



GROW YOUR BUSINESS

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Many Hands Make Light Work - The Value of Mentoring

Small business owners run a perpetual to-do list, constantly checking things off and adding more just as fast. In doing what needs to be done in order to keep the business afloat, self-development and improvement can be overlooked.

Choosing a mentor is the best way to ensure that you continue to grow, learn and progress along with your business.

The most successful owners realize they don't know everything. It's important to play to your strengths while recognizing your weaknesses so you can select a mentor who compliments both.

Not sure how to find a mentor? If your weaknesses are concentrated in the area of understanding what you need to do to create an awesome business, then you should have a chat with us!

However if your challenges are more technical or of an operational nature, then it might be a good idea to join up with a professional or industry group, attend seminars and find ways to get involved in your community.

This is the easiest way to be surrounded with other like-minded business people who are generally willing to act as a teacher to other self-starters.

“Focus to those who are where you want to be.”

Start by shadowing your selected mentor to get an idea of the day-to-day responsibilities. This is the time to ask questions and take notes but be mindful of the fact that they are running a business and generously allowing you to gain valuable experience through their eyes.

In any business, advice flows from a number of outlets - family members, friends, colleagues - most will have something to say. It's best to focus your attention on those who are where you want to be. They have been there, done that, after all.

Business mentors are there to answer questions and provide perspective, but like any other type of coach, they are also there to boost confidence and provide support and encouragement.

Be sure to choose someone who you respect, with similar values and who you feel comfortable with. Go with your gut instinct on this one and select a mentor who will challenge you to continue lifting the bar.

Additionally, being able to challenge your mentor is how you encourage collaborative learning. It allows your mentor to also gain something from the relationship. If your mentor intimidates you, you will not enjoy the fruits that this symbiotic relationship should provide.

Remember that securing a mentor is much like any other acquisition - you must consider the return on investment. The relationship must be constant, the impacts tangible and the developments obvious.

As a rule of thumb, if three months go by without much progress, it may be time to consider a change.



Who Is Influencing Your Customers? - How to Listen On Social Media

We've heard it before - listening and hearing are two very different things. If you are one of the growing number of businesses that are utilizing the advantages of social media, you should appreciate that it is vital to listen to your customers, actively hear what they are saying and then act upon it.

“It has the power to increase or reduce your chances of success.”

Without any one of these three steps, the benefits that come from social media engagement might be squandered.

Monitoring and information gathering is useful but it does not help you understand your customer. And that's a key advantage of social media engagement.

Social care, or the practice of utilizing social media for customer care purposes, is how many of your customers look to interact with businesses.

How do you prove that you are listening? Speed - It's that simple. The faster the response time, the more valuable the client feels and the more likely they are to remain a customer, refer your business or provide positive feedback.

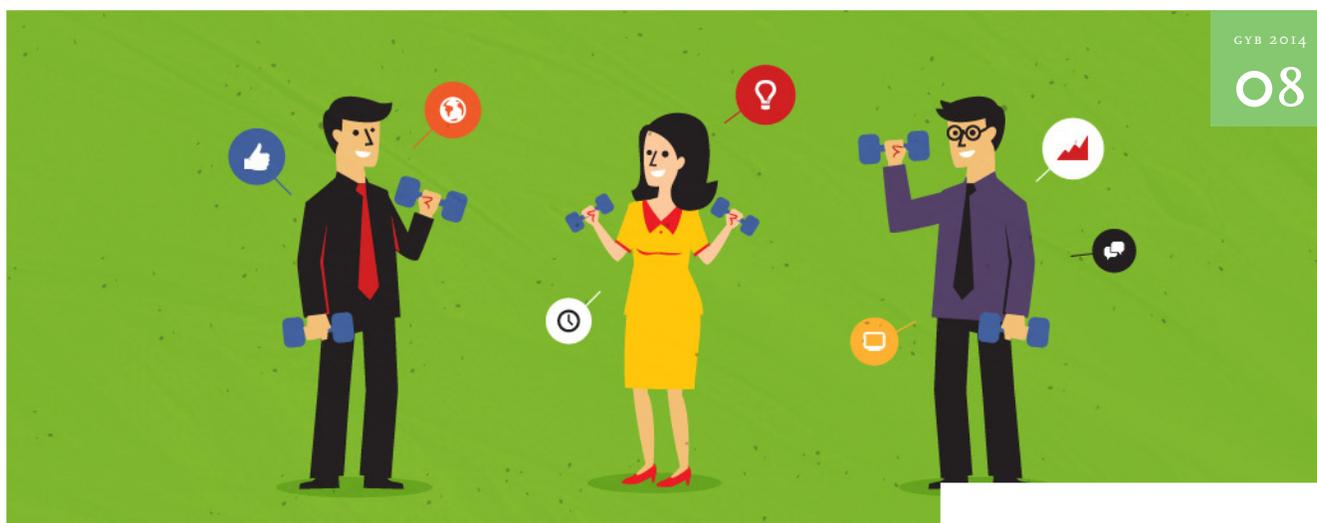
Ready to start providing social care?

