

One size doesn't fit all. What could work for one person may not work for another. The more you're using your social media and being consistent, the more you'll start to see what's working and what isn't.

Having content that stands out from others will help you with engagement and interaction. What content will stand out? It could be something as simple as asking "Do you drink tea or coffee?" to "Do you prefer ketchup or brown sauce?”. Crazy I know but it works; there is no logic as I mention above when it comes to social media. It’s finding what works for you and what your audience react to.

Have a plan

As the saying goes “Failing to plan is planning to fail”. By planning your social media content weekly/monthly this will allow you to be more focused on what content you’re adding and put a stop to getting flustered on a day to day basis.

Ideally, all you need are 7 different pieces of content for a week, just 7! That’s one a day and yes use that one piece per day across all your social media platforms. But don’t dump all your posts over all your platforms at the same time. Look to staggering the times of those posts amongst your platforms. For example –

- Post to Facebook Business Page in the morning
- Add to LinkedIn late morning
- Put it on Twitter in the afternoon
- Then Instagram in the evening
- And don’t forget to add it to your personal Facebook timeline

Do you think you could put together 7 pieces of social media content each week?

Here are my top tips to content ideas to helping you start putting your social media plan in place –

- Work with your business and personal diary, what’s going on in your life that you can share with your followers and connections.
- Look at National and Awareness days, don’t overuse these though – 2/3 a week maximum.

- Themes such as Monday Motivation, Top Tip Tuesday, Wednesday Wisdom, Testimonial Thursday, Funny Friday.
- Share blogs to your LinkedIn Articles and Notes within your Facebook Business Page.
- Videos and Lives – don't be afraid to get behind the camera.
- Make sure your logo is displayed on your photos/images.

Blogs

Do you write blogs? Blogs are a great way to expand more about you, your business and your industry. Don't just leave them on your website. Use them within your social media platforms. Show others that you're the expert in your field/industry.

- Share your blog link in posts
- Turn your blog into a video
- How about creating a podcast from your blog?
- Don't forget to turn your blog into a LinkedIn article and add it to Facebook Notes
- Reuse your blogs over time

Saving time

Time is a big factor as to why people aren't consistent on social media. We only have 24 hours in a day and with other tasks needing to be completed within our business and personal lives, social media can take a back seat. Sometimes we just need that help to get us going and also help us save time.

Scheduling is a great tool to help you achieve social media consistency and save time. There are various scheduling products on the market that allow you to schedule your social media content at a date and time in the future all at one time.

Some social media platforms have their own scheduling function. Using scheduling for a couple of months can help you get into a habit of posting daily into your social media platforms.

Switching off

Scrolling through social media on a daily basis can be a massive factor – taking up so much of our time each day. In fact, the average person spends over 2 hours a day doing just this. Have you ever thought about turning off your notifications to your social media apps? By turning off our notifications, it stops you from constantly feeling that you need to see who has liked, commented or posted recently.

Get your time back. Think about time management with your social media; you can still be very active and present on social media without being on there for hours every day.

And finally, my social media top tips

Getting your social media right from the start can be achieved by following these simple social media tips –

- Be consistent with your social media content daily
- Use the right social media platforms for you and your business
- Don't be afraid to use emoji's and Hashtags
- Show people that you're human and not a robot
- Plan your social media content
- Ensure your social media profile is up to date
- Play around with your social media
- Most of all have ***FUN***

Samantha Cameron – Samantha Cameron Social

Samantha has grown 5 successful businesses using social media and other online methods, over the past 10 years. She loves to help others to do the same. If you're ready to take your business to the next level online, then Samantha is ready to help you take your business there, by using her simple but effective methods that are highlighted here within the book.

Over the past 4 years she has shown thousands of businesses of all shapes and sizes how they can increase their social media presence and, in turn, grow their revenue.

Being a mum of 5, married, an entrepreneur, public figure, keynote speaker and professional networker, Samantha loves nothing more than sharing all of her knowledge, tips and advice on social media and social networking. Helping businesses to gain new customers/clients and to understand your social media, what platforms to use and how to maximise your social media presence, build your online profile and increase your brand – simply but effectively.

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Getting the most out of your website

John Scotcher – Pearson Treehouse

The trouble with websites, for a business that just wants a reliable online presence that gets their message to potential customers and helps generate sales, is where to start. What's a company to do? Walk into any networking meeting in the country with the words "I want a website" and see how quickly you're pounced on. Even worse, ask for recommendations on social media and watch the feeding frenzy that starts to unfold on your timeline. The brutal fact of the matter is, there are a lot of 'webbies' out there. They want your business and sometimes your needs might not get heard in the stampede to fulfil them.

So, where do you start when it comes to getting the right website for your business? In this chapter, I'm hoping to point you in the right direction. Let me try to be an unbiased guide, with some tips to what you need to be asking yourself and your potential web developer.

Now, I am going to start with just two basics. Apologies to the more mature businesses reading this book, but, as I see issues caused by these regularly, they are absolutely worth mentioning.

Control

When it comes to a website, the key thing is you should make sure you retain is control. Whether your business simply needs a brochure website to tell visitors what you do, or a full-blown website portal, passively handing the job off to a web developer is asking for trouble.

One of my clients is a sewing machine shop. When I first met them, they had a website they'd outgrown. It had been built in relative haste, (because they been told they "needed" one by an expert, who was actually a salesperson), and they'd passed the whole job over to a web designer.

The designer set up their hosting, their domain and their email. The client was paying through the nose for it.

It was only when they moved to me that they found that the designer bought and registered their domain in his own name! Fortunately, it was (relatively) easy and inexpensive for them to take back control but it was still a headache.

So, the first point I want to make is a golden rule. If you don't remember anything else from this chapter, make sure you remember this and do something about it. Own your domain name.

In the case of the sewing company, there was a way to solve this. Fortunately the domain name was a .co.uk, so it was in the jurisdiction of Nominet, the UK domain governing body. By proving that the domain was theirs through form filling, provision of documents such as headed paper with the web address and other hoop-jumping, they were able to get it moved to a place where they could change its settings. Of course, there were also admin fees and a fair amount of worry from them initially.

I regularly meet companies, even these days, that don't know where their domain is or whether they're the registered owners. If you're one of those companies, then find out where it is. Find out how to access it and if it's in your name. Don't wait until it's going to cause an issue. It's all about having control.

Content management

Secondly, while we're talking about control, make sure you can manage the content on your own site. Your website absolutely MUST have the ability for you to login and update your own page content. You should not have to email your developer to make basic changes, wait for them to fit it in and then get charged for the service.

When I moved to Northampton, I went networking with a mortgage broker (let's call him Martin to protect the innocent). Martin had his website with one of the larger Northampton web companies, who'd become lazy and complacent. When Martin needed a change on his site, he'd have to email them. They'd make the changes and then they'd charge him for the work.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with that model, other than it's somewhat dated, the problem for Martin was the time it took and the cost. When I met him, he had just waited two months for a page change that had cost him £150.00! I know that the work they did took them no more than twenty minutes!

Whatever the size of your website, you should have the option to log in to an admin area to update the content. Yes, you might still have a support contract or have a developer who makes one-off changes for you. Perhaps you're busy running your business or don't aren't inclined to edit your site. In Martin's case, once he had a content management system, he probably did no more than 20% of the changes – he was too busy – but that was his choice.

Again, it's all about retaining control.

Choosing the right supplier

Ok, let's move on. So, there will come a time when you're thinking about getting a website. Perhaps you're a start-up looking for your first web presence. Perhaps you've outgrown your current site and you know you need to "up your game". And so, with a sigh of trepidation, you start the search for the supplier that will take the dream from your head and translate it into the reality you need.

Let's face it – if you're getting a new website, there's a bewildering array of options priced at every budget. And, just like wine, it isn't simply a case of the more you spend, the better things will be. So, what the hell are you supposed to do?

The businesses that make the most informed choices are the ones that frankly, forget the website. Instead of initially thinking in terms of who to use and what to pay, they come from the starting point of what they want to communicate and what they want to do. Before they get to the stage of looking around to see who can fulfil their needs, they know what those needs are.

One of my customers is an all-female team of boudoir photographers. They know their product inside out. They came to me with a fully realised set of sales packages. They understand who each of those packages appeals to. There was the package that hubby bought for the wife. There was the package that the wife bought for the hubby. There was the package for the girls on the hen do and so on.

What's more, they knew their numbers, so they knew which of those packages would turn the most profit and which were the most popular. By the time they had come to me, they understood what they wanted to feature. That allowed me to craft a site that would gently lead visitors down one of several paths to becoming a lead for them.

By giving me a fully formed snapshot of what their business was doing, they made my job easier and a joy. Admittedly the example galleries also helped!

When you go to a web developer with an understanding of what you need, it's their job to come up with the best way to make it happen. And because they'll all be starting from the same blueprint, you get quotes that are more straightforward to compare.

If you go to a developer with a classic 'I need a new website' and little more than that, don't be surprised if you get wildly varying options, quotes, suggestions and advice.

DIY?

It’s hopefully not a massive shock that the business that understands itself has the greater chance of getting a website that acts as the perfect tool but it does bring me to the subject of build-your-own website packages. For obvious and understandable reasons, many website developers will tell you they are a terrible idea. I don’t necessarily agree. For a young company, perhaps in its first six to twenty-four months of trading, they might just be a very good idea.

One thing those of us who have been in business for a while appreciate is when you first start, you have almost no idea what your business will look like in a couple of years. The products and services you think you’ll sell and do well in, may not be anything like the products and services that you end up selling.

I had a look at articles on the Small Business Trends website when considering this point. According to even the most optimistic articles, fewer than a third of businesses have business plans. That’s even fewer when it comes to start-ups.

Yet, young businesses often spend a chunk of their budget on a website. A website that, even when content managed, may need completely rethinking and re-spending on within a relatively short space of time. Yet, if they spend a tiny monthly amount on a build your own website system, they can dip their toe in the water, learn who they really are and then when they know, move on to getting something that works for them, not against them.

And they shouldn’t be afraid to ask a professional web developer to spend an hour or so helping them get something that will look good during this period.

Likewise, there’s a place for template sites. A customised template can be the next step up for a business on a budget.

The pitfalls with template systems are twofold. Firstly, the potential to look like many other websites. And secondly, because it's easy to use a template-driven web system, it's easy for inexperienced web builders to start a business building template sites. That's fine, as long as they aren't forced out of their basic skill set.

And once your website is built, what then? Back in 1989, one of my favourite films came out. The film is "Field of Dreams". Among the many quotable lines in the film is the one that most people remember – If you build it, they'll come. Over the years, it's remarkable to me the number of companies that have applied that concept to their website.

SEO

I am not going to talk about SEO here too much, other than to say two things. SEO is the bi-product of good website coding, not a paid-for-extra. Ongoing website marketing is a service that can be paid for, but if your website isn't ticking Google's boxes, have a stern word with your developer.

Secondly, search engine optimisation isn't brain surgery. Google wants to do one thing. It wants to answer the question it's given as accurately as it can. If it doesn't, people won't use it. If your website provides that best answer, Google will want to prioritise you in its results.

Companies that advertise online well are prepared. They know the value of a customer over that customer's lifetime. By knowing that, they can make informed choices as to how to reach them.

Whether they're spending money on natural listings, paying Google directly though AdWords, or if they are at an early stage – cash poor and time rich, working on raising their listings themselves, they understand what their budget should be.

