

Getting the most out of your Business in the current climate

Global and UK economic doubt continues to drive the business news agenda and for many of us whether we are leaders at the helm of large businesses or talented entrepreneurs operating within the SME market, the common question which we must all ask ourselves is “how can I get the most out of my business during these challenging and difficult times”?



One thing is certain in business. There will always be peaks and troughs. But after a difficult period, a period of boom will follow, as it has always done in the past. The economy will pick up. When? We are not quite sure, but it will. And when it does, businesses must be prepared to capitalise on the opportunities that will present themselves. During this current period of uncertainty, it is crucial to remain focused and strive to create a lean, mean organisation with its most valuable assets - its people - the heart of the company, all focused on delivering value.

It is normal in a time of uncertainty, and particularly when expenditure is tight that people feel concerned about their futures. It is absolutely critical that you focus on the things that make people feel valued and maintain levels of motivation and performance.

When businesses perform well and make profits many organisations invariably build up a bit of excess fat so some tough decisions may still have to be made. But when focusing on cost management if you need to make expenditure cuts make sure you “trim the fat” and not “the muscle”.

Is it wise to cut training budgets when training and personal development is a proven factor in motivating people? Training will give your employees the knowledge to perform to their highest abilities, staff will gain in confidence, decreasing their reliance on you and increasing their own accountability. Providing your teams with this “Protein shake” should ensure that your team’s

productivity increases, resulting in better performance and increased effectiveness and efficiency. You need to ensure you have a team which is motivated, bonded, focused and fired up for the challenge ahead.

Perhaps the answer lies in looking at giving people new challenges outside of their core role, broadening their responsibilities and challenging individuals to develop a wider skill base. By giving employees more responsibility, autonomy and making them accountable might provide a renewed vigour and determination.

Communication is always critical in any business and never more so when times are tough. Ironically, experience would indicate that this is when organisations typically communicate less, perhaps because there is a fear of admitting things are not as good as they once were, but the opposite should be true. You might consider engaging your key employees in a new strategy for growth, empowering departments to input into strategies for improvement and establishing multi disciplinary teams to explore ways to control cost while improving business performance.

Often the first budgetary casualty is marketing. Perhaps this is because it is an easy decision to make. But is it the right one? The old saying goes, “only half of my marketing spend works, the trouble is I don’t know which half!” Refocusing the marketing budget through detailed analysis of what is working should always be part of your process but we

would advise against making drastic reductions in marketing spend. Logic would indicate that if there is less competition across the spectrum of advertising media then if you maintain your spend you should get more prominence. As always, innovation is the key and the strategy of being more creative and more innovative would seem like a better option. Direct your energy towards sustaining the lifeblood of a company – sales and higher value sales as well as innovative marketing can play a critical role.

Sometimes to be innovative in tough times you need new thinking, a fresh pair of eyes, a different perspective gained from a different level of experience. Having placed non-executive directors on Boards of many companies we have found the introduction of an independent and highly experienced individual who will challenge the business while supporting the executive team through difficult decisions offers immense value. And when you consider that often a good non-executive director can be retained for not much more than the cost of a full time operative or administrator, this is something that you should seriously think about. I would challenge any organisation if they haven’t yet considered the appointment of a non-executive director, to consider it now. There has never been a better time.

A good non-executive director will add intellectual horsepower to your business. They will help the Board to function more effectively, ensure accountability, challenge beliefs and

support and mentor the senior team. It may be that that your current management team is in a “comfort zone” and a change in focus is necessary. There is also a common belief that a non-executive director must come from the industry that your business operates in, this is definitely not the case. A non-executive director who has experience across different industry sectors will bring fresh approaches, new perspectives, varied skill sets and possibly even some high level contacts to help the sales process.

If you are a business owner with all the pressures that that brings, imagine the benefits of having a resource of this calibre available to support you to help you refocus and reinvigorate your senior team and your company as a whole.

Moving into 2009 with a fresh strategy, renewed operational focus and a rejuvenated senior team will really help you get the most out of your business in the current climate. At the very least you should be more ready to weather any storm ahead of your competitors. Prepare now and you will be in a strong position to exploit the growth opportunities that will undoubtedly emerge when the economy picks up!

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