



Time management = better business

Running a business often feels like a circus act- constantly juggling several things whilst trying to keep your balance on a slippery rubber ball. Effective time management skills are crucial for every business owner, big and small, to get a firm grip on their situation.

We are all controlled by it, and never have enough of it. Time dictates most aspects of our life, yet very few of us have an effective handle on it. Making the most of your time can often mean a few simple adjustments to your business. As the old saying goes, 'Time is Money'- so help maximise both with these time management strategies to help you stay on the ball.

Delegating tasks. Poor job delegation often wastes time in re-explaining the task required of the worker. Get it right the first time by bearing in mind the skill and training levels of staff when designating certain tasks. Make the requirements of the job clear, specific and achievable by a certain time. Eg. Worker A must present options available to the employer by 12pm.

Prioritise. There's no point in fussing over a minute detail of your business at the expense of a major problem. Make a list of the most pressing details of your company and number them in order of priority. This should set the direction for your energies and ensure the most serious issues are dealt with effectively.

Manage correspondence. The flood of communication channels available through

email, fax, mail and voice-messaging can all weigh down a business's time management. Treat each piece of correspondence efficiently- sort mail into read, throw-away, file, or action piles; check emails at a designated time of day and deal with each email once only; and maintain a 'clear desk' policy for the end of each working day.

Deadlines. Make clear project/task deadlines and stick to them. Imposing deadlines minimises the ethos that 'Tomorrow will do' in your workplace, and will see tasks managed with more direction.

Project management. By highlighting achievable steps to be completed along the way, your projects won't appear so arduous or unattainable. Make a schedule for your work, including the aims of the task, the amount of time to be spent, as well as the assigning of roles within the project. And remember to make your project management timescales readily accessible to all members involved!



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What customers really want

They are the engines that keep your business motor running, but many of us fail to stop and check when the engine light goes on. Well-greased customer relations will help keep your business running smoothly. Put yourself in the buyer's shoes to discover what customer's really want.

In the mind of the buyer. The sales process is by no means a simple one. Consider the emotions involved in buying products and services in your own experiences. More often than not, you would have feelings of doubt concerning the benefits to be gained, anxiety over searching for new products, and hold fears that your needs will be ignored or unsatisfied.

Respect your customer. This is why it is crucial to treat your customers with respect to ensure that their buying experience is as effortless as possible. Try to make clear to the customer that you understand their position, and highlight how your business can help address the shortcomings of the competition. This means making promises you can keep, and emphasising those products or services that you can deliver. Account for customers' objections or queries and pre-empt problems in delivery or service time by initiating timely communication proactively. Don't wait for the customer to call!

Earn the customer's trust. Do not take customer trust for granted; like any relationship, it takes time and effort to establish. By attempting to earn the customer's trust, you are offsetting the many doubts that underlie the buying process. Help foster a trusting environment by offering superior value, respecting them through your actions and delivering on the commitments you make to customers.

Learn from mistakes. There will always be setbacks in any business, but what is important is to learn from these mistakes to avoid history repeating itself. If your customer is dissatisfied, endeavour to find out why. Was the service delivery too slow? Was the price too high? By understanding complaints, and sympathising with grievances by apologising, you can increase customer retention and conflict avoidance for the future.

Customer feedback. A great way to gauge how successful your business is in catering to the needs and wants of your customers is through initiating customer feedback to obtain constructive criticism to expand or improve your business. These can accompany a product, be sent via mail or email, or can be made available regularly at your place of business.



Top 5 customer survey factors

1. **Outline your objectives.** Avoid the comfort zone of a vague question. This will tell you nothing about your business. Instead, make clear in your open-ended questions exactly which aspect of your business is under scrutiny, providing specific examples if possible.
2. **Make your survey measurable.** This is particularly important if your aim is to obtain statistical information. Opt for a multiple choice style questionnaire, ensuring continuity between surveys to allow for quantifiable and comparative results.
3. **Don't ask leading questions.** You shouldn't be asking what you want to hear in your survey—the point is to learn something new (good or bad) about your business and to act on it accordingly.
4. **Avoid negative responses.** The wording of survey questions can greatly impact the answers you'll receive. While a balanced view is ideal, you should remember not to imply a failure in your business in questioning. Avoid relying too heavily on language with negative connotations like "What did we do wrong? What weren't you satisfied with?"
5. **Keep the survey short and accessible.** Customers don't want to fill in a thesis about your company. While they may appreciate the chance to contribute, you should keep the survey as succinct as possible. Your survey should take under 10 minutes to complete, and feature clear language.

