



# Small business recovery guide



Find your harbor.



## **If you need to recover from a crisis**

If your business is facing a situation where external factors have impacted on sales and the very viability of your business is at stake, it's important to take immediate action to recover some business activity.

First, apply for the subsidies, grants or support available for your business and determine how long your cash reserves will last. This gives you a timeframe to put in place a number of actions to recover.

Crystallize your plan by reviewing each of the steps in this guide and decide what your objectives are for each:

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#### **Step 1: Set goals and involve everyone**

Having clear goals in place that you and all your staff understand will motivate everyone to achieve them.

#### **Step 2: Implement a short-term sales strategy**

Review each of the methods of selling more to each customer.

#### **Step 3: Develop a marketing plan and budget**

Keeping your timeframe in mind, develop a seasonal plan that can be implemented by you and your staff.

#### **Step 4: Measure your results**

Analyze your sales results and learn to focus on tactics that deliver results.

#### **Step 5: Reassess your plan**

Review each aspect of your recovery actions and decide how to allocate your resources.

# STEP ONE

## Set goals and involve everyone



Having clear goals in place that all your staff understand will help motivate them to achieve those objectives. If you're not clear about what you want to aim for, the harder it'll be for you and your staff to succeed.

So rather than having an obscure goal like 'increase sales', your 90-day objectives might be:

- To acquire 100 new customers spending on average \$500 each
- Have 20 existing customers make a second purchase over \$1,000 each
- Get 2,000 website hits a week with 5% of visitors buying a single product worth \$250
- Generate \$50,000 in new revenue from online sales
- Gain one new contract worth \$500,000 per year for 3 years

Collecting the results is critical for seeing what is working. You can:

- Collect customer data from in-store visits, phone call queries, or the number of sales calls made by staff.
- Collect the details of every new customer; ask them 'how did you find us, what made you contact us?' Collate this information to get a sense of how many new customers you are getting, and what promotion is working.
- Use online tools to find out who is on your web site and what they're clicking on. Follow up people who have downloaded your product information or watched your 'how-to' videos. As they have shown interest, they are worth following up as they will probably be easily converted into a customer.
- The same applies to social media metrics. You could have 5,000 followers on Facebook, and of those, you're looking to convert 50% of them into buying customers.

If you're engaged in product or industry discussions on LinkedIn or Twitter, you might aim to increase the number of interactions as a means of sourcing new customers, and offer industry whitepapers, technical product information, or instructions on deploying your product or service to generate leads.

This information will comprise your 'marketing key performance indicators' or KPI's.

### Ensure sales are profitable

All revenue is not equal. Don't sacrifice profit and strategy for a sales growth number especially if sales are hard to find.

An extra \$100,000 of revenue that has low margin, cost overruns, extra waste, product returns, is time consuming to implement, has poor paying customers and takes you away from core business isn't going to help long term. Your sales strategy needs to focus on the best products and best customers.

For example, identify the top 20% of products sold with the top 20% margin. These are the ones that you:

- Incentivize staff to sell
- Place in the highest traffic areas
- Profile in marketing
- Spend your marketing budget on
- Rank customers in order of most likely to least likely to buy and most profitable and contact them first

Before you do anything, analyze your current business data so you know that you're contacting your best customers first, who buy products that have the best margin. Some high-volume customers may not be the most profitable (which at times can be ok to shift product or use up spare capacity).

### Involve everyone

When you've laid out your goals and objectives, put plans in place to continually review them so that everyone stays focused. A simple planning cycle greatly enhances your ability to make continuous improvements. Aim to:

- Set measurable, time-limited targets.
- Write down your plans and place them somewhere that everyone in the business can view, like a whiteboard or even Post It notes in the staff room. Tick things off as they're achieved; it helps to maintain motivation.
- Think about rewards you can offer staff for meeting sales goals; it'll incentivize them to keep improving.

# STEP TWO

## Implement a short-term sales strategy



### Part 1: Sell more to existing customers

It's tempting to think 'I need new customers' to grow sales. But first spend a large chunk of your time on your existing customers. It's always easier to sell to existing customers than to new prospects. It's also cheaper as possibly you know them personally so it's easier to get in front of them.

Before you go along the path of identifying new customer segments, try getting more out of who you already have.

