

Rapid Business Planning

Heard this one before?

Ever heard these words? “Oh and by the way, could you let me have your business plan for review by Friday?” Sadly we sometimes need to produce a business plan against a serious time constraint and its rapid production is the priority.

Though there are many more sophisticated approaches, you can produce a pragmatic and valuable plan with a very straightforward structure.

The solution

This is what you do:

1. Do a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) – preferably with five or six colleagues for a couple of hours. Brainstorm the ideas under each heading and then highlight the ones you think are the most important. In the final document there should be no more than one page of A4 under each heading.
2. From the SWOT analysis formulate the key questions the management team needs to address (in the form of questions); limit yourself to no more than five to seven.
3. Think through what it is that you need to do to deal with each of these questions. Are the current activities the right ones to deal with the longer-term issues you have identified, and if not, how should you re-prioritise? The resulting actions should cover the main points only, and you should have a maximum of one page to deal with each of the key questions that came out of the SWOT analysis.
4. Now sit back and assess whether the plan looks sensible and whether it passes the three acid tests for which you must apply honest self-assessment.
 - * Test one: Do less, better. Are you spread too thin, and trying to do too much?
 - * Test two: Segment and focus. Are you really clear which customers you are trying to appeal to and are you focused on them? Which ones don't you want, and how will you disengage?
 - * Test three: Focus and segment: have you focused on the main issues in the business and broken them down into manageable elements?
5. If you were trying to pick holes in the plan, where would you start? Which bits look thin? Even if you are short of time, make an effort to do this. You may not be able to do anything about the weaknesses in the time available but at least you will be prepared if you are questioned! If at all possible, get someone else to critique the draft, and try not to be too defensive about the feedback!
6. If applicable, check the plan against the budget. Many

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organisations do not harmonise their planning and budgeting very well. If you find that your plan suggests that you will be doing things that were cut in the last budget review, whilst you will not be alone, it is better not to look inept! Have you got the resources to devote to the actions you have defined. If not, be honest and do not delude yourself that you will do it all.

7. You still have some time? Make it look good. Many business plans look boring. Given that your plan, and therefore the future of your organisation, will not be boring, take some time to introduce some graphics. After all, this is a sales document; you are selling your ideas about the future to someone else.
8. If time permits, you can now ice the cake. The first thing to do is to make sure that your set of actions looks like an action plan, so therefore each item needs name(s) responsible and a date for the next step. Produce a project plan with the main activities and their dependencies.

9. You are now able to put the cherries on. For our purposes these are the indicators that you are using to run the business. The financials will form part of this, but you should also be looking at other indicators of the strategic health of the business. Make sure there are not too many of them. Frequently used are:

- * Sales/customer indicators, such as proposal conversion rate, value of work currently proposed for, percentage of repeat business, months work booked forward
- * Staff indicators, such as turnover, absenteeism
- * Effectiveness indicators, such as percentage of chargeable days, percentage of projects coming in within budget.

Any set of indicators will focus the organisation's attention on what they are measuring. This often produces unforeseen effects; so if in doubt, stick to the financial indicators that you are familiar with, and introduce other measures when you have had a chance to think it through.

About ChangeBEAT

ChangeBEAT works with people and businesses to make change a positive and successful reality. We are **Technology Business Experts and Change Management Specialists** with a reputation and credibility built on a track record of equipping people to succeed. This flyer is produced in Association with Howell Schroeder of Schroeder Forbes.

ChangeBEAT has worked for leading companies in 80 cities across five continents. Our customers must constantly change to respond to heightened global competition, and they have engaged ChangeBEAT to help them deliver substantial, measurable benefits.

If you would like further information please call +44 (0)208 446 6946. Alternatively e-mail us at info@ChangeBEAT.com or visit our website at www.ChangeBEAT.com.