Conclusion

So, to conclude, let me say this. It's very easy to get bogged down with the technical aspects of a website. It's easy to lose sight of what your website is for in the minutiae of creating it. If you want to have a website that works for your business like any other tool, you need to make sure you have fully planned why you have the site, what it's for, and what the end result of a user's visit should be.

Finally, you should know how you plan to follow up on active website visits, where a visitor ticks all the boxes and does exactly what you want them to (sending you a mail, calling you, purchasing your stuff, etc.).

When it comes down to the basics, a website is just like the rest of your business – it will work far better if planned objectively and strategically. A website that grows organically may get there too, eventually, but you might find the journey is a tad more painful.

John Scotcher – Pearson Treehouse

John's had a varied career. He started teaching early Photoshop straight out of university. He was a tie designer, (once, many moons ago the Belgian Postal service went to work each day in a tie he designed) and lead web designer for various companies before starting Pearson Treehouse to provide web design in Maidenhead in 1999.

In the late 90s and early 2000s he also worked as a 1st Assistant Director in the independent UK film industry, learning essential project management skills that he'll use on your website project today. He's the front-facing part of the company and will look after you from start to finish.

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Writing winning words for your website

Stephen Church – Copywriter Pro

Isn't it odd how the value of words in business, and the skill required to craft them effectively, are so often unappreciated?

Yes – we copywriters feel unloved. Our products (words) and our skill (putting them in the right order) are the sad, neglected, Cinderella of marketing.

You know when you meet someone for the first time? Before long, you're asking about each other's jobs – that old 'What do you do?' question. I find the chat often goes like this –

'What do you do?'
'I'm a copywriter.'
'Oh, right – what's that then?'
'Well, I get businesses more clients by writing words for their websites that are clear, concise and compelling.' (the seasoned networkers amongst you will recognise the well-rehearsed 'elevator pitch').

So far, so good. But it's here that the conversation takes a deeply disappointing turn.

'Oh, I get it! Words for websites. Actually, I don't need a copywriter …'
(take your pick for what comes next …)

1. *'I got an A star grade in English A-Level.'*
2. *'My friends say I'm great at writing.'*
3. *'My wife's really good at grammar and punctuation. She checks over everything I've written.'*

Website content – just an afterthought

It's true. Well-written copy is often the last thing on someone's mind as they plan their new website. Don't believe me? Ask any web designer. They take on a new client. At the initial meeting, this client is excited at the prospect of owning a new website. He talks, in animated fashion, about the graphics and the overall look of the site. He dreams of how its user-friendly functionality will soon have new customers beating a path to his inbox.

Fast forward a month or two and the web designer presents the client with his shiny new website and declares, 'There you are! That's the design finished. All you have to do now is add the copy – you know, 'words'.'

The client's interest visibly wanes. He glances at his watch and mutters something about setting off to avoid the rush-hour traffic.

For so many business owners, well-written copy is just an afterthought, not to be taken seriously; an aspect of their new website that will somehow, magically, look after itself.

Some clients, having been presented with their copy-less website, simply slide it to the bottom of their to-do list, where it lies, for weeks, for months, sometimes years, gathering dust.

Good copy does the heavy lifting

Visually engaging web design is critical – if your site is to grab and keep the attention of the visitor, clearly this is a must. The design might be attractive, the imagery sublime, the website structure well-conceived. But – important as they are, these elements are little more than a beautiful, essential canvas for that vital ingredient called 'words'.

Well-researched, imaginatively collated, arranged and formatted words will –

- grab your potential clients' attention
- keep them on your website
- persuade them to engage with your website
- convince them to place an order, send an email or pick up the phone
- Oh … and they'll get you high up on Google too.

The words on your website do the heavy lifting.

In short, your words get the job done.

So, what is good copy? Is good copy lovingly-constructed, lengthy sentences worthy of Jane Austen or Charles Dickens? Is good copy long, 'professional-sounding' words? Does good copy slavishly follow the rules of grammar? The answer to these questions is an emphatic 'no'.

I'll ask the question again. What *is* good copy?

Good copy is … **copy that does the job**.

Whatever that job might be –

- Persuading potential clients why they should pay for your services.
- Convincing a nation to cast aside all common sense and vote for you.
- Leaving a note for the milkman, requesting that he stop sleeping with your wife.

Use words well and you'll give yourself the best chance of getting people to do what you want them to do.

Copywriting for SEO – Search Engine Optimisation

Having a great website is a priority requirement for your business. Well, if it's not, then it should be! But if no-one can find your website – what's the point? Clearly, you need your website to feature as high as possible on the search engine results pages but – and it's a big 'but' – *only* for the search terms that your visitors use when they're looking for your type of products or services.

SEO – keeping your reader engaged

So many factors affect how well your website ranks on Google and the other search engines. Many of these are highly technical and related to the coding of the website. But did you know? One of the biggest factors affecting your web pages' Google ranking is the quality of the copy – how well it's written.

How come? Well – Google measures how long each visitor spends on your web page. It also tracks how that visitor moves around your website from one page to the next. The longer a visitor stays on your site or re-visits it, the greater the chance you have of your site ranking high on the search engines. Your website words need to be written in a way that doesn't just **grab your reader** but also **holds their attention** – keeps them glued to your pages.

It's all in that magic word – 'engagement'. By captivating your website visitor and persuading them to re-visit, you'll massively boost your chances of a high SEO ranking.

Keeping things fresh for SEO

No-one likes a stale smell. We recoil from the stench of stale fish or the whiff of dirty socks.

Google feels the same way about your website. The more often Google passes by your site and detects that you haven't refreshed it with new content, the more likely it is to ignore it and to move on to pastures more enticing. So, what kind of 'fresh content' is Google looking for?

It could be –

- additions or amendments to current pages
- new pages
- blogs or articles

Regularly update your website's content and you'll **keep Google's nose twitching.**

A word about blogs

Blogs are a terrific way to keep your clients, customers or followers informed, educated and entertained. Write regularly and you'll soon become known as an authority in your field.

But **blogs are also a great way to impress Google**. A blog that's optimised with your key words and phrases will give your website every chance of leaping up those search engines.

Words – making stuff happen

I love words. Understanding how powerful they are – how to make them work – is a craft that can be enormously satisfying. Have a go yourself. There are a handful of tips at the end of this chapter. You'll find it satisfying too. When you learn how to make words dance to your website's tune, you'll find yourself applying the skill to numerous other aspects of your business communications –

- Catalogues
- Newsletters
- Emails
- Sales letters
- Letters of introduction
- Press releases
- Case studies
- White papers

Words in business matter so much. Words make the offer. Words seal the deal.

Words – make – stuff – happen.

And that, my friend, is what this chapter is all about. Using words to make stuff happen for your business.

Not quite all you need to know

But hang on just a moment. Before you move on to the copywriting tips, what about the title of this chapter –

"*Not quite* all you need to know about writing winning words for your website".

Why the 'not quite'? What's that all about?

Well, apply the checklist of tips at the end of this chapter and you'll get an idea of a few of the basic rules of copywriting. But – to write well takes much more.

It takes research and study, across a wide range of topics, particularly in the field of psycholinguistics. It takes practice. The very best writers write something, anything, every day.

But to become a really good writer, you need even more. And this might surprise you. To write excellently, you need to read excellently, and often. Books. Good books. Good books that tell stories, transporting you to unexplored worlds, evoking unawakened emotions. This is the way to absorb the myriad of techniques that the best writers use to turn our minds. And if you want to turn the minds of your readers – turn them towards using your products or services, that is what you must do – read.
Good luck … and happy copywriting!

I hope you find these following tips useful. Send me an email and I'll reply with a more detailed version for you to print out and keep. Perhaps when I drop by for a visit, I'll spy the print-out – lying just to the left of your laptop, dotted with scrawled notes, decorated with the odd brackish coffee stain. Then I'll know for sure that you too take your business writing seriously!

Your web copy checklist

- At the top of your Home Page – don't write about your company history or your mission statement. Address your reader's 'pain-point'. Tell them what you do and how you'll help solve their problems.

- Make your reader the focus of everything you write – not you. Make sure the 'You's and 'Your's massively outnumber the 'I's, 'Me's, 'We's' and 'Our's.

- Don't write formally. Write conversationally – as though you're enjoying a cuppa with a friend across the kitchen table.

- Contractions – ditch 'cannot', 'we will' and 'do not'. Replace them with 'can't', 'we'll' and 'don't'.

- Don't use long sentences, like this one, of more than eighteen or twenty words, as they can be really off-putting to the reader and you'll find you lose them in no time, jeopardising any chance you might have of engaging them and getting them to get in touch with you.

Too many short sentences are bad too. You write one or two. Then it gets too much. You keep hitting your reader over the head. He becomes punch-drunk. He'll get a headache. Instead, try and achieve a balance. Drop in a short sentence. Then maybe another. And then ease your reader down gently with a slightly longer one – a bit like the way this paragraph has ended.

- Don't attempt to employ lengthy vocabulary. Try to use short words (compare those last two sentences – 'try' vs 'attempt', 'use' vs 'employ', 'words' vs 'vocabulary').

- The passive voice (like in this sentence) should be avoided. Use the active voice (like in this sentence).

- Avoid clichés like the plague (just like this one). Just tell it how it is.

- Bullet points. Don't write, 'We'll clean your carpets, floors, curtains, and upholstery.'
  Instead, try
  We'll clean your
    - carpets
    - floors
    - curtains
    - upholstery

- Use at least one Call-To-Action on each page. This is where you tell your reader what to do … and don't say *'If you want to find out more …'*. Be straightforward. Tell them what to do. Like this – *'Find out more – call today'*.

Stephen Church – Copywriter Pro

Stephen is an SEO Copywriter. He uses his love for language and knowledge of marketing to help businesses get more clients – writing words for their websites which are clear, concise and compelling. He loves working with businesses of all sizes, especially those who understand the immense value of engaging commercial content.

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Choosing the right print partner – what to consider

Janet Braunston – Braunston Print

The history of digital printing is relatively short compared to printing as a whole, which dates back to 1439 when Johannes Gutenberg first used printing to mass-produce books, the most famous being the Gutenberg Bible in 1452. The two main processes are lithographic (litho) and digital. However, there are many other processes, each with its own unique use.

The first digital printing presses became available in the 1990s. Digital print is faster and cheaper than litho for smaller runs, usually up to 1000 pieces, as no plates have to be made and printing can be produced straight from print-ready artwork. In the past, there was a great difference in quality between litho and digital print, litho being much superior to digital. However, as digital machines have progressed over the years, the difference has become minimal and not really noticeable to the layman.

Lithographic is a print process that uses metal plates which press the ink into the paper repeating over and over again. The plates are expensive and time consuming to produce, however after the plates have been made, the actual printing process is cheap to run and is, therefore, more cost effective for larger quantities. Litho print orders take longer to produce as the plate has to be made by a specialist before printing can commence. This type of printing was invented in 1796 by German author Alois Senefelder as a cheap method of publishing theatrical works with the plates originally being made from limestone.

Types of print companies

High Street and business printers are usually independent companies that produce print in-house and are more likely to be open to assisting you with projects and any ideas you may have. They would be able to produce samples and explore alternative processes advising you all the way. You often find that as a print company becomes more established, they invest in a wider range of equipment to offer a varied product range. They usually have an established network of partners allowing them to offer a complete print service.