1. Identify your target market - this is tied directly to your ability to understand your clients and the ones that are best for your business.
2. Identify your influencers - pay close attention to the type of person who is interacting with your page, not the number of people who "like" or "follow" you. They are just meaningless numbers. It's another case where quality rules over quantity.
3. Determine important key words, trends and SEO strategies that are relevant to your business.
4. Develop a social business strategy that stands on its own - managing your reputation and staying relevant are two key goals.

Social media has the power to increase or reduce your chances of success. When ignored, social care has the ability to transfer control of your business to a few vocal customers. Having a strategy in place can pay huge dividends.

NEED LOCAL INDUSTRY SUPPORT?

Building a great team and consulting with mentors are great starts to a successful long-term business plan, but at some point, you may crave the advice and opinion of an even more diverse group. Consider cultivating an advisory board. The board should aid in the decision making process, keep innovation flowing and encourage productivity, growth and profit. Professional colleagues, trusted business partners and experts in the industry should be part of your group.



Take Back Your Time by Building A Great Team

Embarking on the journey as a small business owner may often feel like a one-person job. By building the best team possible, you may start to alleviate that stress and free up some valuable time.

Building the team can feel a bit like a game of Tetris- the key is to find how they all fit together to build the most secure structure.

When building your team:

1. Identify the areas where you need the most support. This could be an area where you are overwhelmed or lack essential skills. Start filling these areas first. Feel good about product development but know nothing about accounting? Fill the void.
2. Clarify roles. Clearly identifying what needs to be done, defining what skills are necessary and determining where and how to look for the right pieces to the puzzle works best.
3. Hire only when you need to. It is tempting to add to your team as the business grows, but consider the

investment in time, commitment and resources each additional hire requires.

4. Be prepared to sell your business vision to potential team members. Great teams are fueled by passion, and not necessarily the desire for a bigger paycheck.
5. During the hiring process, always trust your gut. Your team member should not be a clone – diversity works best – but they will ultimately need to be a good fit for your organization.

Once you have a team in place it is your responsibility to ensure that they remain committed and motivated. Team synergy is vital to ensure the best chances of success.

Consistently build your team based on a cultural fit, not just on qualification. Engage employees on a deeper level to learn about their personal and professional goals and work toward helping them achieve them.

There is nothing worse than getting stuck in the constant loop of hiring and firing - it's exhausting and demoralizing.

If you want your team to be effective, set clear expectations. They want to succeed, but they need to clearly understand the goals.

“Constant motivation to build a long-term dedication.”

With your team in place, it is time to start delegating. That was, after all, the whole point! As the business owner, delegation is not about passing the buck and it's not about abandoning accountability.



Using Webinars to Promote Your Business

No matter how quick the pace, it seems keeping up with technological changes is one of the greatest challenges we face! Just as we get comfortable with one form, a new slew comes to town.

It's not essential to be an early adopter. The key is to select the tried and true methods that best fits with your business's goals.

Utilizing webinars to market your business is certainly one such trend worth further examination.

Webi-what? Indeed. A webinar is simply a web-hosted seminar, hence it's cutesy mashed up name.

Webinars are certainly not new to the small business scene, however, the technique of implementing them as a marketing strategy is.

Need ideas? Interview an expert, feature a customer or vendor, host a Q&A, preview a new or upgraded service/product or simply teach something.

