



STREAMLINE YOUR BUSINESS SYSTEMS

By Tracey Foulkes

An organised approach to your business systems can save you valuable time — and money.

Typically, entrepreneurs are ideas people: creatives, right-brainers, out-the-box thinkers. Ask them to come up with a way-out solution for picking peanuts in Penang and they are inspired to look, read and research. Statistically the first couple of minutes, hours or days spent on a challenging and exciting project yield high results. But sustaining this level of output is a challenge that many of us struggle with. We reach the euphoric plateau, stagnate and then plummet until the next great idea, inspiration or project hits our minds or desks.

I read once that strategy is nothing without follow-through; the same is true of ideas. For a business to experience continued growth and development, you need a firm strategy plus the desire, inclination, know-how and support to carry it through.

Bogged down by the ‘little stuff’

With the challenge of time and resources, businesses are struggling to do even the basics: following up with clients and prospective clients, placing orders, invoicing, managing staff, paying bills and other day to day tasks leaves no time for strategy or future planning. Focusing only on the ‘dots’ (fast, quick, easy tasks) with little focus on the ‘dashes’ (strategic, high focus, big picture tasks) leaves business owners wondering why their businesses are not performing as they hoped.

With time and desire issues in hand, here are the minimum building blocks you need to make sure your business does not become one of the failing statistics.

1. Financial goals

If you are not a number whizz the topic of figures, finance, rands and cents can send you into a blind panic. However, you don’t have to be a genius to formulate a financial goal that is also attainable.

Once you have a clear representation of how much money your company needs to generate, you can devise an appropriate 12 month plan to see that goal come into fruition. You can also keep check on your progress and make adjustments in your marketing efforts, or curb expenditure if necessary.

The layman’s formula for creating a financial goal:

Reviewing your previous financial year’s figures determine:

- Income less expenses less salaries = A
- A + desired salaries = B

- $B + \text{desired percentage profit} = C$
- (C is your financial goal)

2. Sales strategy

This strategy, fuelled by your financial goal, drives sales. Understanding your sales offering, target market, competitors, strengths and growth areas, you can make informed decisions on where you should be spending your valuable rands. This will ensure the greatest return on investment and best use of your time.

3. Operations manuals

In his book *The E-Myth revisited*, Michael Gerber waxes lyrical about building your business on systems. The operations manual, in essence, forms the basis of how you and your team perform your job internally and externally. This bible of a document is created by each employee within your team from the bottom up, and details the step-by-step process involved in them doing their job. The initial creation of this document might seem laborious or a waste of time, but focus only on the big picture:

- Your staff are accountable to a signed operations manual of exactly how they should perform their job (with specific outcomes and detailed criteria)
- Should they leave, they do not walk out the door with a wealth of knowledge that you've paid them to create.

Strategic focus

Choose one day a week to focus on strategy: be it finance, sales or operations. Instead of diving into email and other low focus, reactive tasks as you arrive at your desk, focus only on the big picture 'dashes'. This session is for working on your business: now it's time to step back, assess and reassess what you and your team are achieving while putting corrective actions in place before it's too late. Remember: strategy + execution = success.

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