Over the years, online print companies such as VistaPrint have increased their market presence. They are targeted at a very specific market sector. Typically, out of the three options of “Good”, “Fast” and “Cheap” you can have two of the three options. If you want fast and cheap, you’ll probably find the quality is inferior, choosing good and cheap is likely to be quite a slow process and good and fast can be expensive. Digital printing is getting closer and closer to obtaining all three.

Most online print companies can be cheap and fast but usually lack the ability to produce bespoke or quality work. Customer choice from an online print company is very limited; there are usually few options available. Control of the whole process can be lost due to the automation online companies have to use. It’s more difficult to get personal advice and ideas. Artwork is rarely checked so any errors are not always flagged before printing commences. Their pricing and timescales are not always transparent. They are good if you want a quick and possibly temporary supply of print.

Print brokers are another option. These are print companies, usually with knowledge of the print industry, that don’t actually produce any print in house but they buy print direct from High Street or business printers on your behalf. This usually means a more expensive service as you’re using their knowledge and contacts but you as the customer can lose an element of control over the print process. Therefore going straight to the actual printer could be less expensive and more flexible.

Usually print companies specialise in certain processes i.e. digital print, litho print, screen printing, offset printing, solid ink printing and finishing, so it would be advisable to speak to several print companies to explore which type of print you require and would be best for your order.

Printing materials

When you think of print, paper is the obvious form. It comes in different textures, sizes and shapes. Paper is very versatile and taking a standard flyer and adding a fold can make a huge difference to the finished item, increasing the impact of your marketing material. However, the range of printed material has dramatically increased in the last couple of years. Even as technology evolves and online marketing grows, print continues to remain an effective tool. Printed literature is important and has an impact on your customers. Because it's tangible and can come in various forms it has a physical presence.

For example, business cards are usually the first contact with other businesses, especially when networking. The quality of your print and paper can have a big impact on the impression of you and your business as well as a good way of giving people your contact information.

Recent research results have been released by DMA Research, which states that 72% of People still judge businesses from their business cards. You don't have to spend a small fortune on all singing, all dancing print and specialist finishes to produce an impressive business card. Just a simple, clean, smart design on a well printed and finished card can make all the difference.

Another example is Direct Mail, which is printed material being sent to potential customers using Variable Data Print (VDP). VDP gives you the ability to personalise printed material. The DMA Research Institute states "In 2017 print marketing response rate surged by 190% with 43% more customers responding to direct mail than in 2016". This type of process can only be done digitally not lithographically.

The fact that each print is changed to support the direct mail i.e. name, address, any independent information you require, would mean that an individual plate would have to be made for each print if printing with litho, this would not be viable. Digital printing takes the VDP information and imports it directly onto the paper as the artwork is printed. You can get the same personalisation with this form of printing as you can with email marketing.

Paper isn't the only medium on which you can print, there are all sorts of printed items that a good business printer should be able to offer. Promotional items such as mugs, magnets, pens, keyrings, coasters, garments, just to mention a few. A good way to make your customers feel valued is to provide them with a branded gift, which also provides them with a constant reminder of your services.

There is a huge variety of ideas available for branded promotional items. While most SME businesses would not have the time or finance to take their customers on a golfing day, a small promotional item offers a cost-effective alternative way to say thank you.

There are so many types of finish on printed material there are too many to list but the main and most popular finishes on paper products are lamination, soft-touch lamination, foiling, embossing and spot UV which can go onto different textures and weights of paper. The finishes can be costly so consideration should be made into whether the additional cost will enhance the overall desired result.

When you have chosen a print company you feel you'd like to work with, there are a few things to keep in mind to help both you and the printer have a successful relationship. There are a lot of things to take into account when choosing the right print partner but speaking to two or three will give you an idea which company will suit you best.

It's important to choose a print partner that you feel comfortable with, where good relationships can be developed and with whom you can create a long-term relationship.

Proofing

Proofing is one of the most important stages involved in print! Don't be afraid to ask for a sample. It's very easy to misspell a word or get numbers around the wrong way, so always double-check the work and get a friend or colleague to check it too, preferably someone who didn't have any input into the original artwork. Printers, although they'll look for obvious mistakes, won't take responsibility for errors not noted at the proofing stage.

Colour matching

If colour matching is important, ask your printer for a hard copy proof as different machines will produce different shades of colour. No two PC monitors will produce the same colour shade even if they are of the same make and model, so don't go by what you're seeing on your screen, it may have very little resemblance to a printed proof.

In the same way, no two print machines will produce the same shade of colour directly from artwork so printing a proof from a home printer won't necessarily replicate what a business production printer will produce.

Lead time

Always let your printer know if your order is time critical. A good printer should be able to give you a timeline and they should be able to work within your schedule if they are given plenty of notice.

Paper/print mediums

As previously explained, there is a vast array of different papers and finishes to choose from. Paper weights range from 60gsm upwards; they can be coated or uncoated, textured or plain. Always be guided by your printer as some papers are not suitable for every type of artwork and not all finishes suit all types of media.

Janet Braunston – Braunston Print

Janet Braunston works together with her family in their print business which has been operating for over 15 years; starting with a couple of photocopiers. Having gone from strength to strength, Braunston has invested in new equipment enabling them to offer a full printing service including design, business stationery, marketing materials, large signage & exhibition displays, printed garments, laser cutting, promotional items, wedding & funeral stationery and finishing.

They are predominately digital printers but have access to lithographic print partners; although the majority of orders are undertaken in house giving control over the outcome.

Braunston pride themselves on being a friendly and professional company always happy to help. Got an idea and not sure how or if it will work? They love a challenge! Go and have a conversation with them.

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Section 5 – Operations & Resources

The operations of a business and the resources you use are the glue that holds a business together; underpinning the foundations of a successful organisation. Ensuring that you have systems and processes in place to support your organisation is an important consideration.

"Insanity is doing the same thing, over and over again, but expecting different results." – Albert Einstein

Managing your data effectively

Gayle Parker – Datasense Consulting

For many businesses, the regulatory landscape can be a confusing one. In this chapter, we hope to demystify the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) which came into force on 25th May 2018.

The GDPR applies to all organisations that process personal data. Personal data is broken down into three categories; personal, sensitive and criminal conviction data and is defined as data that can identify an individual.

In the "personal" category this includes name, address, telephone number, company email address, IP address and social media posts.

Under the "sensitive" category falls health data, biomedical, religion or trade union affiliations. In the final category falls anything relating to criminal convictions. The reason it's split into three categories is that you have to look after them in slightly different ways.

When you process personal data and by processing we mean "doing something with it" - this could be storing it on a database, looking after employees, providing services to customers or analysing traffic on your website, you need a lawful basis.

Lawful basis for processing

When you carry out any of these actions, you need a lawful basis for processing. There are six lawful bases and for each piece of data you need to choose one.

The options are outlined in the table below.

Once you have chosen your lawful basis, you'll need to document this in your record of processing activities and privacy policy which we'll come onto in a moment.

Lawful basis	Examples of when to use
Contract	When you're processing data on behalf of your clients
Consent	When you get specific, opt in consent to use data for marketing purposes
Legal Obligation	You have to pay taxes on behalf of your employees
Public Task	You're processing in the exercise of "official authority". This covers public functions and powers that are set out in law
Vital Interest	You're likely to be able to rely on vital interests as your lawful basis if you need to process the personal data to protect someone's life
Legitimate Interest	The GDPR highlights some processing activities where the legitimate interest's basis is likely to apply - ● processing employee or client data; ● direct marketing; However, it does require you to carry out a short, 3-part test before using this basis

If you're processing sensitive or criminal data, then you also need to identify a "special condition" to use. There are more of these and they are –

- Consent
- Employment
- Vital interest
- Legitimate activities of a foundation
- Public domain
- Legal obligation
- Public task
- Health and social care services
- Cross-border threats to health
- Scientific or historical research

It's worth noting that, if you're using consent as either your lawful basis or special condition, you'll need this to be specific and granular and you'll need to keep evidence (either electronically or manually) that you have obtained this.

Again, once you've chosen your special condition, you'll need to keep a record of this.

Registration with the ICO

The next step is to identify if you're a data controller or data processor. A data controller is an entity that makes decisions about how data is processed. For example, you might have employee's data that you process or business cards that you pick up from networking events.

This makes you a data controller and you'll need to register with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO – ico.org.uk). If you just process data on behalf of other people then you'd not need to do this step.

Record of processing activities

The first document you'll need to produce is a Record of Processing Activities. This is a document which is kept internally and helps you to map your data flows. This will need to include the following –

- Purpose of processing
- Categories of individuals
- Categories of personal data
- Categories of recipients
- International transfers
- Safeguards
- Retention schedule
- Technical & organisational security measures
- Lawful basis
- Condition for processing
- Rights available to the individual

This is usually done as an excel spreadsheet.

Privacy policy

The next document you'll need is a privacy policy which needs to be available at the point of data collection. This could mean on your website, on reception or on an app.

The privacy policy must include the following information –

1. Your contact details
2. What type of information you have
3. How you get the information and why you have it
4. What you do with the information
5. How you store information
6. What are the data protection rights?
7. How to complain

With these three documents in place, you'll be well on your way to GDPR compliance.

CCTV

There are a few areas that you may not realise are covered by GDPR. For example, the use of CCTV by organisations falls under the purview of the ICO and is covered under the Data Protection Act 2018.

This is because surveillance cameras are no longer a passive technology that only records and retains images, but is now a proactive one that can be used to identify people of interest and keep detailed records of people's activities, such as with ANPR cameras. This also applies to call recording and Body Wear Cameras.

Subject access requests

It's also worth noting that you'll be obliged to comply when an individual makes a subject access request. They can use this mechanism to find out what data you're holding on them and how it's used.

They can make a subject access request verbally or in writing. If they make their request verbally, we recommend you follow it up in writing to provide a clear trail of correspondence. It will also provide clear evidence of your actions.

What organisations should do

If an organisation reasonably needs more information to help it find data, you have to ask them for the information it needs. It can then wait until it has all the necessary information before dealing with the request.

An organisation should provide you with a copy of the data. It may do this electronically. If the individual needs the data in another format, then you must comply where possible.

An individual is also entitled to be told the following –

- What their data is used for
- Who you're sharing their data with
- How long their data will be stored, and how you made this decision
- Information on the individual's right to challenge the accuracy of their data, to have it deleted, or to object to its use
- The data subjects right to complain to the ICO
- Information on where their data came from
- Whether their data is used for profiling or automated decision making and how it's doing this
- If you have transferred their data to a third country or an international organisation, what security measures you took

GDPR isn't just about compliance. There are many benefits to your business from making sure that you're looking after your customer data.

Greater consumer confidence

GDPR compliance will prove to customers that your organisation is a good custodian of data. Your organisation will have to comply with a set of data protection principles under the GDPR, ensuring that the necessary framework is in place to keep data secure. Recent attacks against companies like Capital One and British Airways suggest that the consequences of a data breach can be devastating to your brand.

Improved data security

Cybersecurity breaches loom as a large threat to enterprises in the UK, with 68 percent of large firms in the UK having encountered a cyber-attack, according to the Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2017. With the scale and sophistication of these attacks growing each day, having a GDPR-compliant framework in place will extend your cybersecurity practices.

Reduced data maintenance costs

Complying with the GDPR can help your organisation cut costs by prompting you to delete data that is no longer relevant to your business. Your organisation will benefit from reduced storage costs.

Another cost-benefit of the GDPR is that your organisation will be able to engage with customers more effectively. The communication will be more personalised because of the granularity of the information collected, thus saving you pursuing uninterested consumers.