The three major benefits of webinars over traditional marketing channels are:

1. They provide a level of engagement that content based articles cannot - they encourage a conversation and rapport.
2. They are more efficient in terms of time - no travel necessary, no wasted time in between meetings, etc.
3. They are customizable and without the limitations set by scale - hosting 1000 people is no problem when done online!

“Webinars encourage a conversation and time efficiency.”

Webinars are usually instruction or education-based and are a great way to interact with customers, engage potential clientele and encourage users to try out a service or product you offer.

However, they can be used to equal effect as a post-sale tool. Hosting these kinds of webinars helps to establish your brand as helpful, encouraging and an expert in the field.

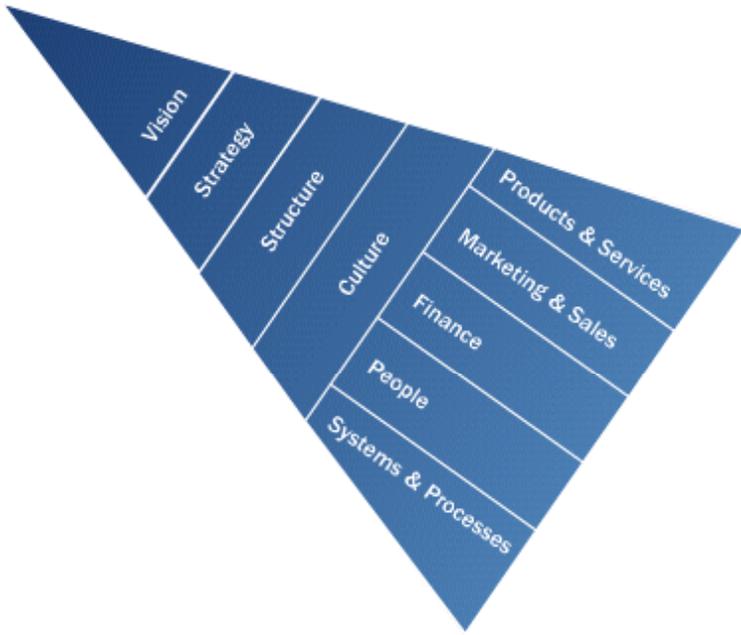
Drive traffic to your website by incorporating Search Engine Optimization into your webinar listings.

Describe the content of your webinar using key words. This can improve your search engine rankings. Hosting an archive of webinars supported by lots of juicy keywords can give you an additional boost.

Host a virtual web event, combining the benefits of the tradeshow with the convenience of the internet. Consider product briefings and demos or events that compliment current seminars or conferences in your industry.

Include lead-generating questions in the sign-up form to take advantage of the niche market users who are attending. Offer discounts or perks for becoming a subscriber or providing an email address to receive future news and event info.

Follow up the webinar with attendee feedback forms to best cater your next event to your audience.



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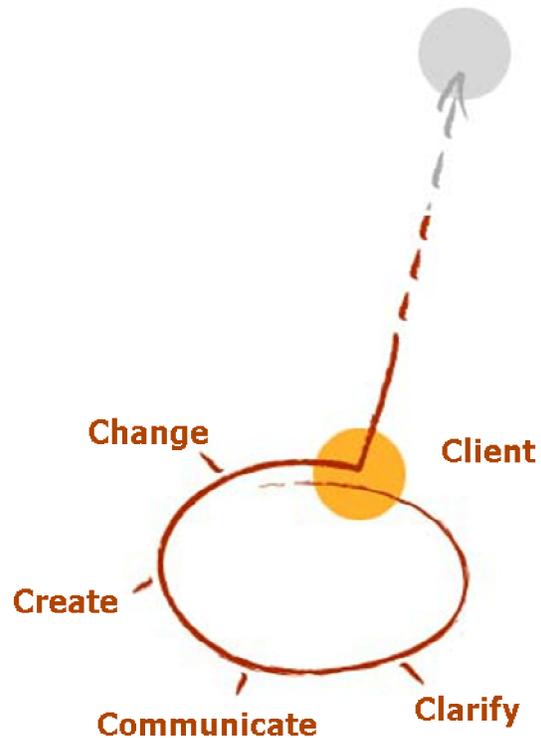
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CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

4080-8171 ACKROYD ROAD RICHMOND, B.C.

T: 604.273.1277

F: 604.273.8876

www.dshcpa.com

info@dshcpa.com

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T: 604.247.1077

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