#### Sell more of what you already have

- Set up a call/contact campaign (do this in-house if you have small numbers of customers or engage a direct calling company if you have thousands plus) to promote directly to your existing profitable customers. Ask if there is anything they need (you'll be surprised how many say yes), offer them incentives or discounts, or pre-payment deals.
- Review any inactive customers and call those that haven't bought for a while, with the goal of uncovering new needs.
- Analyze customer buying behavior from your sales records. Identify complementary products and services they could have bought and then contact them with an offer.
- If your customers have upcoming trade shows or conferences, plan to exhibit or even attend so you can talk to them about additional needs. Much business can be concluded at networking and social events.
- Run virtual events or webinars if your market doesn't travel.
- Run an event that incentivizes your best customers to attend. It could be to view a demonstration of a products, joint venture opportunities, or even an invite to a sporting event to try and uncover any extra sales opportunities.
- Analyze local industry information for growth patterns. For example, if you sell to the construction industry, and you find that a particular region is seeing a growth in commercial building, chances are some of your clients in that region may also be growing. Ring them first.
- Encourage customers to buy in advance, especially if you're selling something people buy in bulk. For example, you could offer them a set price if they buy something 6 months in advance of when they need it.

#### Find new products and services to sell

- Attend international buying trade shows to assess new trends and products that you could introduce.
- Conduct a customer feedback exercise specifically about what else you could provide your existing customers that you currently don't.
- Conduct a competitor analysis (even worldwide) to identify if similar businesses to yours have a different product mix that you could adopt.
- Identify any strategic partners who have new products that you could resell or distribute to your current customer base.
- Go online and identify any new products or services you can offer, without needing to hold the inventory or equipment.

#### Set up a customer loyalty program

Reward your customers with incentives for being a customer.

Point cards and free perks are a proven way to increase customer engagement and improve brand loyalty. You'll often find that customers buy more when enrolled in a loyalty program. Implement one and you'll also see a rise in visit frequency, customer spending and satisfaction. And once people start talking about your loyalty program, you may even draw some new customers away from the competition.

You could host special events, giving your regulars first opportunity to sample or try a new product or service.

Spread word of your new rewards program through your communication channels, including email, social media, newsletters and employees. Encourage customers to try your new program by gifting them some starter points or purchase credits or by offering an additional percentage discount from their next purchase.



## Source supplier deals

This is an important one to consider if you source products to resell. Do your suppliers have bulk or obsolete product they want to shift? If your suppliers have a product they want to sell quickly, you could offer to promote it for them. You may even be able to promote a 'bulk supplier deal' to your customers and pay for the goods only when sold (on consignment). This eases issues with margin, cash flow, or being left with obsolete stock.

Many suppliers have products they can't shift; talk to yours about what they have you can help sell. They might even subsidize the advertising costs.

## Discounts

Offering discounts is a method of bringing new business your way, but beware of any erosion of margin. Some discounts tactics include:

- Offering discounts to regular high-volume customers above your listed prices.
- Organize a one-day-only event when customers can purchase goods at cost or get a complimentary upgrade on any service.
- Offer a buy one, get one free offer or a discount on their next purchase.
- Partner with a local non-competing business to each offer your customers a free or discounted service. This idea will only cost you time and should generate new business.
- If you're selling your products online, offer a discount for those that are purchased through your website, as this has lower costs for your business than conventional transactions.

Take special care that staff do not offer huge discounts to reach sales targets.

## Part 2: Sell more to new customers

Although we've just discussed the importance of retaining, and selling to, your existing customers, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't also focus on gaining new customers.

### Develop new customer profiles

- Develop a number of narrow customer profiles of the ideal new customer (one that pays on time, orders regularly, buys volume and refers customers to you).
- Match your promotions with your new customer profile. Use your customer knowledge to choose the best ways to attract their attention.

### Identify new markets

- Look for new distribution channels to expand your customer base, such as third party selling (Amazon, e-bay, iTunes etc.), and your website. Review your product range to identify what you can sell online because you're not limiting yourself geographically or from 9am – 5pm.
- Exporting can be a logical next step if you've been in business for some time and the local market is saturated. Before you enter the international marketplace, it's important to have a good track record locally, and the necessary working capital funds as exporting can be expensive to set up.
- Identify any non-traditional markets you may have overlooked such as government contracts, education, health care or even the military who often outsource civilian-based needs.