Increased alignment with evolving technology

As an extension of GDPR compliance, your organisation will have to move towards improving its IT security. Migrating towards the latest technologies – virtualisation, cloud computing, Bring Your Own Device, and IoT – can serve two purposes – one, giving you a way to more effectively manage the growing demand for data and two, allowing you to offer end users augmented products, services, and processes.

Thanks to the GDPR, your organisation's data will become more consolidated, ensuring that your data is easier to use and you have a greater understanding of its underlying value. This insight will let your organisation learn more deeply about its customers and identify areas where customer needs are unmet. By using customer information effectively, your organisation will be able to make better decisions and consequently get a better return on its investments.

Gayle Parker – Datasense Consulting

Gayle’s passion is helping organisations protect themselves, their customers and their data from the ever-evolving threats of the digital world – whether that's through consultancy or practical, hands-on training. When it comes to protecting your data, you’re in safe hands. Gayle has helped lots of organisations successfully prepare and implement programmes for GDPR.

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The basics of IT security

Chris Lambert – Blue Sky Computer Solutions

Let's start off with an uncomfortable truth. The bottom line is that your IT systems are vulnerable. As you'll have seen in the press, even with access to the best technology and talent, high-profile businesses, financial institutions, and governments are not immune to the possibility of an IT breach.

For an SME or sole trader without access to those high-level defences, not only is a breach possible, it's likely to be a relatively easy task for a skilled operator. The sad truth is that there is probably no way to stop a determined expert from getting access to your system.

Now the reality check. Before you permanently disconnect from the internet it's worth remembering that most of us are of little interest to a malicious hacker. The amount of work required to get into our systems is probably more effort than the return is worth. In truth, most security issues on small business IT systems happen because we accidentally created an easy opportunity. Think of it like encountering a pickpocket. If you carry your wallet where it can be easily accessed in high traffic tourist areas, you're far more likely to get robbed.

However, if you visit the same area and take a few sensible precautions to keep your wallet safe, you're no longer an easy target and therefore much less likely to encounter a problem. A few small concessions to security and you're safer.

It's the same with your IT. A few simple precautions and habits will go a long way to stop you being vulnerable. Here are 10 things to get you started. These are in no particular order of importance and you need to have a comprehensive approach to your security. Trust me, the people who want access to your system are looking for any way in they can find.

1. Get a good virus checker and keep it up to date. I can't stress that last bit enough. An out of date virus checker is a hole in your security. Virus checkers work for the most part by recognising the code that makes up the invading software. The development of new malicious software is a constant process and just needs a small change to the code in something like a trojan virus (a nasty little bit of code that hides, like a Trojan horse, inside other code) and it will slip through your checker. All good security programmes come with regular updates, so you just need to get into the habit of updating or setting them to automatically update themselves at regular intervals.

2. Speaking of keeping up to date, do the same with your operating system and key software packages. Yes, sometimes it can be a bit of a pain in the neck waiting for your system to update, but most of these revisions contain security features. Updates on operating systems are common and most of the time they are minor tweaks to the way the system works to increase stability and, as we already said, update the security.

3. Do your backups! And then for really key data, do them again. If you have a cloud-based back-up process and you also save your key data to a physical drive, you'll be able to get up and running again very quickly should the worst happen. It's a little difficult to advise you on what you should back up and when in an article such as this one because you'll need to personalise your backups based on your own needs. However, as a rule of thumb back up everything regularly and any really important data immediately or as soon as possible. The more important it is to the running of your business, the more important it is that you back it up after every change.

   The final key factor in backing up your data is making sure that your backups work. Once a month, test your backups. There's nothing worse than finding that what you thought was a working backup solution has, in fact, been a massive waste of time as they weren't configured correctly.

On a monthly basis, you should be testing it with a simple recovery of a few random files. If this works fine, then that's great you have what appear to be a working process. But, on a quarterly basis, you should be doing a full restore of your data to make sure that everything works. This is highly important if you're doing a full system backup and not just backing up the files.

4. Email security is extremely important. Many malicious virus attacks come from an attached file or document containing a virus or similar source of malicious code. The rule is simple. If you don't recognise the sender or even if you do and you're slightly suspicious of the attachment, then don't click on it or open it.

   Check first. You'd be amazed how many problems can be prevented by sending a simple email or a quick phone call/text message to ask the alleged sender if they actually did send the suspicious one. Email hijacking and spoofing that makes the sender address appear legitimate is quite common so it's not uncommon for this to fool the recipient into opening a link or attached file. If it looks suspicious, be suspicious!

5. While we're on the subject of email security, scam emails that trick you into handing over key information deserve their own entry. This is known as "Phishing" and often they seem to come from sources such as banks, shopping sites and so on. If you receive an email asking you to follow a link and enter your information in any way, check it. Remember though these can be very sophisticated and may seem to come from very legitimate sources such as HMRC. Often though there will be clear indications that the email isn't what it seems.

   Grammatical and spelling errors, email addresses that don't match the source, pixelated graphics and so on are common mistakes that will identify a phishing email immediately. The senders are not always so clumsy though. You may, for example, receive an email that informs you that a shopping account has been breached and you should follow the link enclosed to reset your password and payment details. Check it with the alleged sender first and contact them through a different method than the ones in the email you received.

6. Passwords are a pain! Remembering them is a nightmare and to make it worse you should change them on a regular basis. So, keep your passwords in a secure folder and install a password management system. There are many of these available for free or at a relatively low cost and they can really help. Varying your passwords and using random words and numbers also works wonders.

   It may make life easier, but you should never reuse a password over multiple sites. Gaining your password to a less important site or some part of your social media for example may not be the end of the world, but if that is the same password you use for your bank....I am sure you get the picture.

   If you want to get a rough idea of how secure your password is, try this website https://howsecureismypassword.net.

7. It's very common these days to allow people access to your network with their own equipment, so have a consistent Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy and ensure it's followed. As a little side thought on this as well, have you considered your data protection and GDPR responsibilities with BYOD access? Remember if someone has access to sensitive data such as names and bank details, you'll need to show due diligence in protecting the privacy of the information.

8. Beware of your social media trail of breadcrumbs. I sometimes sit with a new client and within minutes I can tell them about a range of personal information from family members to where they are likely to be at the weekend. Your social media trail can seem innocent enough but think about what you're posting. A trail that

shows you being on holiday with your family combined with all the other information on your profile could be an open invitation to being robbed.

9. Public Wi-Fi is a minefield. From virus distribution to spoof networks that masquerade as legitimate to access your data, public Wi-Fi is simply not to be trusted. Use it sparingly and only from trusted providers. Certainly, be very wary of sending personal data over a public network. This is a system that is being accessed by anyone who is in range and is generally not secure in any way. Do your online shopping and banking in particular at home. Would you write your card and pin number down in a coffee shop and leave it on the table for anyone to see? No, then why would you risk sending them over a public Wi-Fi system? If you must use public Wi-Fi, then invest in a VPN (Virtual Private Network). These can be purchased for all devices at a very reasonable cost and the extra level of security they provide is well worth the cost.

10. Finally, the best piece of advice I can offer is this – Don’t be afraid to ask. You won’t look silly; you won’t bother anyone and you won’t be admitting some kind of terrible weakness. There is a lot of free advice online (obviously check the source is trustworthy) and that is a good place to start. In the end though, you can’t beat simply asking someone who knows what they are doing about your security.

This is far from being a complete list but it’s a good place to start when it comes to thinking about your security. Safety is, for the most part at least, about good habits when online, having clear IT policies and keeping up to date.

Chris Lambert – Blue Sky Computer Solutions

Chris has been involved with IT Support since he used his first Computer back in the 80's and knew the path he wanted to take. He has worked within IT Support for Blue Chip delivery companies ensuring their systems and machinery keep the business running. He's also worked alongside the Technical teams at Barclays Bank, Lloyds and TSB.

He decided in 2004 that he needed a change from the corporate life and decided to start his own business. Since he has been trading, Chris has seen year on year growth within the business – by providing his clients with excellent customer service and keeping clients updated with changing trends within the industry. Going into his 11th year running Blue Sky Computer Solutions – the focus buzz word in the industry currently is "Cyber Security". With the links he's made from business networking, he's able to provide a wide range of services from basic IT support to Cyber Security testing and accreditation.

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Outsourcing – yes or no?

Dawar Ali & Rabia Waheed – Recruitico

You may be an ambitious entrepreneur heading a start-up or an experienced business owner with an established company. You may be part of a large enterprise or work for a charity. Whatever business/industry/sector you're in, whatever stage you're at, there is one thing you have in common with all other organisations out there – you have limited time and finite resources.

Limited time, finite resources mean different things to different organisations. For a start-up, 50 hours a week and a few thousand pounds might be all it takes to get to the next level. For a large corporation, this might just be what it takes to organise the Christmas party! However, the idea here is that no organisation has the luxury of unlimited time and infinite resources.

So, with that in mind – in order to generate value, gain competitive advantage and get closer to achieving objectives – the challenge for any organisation is to optimise time and resources. This involves focusing on activities that produce the best results and provide the best returns and eliminating less productive operations. Organisations attempt to do this by a variety of methods, including outsourcing and offshoring – this chapter aims to explore the two in detail.

Let's start by understanding the two concepts.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing is the practice of hiring professionals outside an organisation to carry out essential processes for the organisation. In other words, outsourcing is about moving internal operations to an external service provider. It's practised in a variety of industries across different functions. Commonly known practices range from customer support to manufacturing to the back office and IT support.

Offshoring

The concept of outsourcing and offshoring are often interlinked and sometimes confused with each other. However, it’s important to establish that they are two very different activities. Yes, in many cases the two are combined, but that doesn’t mean they are synonymous.
Unlike outsourcing, offshoring is primarily a geographic activity. The simplest example of this would be that in the developed regions of the world, goods and services are expensive because the staff required to produce, distribute and facilitate them are costly. In the developing world, by contrast, vast inexpensive labour pools provide low cost manufacturing and services.

Offshoring takes advantage of these cost differentials by relocating operations (services or manufacturing) from developed countries to the developing economies in order to sell the goods and services back in the developed countries at greater profit margins. Offshoring can be done as an internal operation, or as an outsourced activity via an external service provider.

Offshoring originally was common in manufacturing. However, over the past 2 decades, advancement in IT and communication technology have enabled services to be “offshored” increasingly. The IT industry in parts of Asia, for instance, has been powered by waves of offshoring by technological companies in the West. Customer services and back office support are other commonly known activities that have been offshored.

As with outsourcing, the activity has the potential to save money for both seller and consumer. Advocates also argue that these actions can stimulate wealth in developing regions of the world.

Combining offshoring and outsourcing

The ultimate means to enhance productivity while saving a significant amount of money is to combine offshoring with outsourcing. That is to move operations to a third-party that is based in an overseas location. This has been an activity in which many large corporations in the developed world have been engaged for many decades. Primarily for manufacturing, mainly in China and more recently for services in South Asia.

There may be a range of operational reasons for outsourcing and/or offshoring.

However, the underpinning motivation can be narrowed down to the following three key factors –

Time

To save time, or to achieve more in a given period. For example, a small business owner may outsource bookkeeping to a professional bookkeeper to save time and focus on more important activities such as business development. Also, the bookkeeper will probably get it done more quickly than the business owner.

At a different scale, several pharmaceutical corporations outsource clinical testing to specialist organisations (often offshore), this allows them to focus on core research and development and speeds up the processes of getting drugs to the market.

