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the resource place for solo-entrepreneurs

Making Success Simple: Effortless Business Planning for the New Year

It's that time of year again! Over the next two weeks, we are expected to wind down for the year and then instantly get geared up for a new year. No wonder so many of us are stressed for the holidays! It's not because of your in-laws, it's the opposing mandates to both relax and gear up in your business almost simultaneously.

How can you do both without going insane? There must be a way to be ready for the new year without breaking out the dreaded traditional "business plan". There is! Instead of spending hours or days in detailed planning for the New Year, you can spend a few moments or hours reflecting on how your business has transformed this year and where you'd like it to be at the end of 2003.

The Un-Business Plan

Mention the words "business plan" and most Solopreneurs are stricken with panic. Do I really need a plan? Where do I begin? I have no idea what to put in it. No one but me would read it anyway, so why would I need one? Even if you've written business plans in the past, you've probably wondered if it was really worth the effort. It is. But it doesn't have to be complicated. The key is in the approach.

The goal of a business & marketing plan is to create a basic map of where you'd like your business to go this year and in the years ahead. It helps you take daily actions and make monthly decisions because you know what your destination is. You can weigh potential choices by asking yourself, "Will this get me closer to my ultimate destination, or take me away from it?"

Take Another Look at Your Business

Often we get stumped when trying to create a "plan" because we are too close to our business to see it clearly. If the business hasn't been doing well, we blame ourselves and all our shortcomings (I don't know how to market myself, I'm not organized, etc). Instead of looking at what you need to do, be, or change, look at what the business needs to do, be, or change to be successful.

The key to seeing what your business needs is to look at it from a different perspective. I've talked in the past about separating yourself from your business and looking at it as its own entity. When you do this, you can see what the business needs, where it is going, and what to work on. It's much easier to determine what your business needs, and do what's best for it, than it is to try to motivate yourself to do something. Reverse psychology, but it works!

Making it Effortless

Often the main reason we have trouble planning for our business is simply because we view it only through our own eyes. Changing perspective can open a wealth of ideas you didn't know you had!

To gain perspective on your business, look at it as if you are viewing it from the 10,000 foot level, as an objective observer. From this vantage point, what do you see? Why is the company in business? What successes did it have this year? Where does it need to head in 2003?

Head to the Nearest Coffee Shop

Business planning should be fun and certainly doesn't have to be hard work. While enjoying the holidays these next few weeks, begin to think about what you want for your business and yourself. Or, take a few hours and visit the nearest coffee shop to enjoy the planning experience.

To create a basic business plan, answer these 4 questions:

1. What worked this year? What didn't work?
2. Where do I want the business to be in 5 years? What does the business need to do this year to get there?

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3. What 3 shifts does the business need to make this year?

4. What 10 things does the business need to accomplish this year? (no more than 10 -remember, keep it simple!)

If you want to add more detail to your plan, ask yourself the following questions:

- How will I measure my business success? - Number of clients? Money coming in? How much fun I am having?
- What role does the business play in my life? How does it serve me? How does the daily work I do in my business fit into my schedule?
- What does my ideal business and ideal client look like compared with last year?
- Are my products and services those that my ideal clients are looking for? If I'm unsure, how can I find out?
- Where are the gaps? Look for gaps in the business' processes, R & D, marketing, client retention, etc. For example: If I suddenly got 20 new clients today, would my business be ready to handle the work? What would the business need to have in place?
- What investments in equipment, knowledge, and/or personal growth does my business need to make this year?
- Do I have a strategy for working ON my business regularly (business planning, R & D, creating marketing strategies)? Will I do it an hour a day, or maybe one day per week or month?

Give Your Plan a Strategic Name

Just for fun (we are supposed to have fun in business, right?), create a theme for this year in your business. If you've worked for a major corporation, you may have noticed that they often have names and themes for periods of growth, major strategies, or big product releases. It helps keep employees motivated and clear as to where the company is going. So, is this the "Year of Going Virtual" or "Project Target Market" or maybe "Operation Passive Income"? Hmm...easy stuff to work on with my cafe mocha by my side!