### Franchising

If your business operates profitably in one town or city there is a strong possibility that it will work in another. Determine if this business model can offer new customers fast, efficient and competitive products or services, and if there's a demand.

Franchises have the highest success rates and the lowest failure rates of any business in the US because they all come with built-in proven success formulas.

The [American Franchise Association](#) (AFA) and the [American Association of Franchisees and Dealers](#) (AAFD) are great places to start if you're looking to franchise your business.

### Other business channels

- Your intellectual property (IP) could be worth money in terms of royalties and licensing. Instead of exporting or setting up new markets, you could sell your designs or patents to other companies operating outside your State or region. You can find out more about this at the [United States Patent & Trademark Office](#) (USPTO) website.
- Look into buying other businesses that have different products. This can work especially well if you buy out a supplier – not only are you gaining access to their customers and making them your own, but you'll have their product range to sell from as well.

If your business is service based, come up with new services that enhance what you already do.

## STEP THREE

### Ensure your marketing plan is still accurate



You now need to develop a longer-term plan to ensure any sales gains are sustainable, and to see if there are any parts of your business that need to be amended.

#### 1: Check your competitive advantage is still relevant

People choose to do business with you for a particular reason, and if you've been struggling for sales in the past, then ensure you are still delivering value. You need compelling reasons for people to choose you rather than competitors. The need becomes even more urgent if your products or services are similar to others. You may have more advantages than you think. Audit your business to see how many of the following you have:

- Your product or service is clearly superior or better value for the money.
- Your product is unique, or new to the market.
- You've identified a niche market that others have ignored or served poorly.
- You stock products or offer services that others don't.
- You've patented your product or registered your design so it can't be copied.
- You offer a better guarantee or warranty than the industry standard.
- You sell through channels that competitors don't yet use.
- A great reputation.

Ideally, all of them. If the competition is significantly better than you on some of these, you need to fix this fast, or no matter what advertising and promotion you do, sales will not materialize.

Talk to your customers about what they value by:

- Forming a focus group of repeat customers. Find out what they like and don't like about your product/service and what related products they buy. Focus groups are great for getting opinions, while surveys are designed to give you statistics. Together, they can help you form a complete picture of your ideal customer and how you can meet their needs.
- If you have a customer database already set up, use it to email surveys out to them. If not, try placing a survey in-store or posting one online. Services such as [SurveyMonkey](#) are free to use once you register online. Make sure your survey is preceded by a message explaining what the survey is for, how it will be used, and that the information it gathers will be used confidentially.
- If you only have a few customers, then simply go visit them. Or if that's not easy, find out the conferences or trade shows/exhibits they attend and make sure you go. Often discussions away from the place of work generates the best information.

#### 2: Check your target markets

Who are your existing valued customers and do they still fit who you want to do business with? Often businesses find themselves with lots of customers, but the wrong type. Remind yourself of the kind of customers you want to maximize your chances of success.

Create a profile of the ideal customer. For example, a retail consumer target might be "professional women aged 25–45 within a radius of 25 miles from our store with an income of \$200K plus, wanting stylish clothing."

An industrial supply target might be "construction companies within the State with more than fifty staff needing our health and safety clothing."

Are your existing targets still viable? You may need to think about selling less to unprofitable customers and refocus on those that are, which will require you to consider new customer targets.

### 3: Check your pricing strategy

Price is perhaps the biggest influence on how your customers will perceive the value of your product or service.

If sales have slowed it can be due to a competitor undercutting, or the buying behavior has changed (for example buying online instead of local). If this is the case, you have major work to do.

Options include:

- Sourcing cheaper suppliers so you can drop your price yet maintain margin and profit.
- Searching for new products or offer services that don't have a direct low-price competitor.
- Start unbolting any fixed costs or unnecessary overhead so you can match prices without losing profit.
- Switch to customers that are less price sensitive, who appreciate the added value you bring to your business, as it's not just about price.

It's always healthy to review your prices and strategy on a regular basis; lowering them if you are forced to (worst case), increasing them if you can continually improve what you do (best case).

### 4: Check your promotion is working

You should have a pretty good idea from your short-term sales tactics which promotional methods are working. Spend more money on these and be ruthless and cut those that don't.