Cost

To reduce cost. One of the most common reasons for offshoring and outsourcing certain jobs is that it's less costly than hiring a full-time employee to do it for you. Staffing costs vary from country to country. Therefore, outsourcing to professionals in countries where the living costs are lower means you'll be able to use talent at a lower cost. However, before outsourcing, it's important to study the target market and have a realistic estimate of the employment cost.

Skill

To acquire talent. A number of regions around the world are becoming "hubs" for certain skills. For example, South Asia and particularly India and Pakistan have in recent years become known for IT talent. Several large technology companies such as Google and IBM have set up Global Inhouse Centres in the region.

Advantages of outsourcing

There are many reasons why a business may choose to outsource a task, job or a process. For example, some of the recognised benefits of outsourcing include –

- **Improved focus on core business activities** – outsourcing can free up your business to focus on its strengths, allowing your staff to concentrate on their main tasks and on the future strategy
- **Increased efficiency** – choosing an outsourcing company that specialises in the process or service you want them to carry out for you can help you achieve a more productive, efficient service, often of greater quality
- **Controlled costs** – cost-savings achieved by outsourcing can help you release capital for investment in other areas of your business
- **Increased reach** – outsourcing can give you access to capabilities and facilities otherwise not accessible or affordable
- **Greater competitive advantage** – outsourcing can help you leverage knowledge and skills along with your complete supply chain.

Outsourcing can also help to make your business more flexible and agile, able to adapt to changing market conditions and challenges while providing cost savings and service level improvements.

Risks and problems attached to outsourcing & offshoring

All these advantages are bound to make outsourcing look like a tempting option for your business but before you opt for this business model, it's important to note that there are also certain risks and problems attached to outsourcing & offshoring, such as –

- **Service Delivery** – Some professionals may not be able to meet deadlines or may not be able to provide the required quality of work. To avoid any such inconvenience, it's always a good idea to assign deadlines with enough time margin to handle delays or improve the quality of service
- **Confidentiality & Security** – Before signing up a remote worker or outsourcing a certain task, make sure all terms and conditions of work are clearly understood and agreed upon by both parties. Once an agreement has been signed make sure all the work requirements are met within said time
- **Management Difficulties** – Any changes at the outsourcing company can lead to difficulties such as resistance from offshore workers in signing up for more projects/ work

Outsourcing & Offshoring Models

Now that we have looked at the advantages and risks involved in offshoring and outsourcing, let's have a look at some common outsourcing models –

Global in-house centres (GIC) – This type of model is typically an offshoring practice where a company enters a new country and sets up its own operations (office/manufacturing/research centres, etc.). Usually, the motivation is cost-saving and/or access to a bigger talent pool; mostly seen with large corporations with pockets deep enough to enter a new country and set up operations there.

The upfront cost of this can be huge. However, it's likely to deliver long term benefits in savings and competitive advantage.

Business process outsourcing (BPO) – In this model, an organisation hires an external business to perform a certain set of processes. For example, outsourcing customer services to an external call centre. This can be both onshore and offshore.

Project outsourcing – Instead of hiring a professional for the long term, many businesses outsource projects to professionals offshore/ onshore as a one-time commitment. For example – in the initial stages of a business, business owners outsource web development to web developer.

Freelance marketplaces – Global connectivity has made it possible to hire freelancers from all over the world through online communities and platforms such as UpWork, Freelancer, Fiverr, etc.

Virtual assistance – This type of model can be both offshore and onshore. In this model, you can hire a virtual assistant for basic administrative tasks that you might not be able to do as a small/ micro business owner due to the shortage of time and resources.

Remote staff – As communication and global connectivity have advanced, they have opened avenues for collaborative work across the globe. You can now hire remote employees who work for you remotely without having to physically attend your workplace. Such employees often work from another country and can be hired through employment agencies.

The following table compares these different options.

	Cost	Control (Reliability, Accountability)	Quality	Compliance
GIC	VH	H	Controlled	Based on company policies
BPO	VH/H	L	V	V
Project based	H	M/L	V	V
Freelance	M/L	M/L	V	V
VA	M/L	H/M	V	V
Remote staff	L	H	V but closely monitored	Based on company policies

VH = Very High, H = High, M = Medium, L = Low, V = Variable

Questions to ask yourself

What are you paying for?

With all the available outsourcing/offshoring options, it's important to understand what you're going to buy, before opting for a model well suited for you. You can be buying either of three things –

1. A solution
2. Time
3. A combination of both

Let me explain this with the help of an example.

Example 1 – In the case of project outsourcing, if you're outsourcing web development, you're buying a solution and will be paying a price for the service.

Example 2 – In the case of remote employment, you buy time and will be paying your remote employee for the number of hours they dedicate for your work.

It’s vital to understand what you’re buying so that you can manage and prioritise things accordingly.

What do you need to outsource?

Value Mapping System

You might be asking yourself at this point, should you outsource/offshore? And if so, how do you determine what you need to outsource or offshore? The recommended model to answer this question is something called Value Stream Mapping (VSM).

VSM is a lean-management method for analysing the current state of an organisation and designing a future state for the series of events that take a product or service from its beginning through to the customer. A value stream focuses on areas and activities that add value to a product or service.

The VSM process is performed by listing each and every task that you carry out in order to provide your product or service to your customers. It’s a representation of the flow of goods/services/actions/tasks from the point of origin to your customer through your organisation and puts on display all the important steps of your work process necessary to deliver value from start to finish.

“Value” is everything that the customer would pay for. However, when it comes to mapping a value stream, there are steps that may not bring direct value to your customer but help to ensure that you’ll be able to deliver the final product/service.

A clear example of such steps are the quality inspections that are an irreplaceable step in every production process. Your customer isn’t paying you to do these checks but if you deliver a final product that doesn’t meet their quality standard or expectations, they’ll be less willing to buy from you ever again.

Once you create a value stream map – or in other words list every process, action and task that you perform to deliver your product or service, you'll have a clear picture of your organisation's core activities and areas that bring value. This will allow you to make better decisions regarding the activities that you want to outsource.

These decisions will vary for every business, and there is no right or wrong way to look at this. For instance, a business may decide to outsource "low-value" activities such as admin or back office support that don't generate direct value to focus on core activities.

On the other hand, a business may decide to outsource and offshore high-value activities (such as manufacturing or software development) to reduce cost and increase profit margins. Therefore, it's for the business owners to decide which activity they want to outsource in order to actively achieve its business objectives.

Conclusion

With advancements in communication technology, globalisation has made collaborative work easier than ever before. Outsourcing & offshoring are great options for businesses to reduce cost and improve work efficiency. However, before opting for a specific outsourcing model, it's important to understand how that model works, what are the attached costs and what activity do you want to outsource.

Dawar Ali – Recruitico

Recruitico find and manage highly skilled professionals in Pakistan to work remotely for businesses in the UK. The company works with various digital, creative and technology-related businesses, providing remote offshore staff including (but not limited to) developers, designers and digital marketing experts.

Pakistan has the 5th largest population on the planet and this model gives UK businesses remote access to the entire workforce of the country, along with the infrastructure and ongoing support to select and work with individuals with the desired skills. English is the official language in Pakistan, so communication is easy. The economic difference between the two countries means Recruitico workers in Pakistan get paid extremely well, while it still works out at surprisingly low cost for businesses in the UK.

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How can software improve your efficiency and performance?

Damien O'Dwyer – Business Growth

In today's connected world, cloud-based software has so many business-enhancing applications that almost anything can be achieved. Here are a few ideas that can help you save time, sell more and grow your business with ease and efficiency.

Saving time, increasing efficiency

Many businesses are already using multiple software applications and find that they are entering information repeatedly. Maybe you use some of the following in your business?

- Email
- Accounting software
- Document management (Dropbox, OneDrive, etc.)
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) (Infusionsoft, Salesforce, Pipedrive, etc.)
- Stock management
- Various apps on smartphones

Pulling it all together

Today most software will have API's (Application Program Interface) which allow them to share data. This means that you only have to enter information once and all your applications stay up to date.

For example, your CRM software will manage a client's progress through the various parts of your business. A typical scenario would be Marketing to Sales to Fulfilment to Accounts and on to Retention. All of these parts can be integrated, in one system or across your preferred marketing, CRM and accounts packages.

Enhancing the way you work

All companies conduct business in a particular way – how they deal with clients or prospects (external) and how they run their operations (internal). Let's take a simple example of a plumber (or any other trade) –

Mrs Jones calls up with a leaky tap. James, on reception, takes the call and finds (because she is already in the system) that Mrs Jones called up last month with the same problem. So, he asks, "is that the bathroom tap we repaired last month"? It turns out it's not the same tap, so James logs a job for her and can instantly see that Mark the engineer is in the next street and is 20 minutes into a 30-minute job.

"Will you be there for the next couple of hours Mrs Jones?", asks James. She will be, so the job is passed to Mark as his next port of call. Up pops an alert on Mark's phone and he arrives at the job within 20 minutes. He has the right washer in his van (all parts are managed by an inventory system, so a replacement is put in the stores for Mark to top up his van stock). He completes the job and gets Mrs Jones to fill in the job sheet, on his tablet, and pay for the job there and then on her credit card. A receipt is immediately sent to Mrs Jones and the job has been marked as complete. She also gets sent a satisfaction report and links to review websites.

Whatever you do, software can be used to follow your own processes, which as you can see in the previous example, can greatly save time; as well as delight your clients.

More time selling = more sales?

From a sales manager's point of view, software can provide tools that can help them identify the activities of their sales team and correlate these with sales performance. With these metrics at hand, a sales manager can instantly identify areas of strength and weakness and help them develop world-class sales teams. (even sole traders can use this sort of data to enhance their own performance).

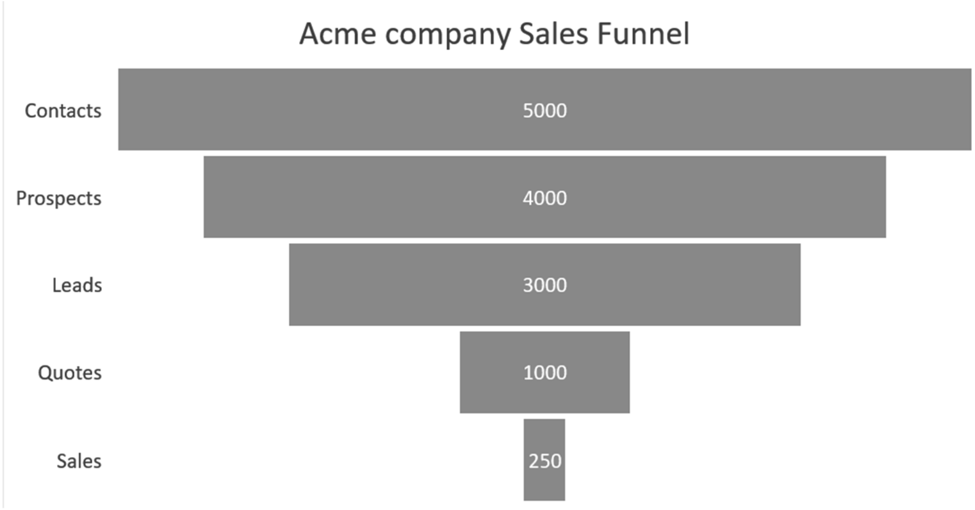
For example, one salesperson, Joe, is spending 20% of his time on the phone and another, Jan, just 5%. At first glance, you'd assume that Joe makes more sales, but the figures don't represent this.

