



NDSU Extension

Small Business Newsletter

Business Owner Tips and Resources

January, 2012

Wow, another month has already come and gone. I don't know about you but this has been a January to enjoy.

The office activity keeps building. The first story below discusses a new fact sheet that is available. The background comes from all of the comments about how great it would be to own a business. While there is some truth in that statement, there is also a flip side – it doesn't come easy, it doesn't come quickly and it takes time.

Another new resource is a newsletter supporting business owners interested in having an online presence and social media and developing a food specialty business. You can find the newsletter at: <http://paper.li/UNLeShip/1319999929>. Soon an educational program on "Direct Online Marketing of Food Specialty Products" will also be released. We are just working on improving its web friendliness. Related to that, we are looking at a potential June workshop that will help you consider your online presence. Stay tuned for more details.

I hope you are finding these newsletters useful. I have noticed they are growing longer. Please let me know if that is a problem. There is so many useful articles that it is hard to know what to include and when to stop. I thought about doing 2 newsletters a month but travel schedules would sometimes make that harder. My thought is to have one slightly larger newsletter that I know I can get done than 2 small ones where I may miss getting them done. Any thoughts on this subject are welcome.

Well, time to sign off. I hope everyone is preparing for "Groundhog's Day." In my humble opinion, it is an overlooked holiday. So celebrate and let's see if we will be having 6 more weeks of winter or if spring is around the corner.

Till next time,
Glenn Muske
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Small Business Myths?? Or Realities?? – New NDSU Resource Takes a Look

Build it and they will come! Get rich quick! These are just two common ideas that you will realize when you own a business. For the real story, check out this new NDSU resource, Small Business Myths and Realities - <http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/agecon/market/ec1590.pdf>

Building Trust = Building Your Business

What are the key building blocks or values of your business? Have you asked yourself that question lately? If you have, then ask if your business is meeting the values you want?

A key element for any long term sustainable and successful business is the building of trust. Trust between you and your customers, trust between you and your suppliers, trust between you and your financial backers and mentors, and even trust between you and other family members.

Next you might ask in what areas do you need to build trust. Obviously it is necessary in your product or service. But trust must also be built in how you do business. Service is another area where you need to build trust. Building trust even needs to go beyond just your business, you need to think about building trust in your community and in your industry.

For more insight into building trust, check out: <http://www.trustedbusiness.com/blog/3-ways-to-earn-customer-trust/>

Marketing for Small Businesses

Thanks to those of you who participated in my survey asking in what areas small business owners needed more help. One clear area was in the area of marketing. This short article provides some simple, basic ideas that won't break the bank. They just require some time, some thought, preplanning, and continued effort. I am willing to bet you already know most of these things but just can't find the time to implement them. Bottom line, there is no time like the present. As Mark Twain said, "Many a small thing has been made large by the right kind of advertising." Check out: <http://vator.tv/n/1dfd>

A Top Marketing Tool – Customer Testimonials

Are you looking to build your business? A key marketing tool is getting customers to share comments regarding why they do business at your store. Gathering this information does not need to be scary or time-consuming. Try:

- 1-question testimonials – remember it also allows for a chance to fix problems
- Video
- Audio or written comments

Read the rest of the article for more information - <http://bit.ly/x8GTc1>

Starting a Small Business – It's All About the Money

Some of you may remember the line, "Show me the money," from Jerry Maguire. Well this line is even truer for startup small businesses. Early in the life of a business, cash coming in early and in increasing amounts is crucial. Most business owners underestimate the capital needed to start a business. Thus cash coming in takes on an even greater role.

The hard truth is that you need to be running a business that brings in cash and makes a profit. The business must bring in an increasing amount of cash and can do so over the long term. So how do you know if your business has that potential?

1. Face the hard truths – Crunch the numbers
2. Learn accounting basics. Know what it takes to make a profit. Just selling more at a loss will not create a sustainable business.
3. Get tough on slow pay or no pay clients

Cash and profits (don't forget to include all your costs as well as your time) are necessary. If you don't have both, you have a hobby but not a business.

More Customer Service – The “Apple” Model

Good products that are intuitive and easy to use, trained customer service help, and processes that allow for speedy resolution. These are the three core elements in Apple's customer experience model. How does your business fit? http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505143_162-57351047/make-customers-want-you-more-by-needing-you-less/

Social Media Complaint Response – How Does Your Business Rate?