There are other promotional methods you can experiment with;

- Traditional methods like television, radio, direct mail and print marketing. New online media hasn't killed off these yet. Smaller communities often have local advertising options that just cover the area you want. Industry groups will have specialist magazines with tightly defined readers.
- Increase your personal profile, for example, you could appear as a guest speaker on a local radio show to talk about events in your industry.
- Don't forget signage; your location, your business vehicle and uniforms all add to the message.
- Advertise with strategic alliances through complementary businesses and do the same for them.
- Promote special events, such as Independence Day, Christmas, Easter or school vacations. If you've got a well-established social media platform, you could use it to promote special offers around these events.

### Electronic vs. traditional media

There is no clear answer which is best; the only relevant point is to use whatever works for you. There are still many businesses without websites who use word of mouth, networking and their reputation and credibility in their industry to generate sales. Other businesses are completely online and have sophisticated in-bound and out-bound marketing software to generate and nurture leads.

### 5: Stick to the budget

Set a budget so you can measure return on investment. Some typical options include:

- A percentage of sales; if you know 8% of sales is the industry average, and you have \$1m in sales, then you will spend \$80,000 each year.
- A set figure based on what you want to do. Add up all the tactics that you know will work, cost them, and that's your budget.
- What you spend last year, plus or minus depending on how much cash you have, or what opportunities lie ahead.
- You promote during the year on an ad hoc basis.

Regardless of what the budget is; stick to it, measure the results, do more of what works, and less of what doesn't.



## STEP FOUR

### Measure your results



If you don't measure the results of your promotions, you'll never know what worked. It's vitally important to find out which tactics delivered the best results over your campaign.

This may not be the last time you really push to promote your goods or services to potential new customers, so make the most of it and analyze how you performed:

- Check that the promotional methods you're using can be tracked and measured. This is something you'll know from the previous step. For instance, if you've invested some money in getting your website SEO-optimized, it's important to keep track of the traffic so you know if it's working and you're getting more website visitors.
- Generate some useful figures and graphs showing how successful your campaign has been. Being able to visually see how you're doing is helpful for you and your staff, because you can tell at a glance if you're achieving your objectives or if they're falling short.

#### **Make use of easily evaluated tactics**

Consider using tactics that are easier to evaluate post promotion, such as:

- Coupons or actions linked directly to your business's advertising. You'll be able to tell how well it's working just by the number of new queries or sales.
- Codes to access special offers through your website. When someone uses a code to gain access to a special offer, they should also be given the opportunity to purchase a complementary item.
- Online tracking that shows the origins of your web traffic. This is especially important if you've invested in SEO optimization, but even if you haven't it's still something you should be aware of.
- Keep an eye on your social media followers. This is an easy way to find out if your social media tactics are working – are you gaining more followers? Use Facebook Insights to track your followers and interactions.

Monitor your website's results using tools like Google Analytics and start asking customers how they found out about your business.

By measuring your promotions you'll find out which tactics deliver results. Your next promotional plan can then focus on the winners, fine tune the averages, and eliminate the unproductive.

## **STEP FIVE**

### **Reassess your plan to make sure you're on track**

Once your plan is underway, it's important to keep track of your progress. Check that your objectives are clear, and that your tactics are well targeted. You'll want to reassess your plan at the end of each 30-day period.

- Check in with staff allocated tasks and discuss how they're getting on implementing the tactic, and what feedback's been like. Ask if they have any ideas on how it could be improved.
- Measure every promotional idea for effectiveness, and double check you're not sacrificing profit and margin just to increase gross sales.
- Keep an eye on the budget. Whether you've assigned an overall amount, or a specific amount for each objective, it's important to make sure that you're not overspending, or, conversely, if there'd be some benefits to upping the amount you're spending.
- When you're assessing the budget, make sure you're getting a reasonable ROI for the amount you've allocated. If there are some tactics that aren't paying off or achieving their objectives, consider ditching them and reallocating the funds to something more profitable.

Don't be afraid to update your marketing plan and budget if you feel that you're not achieving results.

#### **Ask yourself...**

When you're reassessing your plan, of each tactic ask yourself:

- Is it answering the consumer's No.1 question – what's in it for me?
- Are you building relationships with your customers?
- Are you utilizing the best methods of reaching your customers?
- Are you making sure you're in continual communication with your customers?

If the answers to any of those questions is 'no', it's time to take another look at your tactics.

Please note that the information provided isn't intended and should not be relied upon as professional or personal financial product advice. You should seek professional advice before making any decision that could affect the financial health of your business.