Jan is actually closing 20% more sales than Joe. When we look at what Jan is doing differently, it turns out that she is spending 20% of her time networking, whereas Joe is only spending 5% networking.
Who would have thought, networking is more productive than cold calling!?

How about having a TV screen in the sales office showing up to date metrics on each of the team's performance? Now that is motivating, could this lead to more sales?

It's in the pipeline!

All sales processes run on a pipeline, here's a typical sales funnel.



These can be produced for each salesperson, team and also the entire organisation. It can have as few or as many steps as you need.

If you know the numbers, you stay in control!

- Are leads drying up? Do more prospecting by speaking with more contacts!
- Is your contact database too small? Do more networking
- Not closing as many deals as you were last year? Review lead volume and quality of work on your marketing message and arrange sales training

Lead routing

This can be automated so that leads can be distributed evenly between your sales team, sorted by skills, region, workload or client.

Assigning tasks

Tasks can be assigned automatically based on various criteria, again workload region, rep, task type and so on. Tasks can be manually overridden or assigned, and reports sent to management on task resolution and efficiency. Management can be alerted of overdue tasks so they can take appropriate action. Integration with calendars is also a very useful application.

Fewer meetings, more sales

Hands up if you feel you spend too much time in meetings?

With well-written software, essential meetings and those with clients become the norm. Why? Look at the agendas of the meetings you have, could the information passed be made available using software. Could tasks be assigned instead of holding a meeting every time you want something done?

Reporting

Software can be used to report on every aspect of a business. Some common examples –

- Profitability Reports
    - Find out which customers make the largest revenue contribution
    - Who are the most loyal?
    - Who will buy again and again?
- Sales Cycle and pipeline
    - Find and fill holes in your pipes
- Sales Forecasts
    - Analyse trends (seasonal, regional, demographic, salesperson, etc.)
- Conversion Reports
    - How well are sales being closed?
    - What is the best marketing channel?
    - Who is the best salesperson and why?
    - What products or services sell best/most profitably, etc.
- Business goals, KPI's, etc.
- Customer satisfaction
    - By product or service
    - Asking clients
    - Generating the most referrals
- Referral Marketing reports
    - Best referral partners
    - Most referred product or service
    - Best networking events, etc.
- All manner of financial and operational reports! (tasks, meetings, time to payment, product performance, individual & client metrics, etc.)

Voice over IP (VOIP)

Basically, a VOIP system replaces traditional phone systems and puts your communications in the cloud. One of the key benefits of this technology is the ability to record calls, which gives you the ability to listen to calls made by staff. Great for training salespeople and all staff in customer care. Plus, if staff know they are being recorded, they'll be careful what they say and how they say it.

Don't be "Big Brother" about it, let staff and clients know you're doing it! Let them know you're using this to help them provide a better level of care to your contacts and help them be the best they can be.

Call & email logging plus reminders & automation

Emails and phone calls can also be managed & recorded in your CRM so you can manage how often you're proactively "touching base" with your contacts. A good CRM will allow you to set contact frequency for every client, individually, globally or in groups.

For example, Acme Estate agents know that, on average, their customers move home every four years. They don't just call up every four years and ask the client if they want a valuation, they do the following, with reminders and automation from their software –

- After three weeks they call to ask if they have settled in OK and if there is anything they need. (The estate agent has contacts in home improvements, furniture and so on)
- Every month they send a community newsletter offering the sort of help and advice every homeowner needs
- Every eight months, they call to see if the client needs any help with renewing utilities, insurance, etc.

- Every year the client is sent an anniversary card and bottle of bubbly to celebrate another year in their home
- At year four they are sent an up-to-date valuation of their new home and a special offer should they wish to move! An up to date valuation can now be included in almost every communication they receive! (the valuation can easily be calculated by the CRM as the agent knows how much property values fluctuate for any given area!)

It’s no wonder Acme are one of the most profitable agents in town with numerous awards to their name!

Pop ups

Software can be used to pop up a client/contact record whenever a client contacts you. Wouldn’t it be great to be able to answer the phone like this? “Good morning Mr Smith, how can we help you today? How was your holiday to Majorca, did you get the widget we sent you last week? Are you calling about the engineer visit you’re expecting today, Mark is actually en route and should be with you by 11?”

And there’s more …

Much, much more, we have only scratched the surface but hopefully you now can see how software can enhance businesses from solopreneurs to multinational corporates!

Here are a few more ways software could enhance business –

- **GPS tracking** – know where your vehicles are, how long to the next job/meeting/delivery – all managed from your base.
- **Inventory management** – save on stock levels with “just in time” management, automatically replenish stock, alerts on best and worst performing products/services.

- **Tick tock** – Track time spent on projects/clients, bill automatically, bill according to fee earner (in a law practice a senior partner would be charged out more than an administrator).
- **Document archiving** – No more storage costs or bulging filing cabinets. Instant retrieval. Customer documents are attached to their record.
- **Document merge** – Use common documents across the business, these can be templated and merged with client data. Think insurance documents, legal, contract and quotes.
- **Resource libraries** – Sales information, technical sheets, handbooks at the touch of a button, anywhere 24/7/365 – Reporting on which client has been sent (and opened) which documents.
- **Digital signing** – Need a contract signed? Just email it to the client, they can sign online, instantly passing the job for fulfilment.
- **Staff/visitor management** – who is on site, in work or visiting your premises – e.g. a recruitment company needs to know which temps turned up for work so they can bill their client or arrange for a replacement if there is a no-show.
- **Customer tracking** – automate reviews, feedback and customer data so you know who buys what, when they will buy again and ask happy clients to shout about it!
- **Marketing automation** – create campaigns (phone, SMS, proximity, email, digital, website, social media, offline, snail mail and correspondence) that attract, nurture, generate leads and delight your customers. All targeted and personalised to each customer avatar/profile.
- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** – Smart Calendars that provide information you need before a meeting. Personalisation across different media e.g. website content delivered to website visitors based on previous visits or tracking cookies on their computers.
- **Route planning** for those out on the road.
- **Chatbots** that can “replace” human customer service agents. AI is still in its infancy, but the potential is only limited by our imaginations! Many of the above tasks can be carried out by AI already. AI will simply enhance the experience.

- **Out of office** offering the ability to work anywhere that has a WIFI or phone signal.
- **Client self-serve** – Ecommerce and its integration to businesses, not just those selling "stuff" online. Customer service management – call backs, problem solving, order tracking, document management and much more.

Damien O'Dwyer – Business Growth

Business Growth Midlands was established in 2006. Damien is a business growth and internet marketing expert with 22 years' experience in the industry and has a technical IT and sales background. Damien with his wife and business partner, Danielle, possess a myriad of skills and knowledge across the spectrum of internet marketing and business growth in general. Their primary reason for being in business is to help my clients make more money from their business, using the internet.

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Protecting you and your business

Tim Mullock – Adept Asset Solutions

You've woken up on the first day of your new enterprise – the master or mistress of your own destiny; Chief Executive of your own lunch box, answerable to no-one, responsible for just you and as the saying goes "The Buck Stops Here".

Three days, three weeks, three months, three years – they are the milestone you'll have to pass before your business is established – what & why could go wrong? The list is very long and can have twists & turns you never imagined.

Let us identify the common ones: your health, ability to generate new leads, to sell, to earn enough to pay your business' running costs, pay you an income, payment terms, customers not paying, suppliers not delivering, will your car will it make the next service and so on?

Many business coaches will tell you why your business might fail: no business plan, knowing your numbers and so on – but fundamentally there is only one reason and that is money – or the lack of it.

If we roll back time before you had started your business, you may well have been employed enjoying a salary and all the benefits it would have. At this point one of the most important actions you could take is BORROW. Or put in place lines of credit to the maximum, re-mortgage the house, extend your credit card limits, maybe even take out a bank loan. Why? Because the moment you're self-employed either as a director or a sole trader, your ability to borrow again will be based on your business profits.

Having a financial safety net can take a lot of pressure and stress.

Let's take the example of a young entrepreneur. Just a couple months into her new venture and her car lets her down; it won't start – the engine has failed. Missed appointments, re-scheduling of the diary, lost income &

reputation, relying on the bank of Mum & Dad to bail you out – what if they can't!

Or perhaps you run a shop? A lady hairdresser local to me had her salon flooded due to heavy rains; customers turned away – will they come back? In her case, she did have the right insurance – **Business Interruption Insurance** – who knew such a thing exists? It does and provides enough money (there it is again) to keep trading.

My first mention of insurance as a means to underpin your business – you can insure pretty much anything, health, trade, cashflow, premises. To get insurance, there normally must be an insurable risk – for our hairdresser & flooding that's easy. It's your health that can prove tricky.

For example, **Private Medical Insurance** can be arranged as there is an identifiable risk, but can you afford it, will you pay the premiums or will the business? Your income or profit certainly there may not be much as your accountant will be beavering away to reduce your tax bill. You've had fantastic treatment that a private doctor can provide but you're broke as you have no money.

Permanent Health Insurance

Critical Illness Insurance may have saved the day if it was a major illness but not an accident. Accident insurance covers just that or at best provide a temporary solution to your money worries. It's only when you're established and you're regularly making profits that an insurance company will consider the risk and insure your income up to retirement age – **Permanent Health Insurance** (PHI) pays a regular income that can be inflation-proofed for months, even years, until you have recovered, making your recovery so much easier

Many moons ago, one of the first PHI policies I arranged was for two brothers running the family business of Saw Sharpeners – obviously a risky occupation. It still took some convincing the lads needed cover, let alone finding an insurance company prepared to take on the risk. Six months into the policy, Steve was involved in a serious car crash, luckily his only injury was a compound fracture of his right leg but was off work for two years due to complications, physio, etc. His salary was insured, so his mortgage was paid. The business survived because Steve wasn't drawing a wage – a double cost to the business.

Many businesses are said to fail in the first five years. Many, however, equally succeed and one of the best pieces of advice I believe is to do with your payment terms. Big business may run on 90 days, which is fine for them – they already have the cash-flow to absorb the costs of these payment terms. Often they employ a team whose job is to pay late & collect early. A business buddy of mine had a contract with BT. Not only did they pay late but offered to pay 80% of the bill for paying on time, thinking they were doing my buddy a favour! Don't be afraid to ask for payment upfront or 7 days at the most – unless there are special reasons you have no requirement to be your customer's or suppliers bank.

Now your business is established, you have staff, you might even have merged with another business as a partnership or co-shareholder. The business is turning over and making profits even when you're not there, you've afforded yourself a holiday or two. What are you going to protect now?

Protecting Profits

You, or maybe another senior member of your team, is the driver in the business making profits, you've paid back those early borrowings you set up when you first started and all is looking good.

I remember discussing this issue with two guys who had formed a partnership. John was a technician and highly trained in his field. Peter, equally fundamental to the business was the sales manager. They were looking to move premises and needed to borrow from the bank. John, a keen glider pilot was bullish about not needing cover, as was Peter. But, after much wrangling, they agreed to insure Peter not only for the loan they were about to take on but a surplus to hopefully fund the recruitment of another “Peter”. The ink had only just dried on the application form when Peter died in a mid-air collision with another glider. The business was protected. And whilst John was distraught because his lifelong friend was no more, the business did survive because of this policy.

It’s important to remember that this type of cover may also include Critical Illness. So, if in the story above, Peter had say suffered a heart attack or even a form of cancer, the policy would have paid out again to the business – this is known as **Keyperson Insurance**.