A non-scientific poll found that 83% of businesses responded to complaints made via social media in 6 hours or less. How does your business compare? Perhaps more importantly, are you monitoring social media to even hear these complaints? You need to.

<http://smartblogs.com/socialmedia/2012/01/04/do-you-answer-the-social-telephone/>

It's the Planning, Not the Plan

Entrepreneur offers 10 business plan mistakes. All of their comments are excellent, but the first one, the reason to do planning is planning becomes management. The plan itself is just a first step.

If you are thinking of going into business, thinking of expanding your business, or just in business but have never done a plan, this article gives you lots of reasons to take the time to do some planning as well as how you use your plan.

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/222547>

Finding the Space to Work from Home

Many small businesses get started in a person's home. A common question though is where do you find the space. The answer is often to be creative. It may be a closet or even a corner of a room. Today you will find equipment that supports the at-home office by being portable and/or folds neatly away. Also with "cloud" technology working from home becomes easier. Check out the entire article at: <http://bit.ly/xtil7w>

Working from Home – Some Answers to Why

The idea of working from home often is relegated to (a) a great way of life or (b) not for the serious business owner. In some cities, zoning and regulations often make working from home difficult to do. So what are some of the myths about working from home and what are the realities?

One of the greatest concerns about working from home is not being taken seriously. And that is a real obstacle. Surprisingly the hardest group to convince is often family and friends. To much of the outside world, today's new tools and technology often make the home business owner look no different than the one who has a main street business. Being able to look the same,

means you should have a potential advantage in competing with other businesses for work since you should have a potential cost advantage, a second concern about working from home.

These are just a couple of reasons why working from home can be a great idea. Check out some other myths and realities at: <http://www.inc.com/eric-markowitz/5-myths-about-being-a-home-based-business.html>

Social Media – A Marketing Tool

You hear a great deal about the great opportunities of social media to help small business owners market and network. While social media may not be for everyone, it is increasingly becoming a more important part of a small business's need to be found and then remain in the consumer's mind. Two tools that help in that effort are:

Leveraging Social Media Beyond Social Networks - <http://bit.ly/yG70Nl>

Creating Social Media Buttons - <http://bit.ly/zykwjl>

If you want to receive more tips on ecommerce and social media, please sign up for my Facebook page and follow my Twitter posts. Also a weekly newsletter put out by the University of Nebraska – Lincoln and my office, Direct Food Marketing, <http://paper.li/UNLeShip/1319999929>, (don't be fooled by the name – these tips work for any business, can offer more help.

Business Opportunities – Buying a Franchise

Thinking of buying a franchise business. This can be a great way to start as some provide an enormous amount of support in management, marketing and even financing. However you need to carefully review the prospectus. Here are some tips of what to look for. <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/222438>

Tax Season is Here – Get Help Designed for the Small Business Owner

Online Tax Center Offers Tools and Resources for Small Businesses and Self-Employed

<http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/index.html>

If you're a small business or a self-employed individual who needs answers to tax questions, educational materials or tools to help you run your business, check out the IRS's Small Business and Self-Employed Tax Center on this website. This one-stop shop offers resources and online tools to help small businesses and self-employed persons such as:

- Small business forms and publications
- Online applications for an Employer Identification Number
- Employment tax information – federal income tax, Social Security and Medicare taxes, FUTA and self-employment tax
- Tax-related news that could affect your business
- Small business educational events
- IRS videos for small businesses
- A-Z Index for Business, a fast way to find information

The site provides important federal tax information for all stages of owning a business, whether you're starting, operating or closing a business.

Upcoming events

Feb 3-4, 2012 - [Dakota Grown Local Foods Conf & NDFMGA annual meeting](#) (Holiday Inn, Fargo - For more information or to register E-mail pritschet@nd.gov
March 20, 2012 – Pride of Dakota Annual Meeting – Doublewood, Bismarck -

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

Success depends on analyzing the opportunity to determine whether there is a viable opportunity. You simply can't force the market to embrace your business no matter how fabulous you think your product or service is."

--Susan Wilson Solovic

MORE INFORMATION

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