Many people in business get Keyperson cover confused with other sorts of Insurance. Remember way back when you were employed, you probably would have had **Death in Service** running in parallel with your pension; typically 3 to 4 times salary. In today's world of self-employment, life cover can be arranged, paid for by the business, premiums benefit from tax relief and importantly using the correct sort of Trust, the proceeds payable to your family or nearest and dearest will be tax-free too. No benefit to the business, but it can make sure your loved ones' standard of living may be maintained – this is called **Relevant Life Insurance**.

Having insured your Keyperson your thoughts might turn to succession. Who is going to run the business or inherit the shares? Or if there are multiple shareholders, would a deceased shareholder’s spouse be useful in running the company or a hindrance? How would you feel about working all the hours in the day keeping your business afloat and have to give away half of the profits to the widow of your business partner? Pleased? No, I thought not!

I recall playing golf with a co-owner of a very successful business making multi-million-pound profits and on an upward curve to viability. We were discussing how the business was owned as we moved from hole to hole. The company was limited with two friends and their spouses are shareholders, each with 25%. They had discussed many times about the possibility of either of the main shareholders dying. As they all got on, they couldn't see there could be a problem.

For ease, to explain how as the round progressed and how on realisation my playing partner went into panic mode let's pretend their names were Smith & Jones. Jones was much older than Smith with whom I was treading the fairways and Mr & Mrs Jones holidayed frequently together leaving Mr & Mrs Smith to run the business with Jones Junior their son working on the shop floor. Jones Junior was a lazy good for nothing and Smith didn't really like employing him but did so as he didn't want to fall out with their co-shareholders.

The golf was going well and Mr Smith was holding his own and it was around the tenth hole I raised the question about succession planning and what were Smith's thoughts should his much older partner Jones die somewhat prematurely? Smith dismissed this as not a problem as the three remaining shareholders got on so well. It was when I raised the ante and suggested that may not be so favourable if both Mr & Mrs Jones had say an accident on one of their many holidays. Looking puzzled Smith questioned why?

By the eleventh hole, Smith's golf was all over the place as it slowly dawned on him Jones Junior was no longer on the shop floor but had a seat in the Board Room having a say how the company would be run.

Shareholder Protection & Cross Option Agreement is the solution – a mixture of life insurance policies and contracts agreeing to use the proceeds from the life policy and purchase the deceased shares from their Estate. An addition of Trusts can make this a very tax-efficient transaction.

Importantly, Smith & Jones should have had a Shareholders Agreement as a bare minimum – this deals with how the company and the ownership will continue should any shareholder wish to retire or leave the company. A bit like a prenuptial agreement it can take away any disagreement and acrimony.

An extension of the Shareholders Agreement is a **Business Lasting Power of Attorney**. Most people are aware of having LPAs for their mum and dad. The business version appoints an Attorney or Attorneys to look after the business so decisions can be made, bills paid and dividends distributed should a shareholder lose capacity either permanently or temporarily. In the Smith & Jones scenario, the business had a very turbulent turnover despite its success and relied on the bank for support during the lean times – that support could easily disappear if either director were incapacitated in some way and the success of the company at risk.

In summary

- Get as much financial credit available to start your enterprise. Fingers crossed you'll never need it but just in case.
- Payment terms – you're not a bank – so why offer extended terms.
- An accident and sickness policy to give you a temporary income, should your health fail for 12 months, is better than nothing. Life cover & income protection once the business is established.
- Business insurance – you'd insure your car surely you should protect your business.
- Protect profits & ownership – a mature business should look seriously at protecting all that hard work building up the profits and have a succession plan.

Tim Mullock – Adept Asset Solutions

For Tim, the core of what Adept Asset Solutions does is about family. He started the company in 2013 to make estate planning local and straightforward. He has been helping people manage their wealth and estates for thirty years and reached the point where he knew he could help people more effectively on his own.

When growing up, Tim's uncle introduced him to the exciting world of stocks and shares. It gave him a passion for helping money grow and why wealth management was critical. He loves knowing his clients have peace of mind, knowing their wealth is protected and will stay in their family for generations to come.

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Section 6 – Personal

You're the common denominator in your business and therefore your well-being and development are key to the success of your business.

"Success is something you attract by the person you become." – Jim Rohn

Managing your stress and anxiety

Judith Hanson – Therapies Of The Mind

If you're new to running your own business, you may be thinking "I'm my own boss now and I'm in charge! No more unreasonable work demands to cause me stress. No more anxiety about that next promotion or losing my job". In one way you're right but running your own business brings its own stresses –

1. You've lost the support system of colleagues
2. Success or failure is all down to YOU now
3. There are likely to be lots of tough decisions to take
4. The financial pressures may be greater e.g. will I make enough to pay the mortgage this month?
5. You're likely to be doing everything – working in your business providing a product or service and handling sales, marketing, admin, finance, recruitment and so on
6. There may be doubts – was it right to launch out on my own; is this the right product or service for my market; who exactly is my market and how do I get to sell to them?
7. …and because of all the above and more, you may find yourself working longer hours than you ever did before and, initially at least, earning less money!

So yes – there will be stress and possibly anxiety and because you're a sole entrepreneur or part of a small business, it's even more important that you're able to manage it – no sick pay if you're ill, probably no business if you can't work.

Let's start by having some working definitions of stress and anxiety and how to spot that you're beginning to suffer from them so that you can take action.

STRESS isn't classed as a mental illness and is usually regarded as short-term – a response to specific trigger situations. In addition, it can be seen as positive or negative – we all have a “tipping point” up to which pressure is positive and enables us to work more effectively and efficiently.

Beyond that point, our performance deteriorates and if the stress continues for a significant period of time, it MAY lead to anxiety. So we can think of stress as a response to a threat.

ANXIETY is a mental illness and may result from stress, where the symptoms continue after the original threat has gone. However, it can also appear without any obvious trigger, often involving excessive worrying about future events (that probably won’t happen!) and focusing on unlikely catastrophic outcomes from these events. It can also result from unresolved past events or be the result of behaviour learned from the adults who brought us up (or often a combination of all of these).

It’s important to remember that neither stress nor anxiety is the result of character defects or signs of weakness. Stress is a hardwired response to a threat and anxiety is an illness, no different from heart disease or cancer – and equally dangerous if not treated.

So, let’s first of all look at that automatic threat response – fight or flight, which is a beautifully designed emergency system for life-threatening situations.

However, it’s generally inappropriate for dealing with most of the threats (or perceived threats) that we face in the developed world today. This response is out of our immediate control so we need to learn to recognise it and have ways to then manage it.

Fight or flight?

We inherited this from our pre-human ancestors and it’s an automatic survival response. When faced with an external threat, like a sabre-toothed tiger wanting to eat us for lunch, our only choice is to attack or run away as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately, this valuable system is also triggered by “perceived” threats, which are frequently internal worries about things like money, a business failure, a difficult customer or staff problems.

Frequently these things may not have happened and may never happen or, if they have happened, their effect may be much less than we fear.

The hypothalamus is activated by the threat (real or perceived) and initiates the firing of nerve cells and the release of chemicals, primarily cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline; all of which are designed to get us ready for action. This is essential if we’re faced with that sabre-toothed tiger or are trapped in a burning building, but not so helpful if we’re faced with an irate customer or unhappy employee.

The Autonomic Nervous System, which controls our flight/fight response, is in fact two subsystems and neither of them should be activated for most of the time. In the presence of a threat, the Sympathetic subsystem activates with the physical effects shown in the table that follows.

When we have killed our tiger or reached safety then the Parasympathetic subsystem is activated to reverse the previous changes, bringing us back to a balanced point where neither subsystem is activated.

The key effects that result when the Sympathetic subsystem is triggered by a threat are accelerated heart rate and breathing, dilated blood vessels plus partial or full shut down of non-essential (at this point!) functions like the digestive and immune systems. If our stress continues after the threat has gone or we’re triggering the ANS by worrying continually about what might happen and how bad it will be then we remain in this highly alert state and everything in our environment is perceived as a threat to our survival.

This is when our Stress becomes Anxiety and, apart from the effects of the mental illness itself, we’re causing long term physical damage to our cardiovascular system and operating with poorly working digestive and immune systems.

Parasympathetic	Sympathetic
Slows heartbeat Constricts blood vessels in skeletal muscles	Accelerates heartbeat Dilates blood vessels in skeletal muscles – leads in the long term to cardio-vascular problems
Constricts bronchi – breathing *can* return to normal	Dilates bronchi in lungs Fast, high breathing
Stimulates salivation Inhibits sweat section	Inhibits saliva production – dry mouth Stimulates sweat secretion – sweaty palms
Stimulates digestion and peristalsis	Inhibits digestion in stomach and peristalsis in intestines – nausea and long-term digestive problems
Immune system back to full operation	Partially shuts down immune system – over long term leads to infections and other diseases
Liver – inhibits glucose release Gallbladder – stimulates bile Stimulates pancreas	Liver - stimulates glucose release Gallbladder – inhibits bile Inhibits pancreas
Eyes – constricts pupil	Eyes – dilates pupils

Symptoms

The symptoms of Stress and Anxiety are very similar so it can be difficult to know which of them you're suffering from. The symptoms are extensive and vary from individual to individual but can include –

- Frequent headaches or pains in other parts of the body
- Sleep disturbance and consequent tiredness
- Feeling light-headed, faint, or dizzy
- Excessive sweating, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate, muscle tension
- Difficulty swallowing
- Frequent illness
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Excessive worry
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability
- Having difficulty quieting the mind
- Poor concentration and memory
- Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
- Exaggerated startle response

The key way to distinguish between the two is therefore primarily –

1. Stress – is there an obvious trigger for the way I am feeling? For example, the need to meet a key deadline and do I feel better once that trigger is removed?
2. Anxiety – is there no obvious trigger or do I still feel bad even though the threat is over? Am I continually worrying about what might happen in the future and always assuming a worst-case outcome to real or imagined issues?

We all need to learn our "stress tipping point", understand what our triggers are and have strategies that we know will help us to keep our stress positive. In addition, it's important to accept when we have "tipped over" into anxiety or are suffering from some of the above symptoms without an obvious trigger and be prepared to seek help if needed.

Self help

Things that you can do yourself to manage your stress and minimise your anxiety include –

1. Deep breathing – this is my number one suggestion because of the potentially huge benefits from doing something that is easy to learn and to do whenever needed. The in-breath and the out-breath should be slow and even and the same length. Ideally, each should be to a count of 6 but you may need to start with 4 or 5. If you're pretty stressed then you're probably breathing high so you need to breathe using your diaphragm and the easiest way to do this is by placing your hands on your belly. You should feel it rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out – if it doesn't then push it out as you breathe in.

   Most of us need to spend some time practising this and it may seem a bit odd at first but persevere. Then use that breathing whenever you feel any of your stress symptoms – it will tell your brain that the threat is over and it's time to reverse those "get me ready for action" effects of an activated ANS and move you into "rest and digest" and then into balance.

2. Practice Mindfulness – this isn't just a case of listening to the odd meditation CD. Mindfulness is a very effective way of dealing with both stress and anxiety, but it will only do this if you do daily practice. This doesn't mean having to spend hours meditating – there are short breathing meditations you can do and you can also practice Mindfulness while doing regular daily tasks like eating or cleaning your teeth.

The key is to focus on what is going on with you in the present moment – how does the brush feel against your teeth and gums, what else is going on in your mouth, how is your body – relaxed or are some of the muscles tense?

Mindfulness isn't about changing anything but about learning how to become aware of how you're in this moment, so it can help you become aware of how stress is affecting you.

There is no objective other than awareness and it's important to accept that your mind will wander off into thought and noticing this and gently guiding your mind back to your current focus is, in fact being mindful.

3. Find what works for you – it could be –

    a. Listening to relaxing music
    b. Taking regular exercise and it doesn't have to be in the gym. A walk in the fresh air can be just as beneficial for relieving your stress
    c. Keep a journal. This can just be a "brain dump" or documenting what went well each day as well as what went badly (when we're stressed we tend to focus on the negative and forget the positive). Some people like to keep a "gratitude journal" or just remind themselves before sleep of the 3 things they are grateful for today
    d. Eat well – it's worth keeping a food diary, documenting not just what you ate but what your mood is. That way you can learn what foods elevate your mood and which ones make it worse. The general advice is lean protein, fruit and vegetables and complex carbs. Drink lots of water and limit caffeine
    e. Avoid "self-medicating" with alcohol or food or whatever is your "drug" of choice. It may give you a quick lift but it will make things worse in the long run

f. Get enough sleep – you'll be more efficient if you do. Don't work on those accounts late into the night and then expect to get into bed and fall into a deep and restful sleep. If you're
having trouble sleeping –

   i. Establish a regular bedtime routine that relaxes you and tells your brain and body that you're preparing for sleep.
   ii. No electronic devices or TV in the bedroom.
   iii. Make sure the bed is comfortable and the temperature and light levels are right for you.
   iv. Use earplugs or noise-cancelling headphones if your partner snores!

Other help

If your stress has become so bad that you're struggling to run your business and enjoy your life or if you're suffering from anxiety, then the above self-help ideas may not be enough and you may need to seek alternative help. The options are –

1. Visit your GP, where in general you'll be offered medication. Anti-depressants may have side effects and it may take a while to find the right one for you. Many of them also take a number of weeks to have any significant effect. Whatever you do, once you have started don't just stop, as you need to wean yourself gradually off the medication under your GP's supervision.

2. Therapy – find a therapy and a therapist that's right for you. The two most significant "indicators of success" for therapy are that you're comfortable working with your therapist and that you believe that what they do will help you to get better.
   There are the "talking therapies" like psychotherapy or counselling and therapies that enable you to learn skills to "self-manage" like

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Ask for referrals if you know someone who has sought this kind of help. If not, then do some homework and talk to several therapists so that you can choose wisely and, if you start therapy and it's not helping, say so. I'd always want to know if one of my clients was not feeling any benefit so that I could look for alternative approaches.

Personally, I believe that hypnosis provides an excellent "environment" for therapy because it offers a state of focused relaxation in which to do whatever is appropriate – but then as a clinical hypnotherapist I'd say that and it may or may not be right for you!

3. You may also need help with making the necessary lifestyle changes such as seeking help with insomnia, seeing a nutritionist to help improve your diet or a personal trainer to guide you into an appropriate fitness regime.

I trust that this article has been useful in helping you to understand what is going on when you experience stress or anxiety and given you some ideas to help yourself or seek help when you feel that you need it.

Judith Hanson – Therapies Of The Mind

Judith is a qualified Clinical Hypnotherapist (DipCHyp, HPD, MNCH), and NLP Master Practitioner and Coach. As a member of the National Council for Hypnotherapy (NCH) and the Complementary and the Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) she is bound by their Codes of Conduct.

She also undertakes regular training, as well as frequent supervision, to update her knowledge and skills, in order to provide a professional and effective service.

My aim with all my clients is to help them to be the best they can be. Sometimes in life we feel overwhelmed. When this happens we may need help and support so that we can:

- manage our thoughts and feelings
- start to accept ourself for who we are
- take control

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Goal setting (and achieving) – the key to success in business

Kathy Bassett – Action Coach

Focus and discipline – I am sure you'll agree that to achieve anything in life we have to focus on it and stick with it through thick and thin. When we finally achieve our goal – boy do we feel great!

As business owners we can sometimes get so wrapped up in the day to day running and management of our companies that we forget to take a step back and revisit the goals we set ourselves, can't we? Goals help to ensure you're on track to move forward in the direction that is right for you.

I am very aware that some small business owners have run successful businesses for years without really ever having a clear set of goals to aim for. This can lead to resentment and frustration when you realise you're spending all your time and energy on your business rather than with those you love, which can result in a poor work-life balance. Taking time out from your business to sit down and define your direction of travel can really help to bring clarity. The starting point should always be for you to set out what you want to achieve and the timeframe in which you want to achieve it.

Doing this objectively and realistically helps to ensure that the goals that you set are more likely to be achieved, and just imagine how good it's going to feel knowing that you have achieved the goals you set yourself.

When it comes to setting your goals you need to ensure that they are S.M.A.R.T. Setting a mixture of short, mid- and long-term goals for your organisation means that you always have something to strive for, while having the satisfaction of achieving those smaller milestones along the way; or to think of it another way, goals help you to climb that mountain one step at a time, or eat that very large elephant a chunk at a time.

I recently climbed Pendle Hill in Lancashire. Now my main reason for visiting was not to find out more about the witches in days gone by, or to test my fitness level, it was to carry out the wishes of my mum to scatter her ashes in the place she lived as a youngster. On the way to the start of the climb, I had a short conversation with someone who had just come down. She said that she goes up every day and it doesn't get any easier and she found it more difficult than Ben Nevis. Ok I am thinking, I can still do this – no training required!

So we, as a family group, walked together to the lower slopes and scattered some of the ashes and drank champagne. Our less mobile members then went off for cups of tea. My 25-year-old niece and I then climbed the hill, not actually together I might add. We both made it to the top, me after many more rest stops than her. By the time I reached the top she was laying on the grass chatting on Facetime with her friends.

One thing I didn't mention was that I chose the steep and theoretically quicker route rather than the more meandering way. I was able to make it to the top because I had a goal and a reason and I made it in short bursts, so my rest stops were my milestones and I felt really good once I got there and the view was just beautiful.

For your goals to be SMART they need to be …

Specific – as simple as it sounds, your goals need to be specific to you and your business. Think about what you need to do to move your business forward. For example – next quarter, add 10% to last quarter's net profit, or longer-term quadruple last year's net profit over the next five years.

Measurable – how are you going to quantify your success? This might be an increase in the number of products sold, or the amount of new business that you secure. Either way it's important that you're able to track the results of your goal setting and take action on the way if you need to.

Achievable – the goals that you set should be challenging enough to give you something to strive for, but not so hard that you give up trying to get there. If you set yourself a target that is very easy, then you're likely to lose interest and give up. If, however, you set stretching goals and don't quite achieve them you're likely to achieve more than if you set easy ones in the first place.

Results orientated – Always focus on the result and what it will look like, for example, an extra £100k in the bank, or debtor days down to 20 days, a new machine operational in the machine shop.

Time-framed – mapping out a timescale for achieving your goals is so important. There is nothing like a looming deadline to make you focus on the task in hand. Of course, there may be times when due to circumstances beyond your control you might miss a deadline, but the chances are that if you've set one, you'll have made significant steps towards meeting it which, in itself, should be viewed positively. Conversely, if you've procrastinated about doing something, they can provide the nudge you need to get a particular job done.

It's important to remember that just because you've set your GOALS, it doesn't mean that you'll actually achieve them. If you've ever embarked on a New Year's resolution only to give up two weeks into your new regime, you'll know what I mean. You now need to put the hard work and effort in to reach those goals, this needs to be done consistently and you also need to be focused on getting to the endpoint.

Now as organised and disciplined as you might be, you'll need help to achieve your goals, so, as part of your GOAL setting strategy, it's vital that you share your vision with the rest of the company. You're going to need your team to be onside in order to achieve them, so it's important that they are fully committed to the process and what is required from them. You'll find it beneficial to have a team or company brainstorming session where you're able to ask for their ideas and thoughts on how they can help you make both the small and large changes required to move you all in the direction of your long-term goals. This process helps the team to connect with you and understand how they fit into the overall vision. In doing so you should also be able to work with them on timings of the milestones that you're going to need to reach along the way.

Having shared your vision, each member of your team will then need to be given a list of the contributions that are expected of them and their responsibilities. This structured approach serves two purposes, firstly, and most importantly, it ensures that they understand the role that you need them to play in achieving the GOALS and therefore the ultimate success of the business. Secondly, it means that you can delegate some of the workload that will be required to get you to the endpoint.

Using your GOALS will help you to bring a structure to everyone's day. Many of the business owners I work with find that they are often pulled from pillar to post working "IN" rather than "ON" their business. Being able to spend time each day working on the specific areas of your business that need your attention without distraction helps to ease the pressures that you feel.

It's important that you regularly review where you are in the process of achieving your GOALS. This enables you to see where you're falling behind or overachieving and ensures that you focus on that area and update your plan accordingly. There's nothing like a guilty conscience to make you more determined to get those little jobs done, or in fact, increase your goals, or decrease the timings if you're ahead of the game. Conversely, it can also stop you feeling guilty about taking time out to focus on a specific area of the business, particularly if you view it in terms of knowing that you're working "ON" your business.

As a Business Coach, I know that for some clients having a set of GOALS to focus on can feel like they are working with a heavy monkey on their back. Part of my role is to help them to realise that this isn't the case, and to celebrate the steps, be they smaller or large, they have achieved on their journey to date. This allows them to tick off their achievements as they accomplish them which helps to inspire and motivate them to carry on.

Kathy Bassett – Action Coach

Kathy's passion is working with owners of successful small to medium sized companies. She can help you to bridge the gap between where you're now and where you really want to be, whether it be to grow your business long term, or to implement an exit strategy. Kathy helps you focus on both business and personal development, whatever is needed.

Kathy puts her success as a business coach down to years of experience as a manager and qualified accountant, as well as regular self-development by attending management and training courses.

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Epilogue

Whatever you have taken from this book, the only way that you'll move your business in the direction you want it to go is by taking action.

Contemplate the different sections of this book and what you need to do to improve those aspects of your business.

If there are any areas that haven't been covered, then please send an email and let us know, so that this book can be updated for future editions.

Please feel free to contact any of the authors to find out how they can help you in their area of expertise.

If you have found the book useful, then pass it on to your connections or let them know about the website where they can get their own copy.

If you haven't, then let us know how we can improve for future updates of the book.

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Since 2003, Paul has worked with 100s of businesses as an independent advisor. An experienced small business owner himself, Paul understands the trials and tribulations that are so common in the world of business. The purpose of The Small Business Toolkit is to provide a guide to the "pillars" of business - Strategy, Finance, Sales, Marketing, Operations, Resources & Personal. For each pillar, you'll find articles covering vital information and advice to help you on your way. In the early days of a business, it's easy to make mistakes. With the collective wisdom and experience of its authors, The Small Business Toolkit shines a torchlight onto the potholes on the road.

This book has only been possible due to the generous contributions of its authors - readily sharing for your benefit, their immense knowledge and experience. Paul considers each to be an expert in their field. The Small Business Toolkit is packed with gems of vital information that will prove beneficial to any business. Whereas the book is by no means a complete anthology, it does cover many key business issues.

Paul plans for The Business Toolkit to be evolutionary - "Over time, I'll always be on the lookout for new contributions from business experts to add to the book. I'll be delighted for anyone who'd like to contribute to get in touch. I'd also love to hear feedback and encourage readers to let me know their thoughts and what they'd like to see added to the book to improve the reader experience."

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