Stand out from the crowd

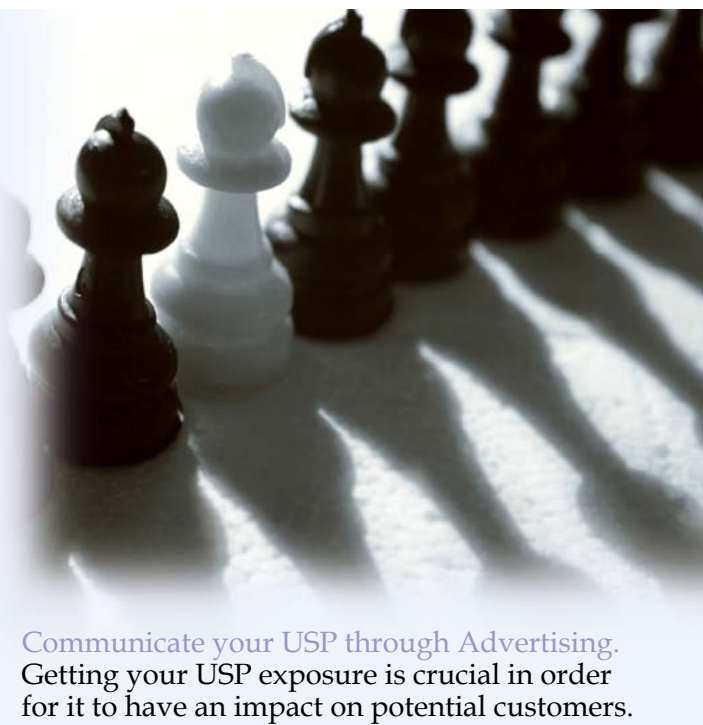
In an increasingly competitive marketplace, it's all too easy for many businesses to become carbon copies of one another. Many businesses lack originality in their selling propositions, continually offering more of the same to uninspired customers.

What's a USP? Your Unique Selling Proposition is a clear message to your customers about what your company does, and why they would benefit from choosing you. This involves identifying your products and services, and incorporating a coherent message about why these are different from the others in the marketplace. As a form of marketing and advertising, USP's can be adopted for your business' image as a whole, or used to highlight certain promotional and sales activities.

Below are some helpful hints to help revamp your company's selling proposition- giving you an edge over competitors.

Make your USP clear and snappy. By clarifying your USP in a short and succinct way, you get straight to the core values and qualities of your business. Think in smaller terms about what exactly makes you unique from others in your sector- This is your USP.

Don't Be a Copy Cat. USP's are one of the main signposts to a potential customer about your company and what you do- so merely copying a competitor will lead the customer in the wrong direction. Avoid generic clichés like "We offer the best service" and opt for more specific promises- "We offer the longest guarantee". And NEVER try to adopt a USP that you can't deliver!



Communicate your USP through Advertising. Getting your USP exposure is crucial in order for it to have an impact on potential customers. Try incorporating it as a by-line or sub-heading in all your promotional material, ads and mail correspondence; indeed every aspect of your marketing should appropriate your USP in some way.

Keep Everyone Informed. It's all well and good to ensure your potential customers are aware of your USP- just don't keep your company in the dark! Ignorance of your USP shows a lack of commitment, damaging the image of your company. Make your USP an obligation: involve all members of staff, from your secretary to in-store representatives, in the message of your USP.

Types of unique selling propositions

The 'Promise' USP. This links in with the Quality USP by providing a definitive promise to your customers to be fulfilled. For example, 'We promise to be on-call, 24hrs a day, 7 days a week, and respond within three hours'.

The Price-Discount USP. This targets the bargain shopper at heart by indicating the price differences in your goods or services. For example, you could 'offer a 100% money-back guarantee anytime'.

The Quality Service USP. Think of the famous Domino's Promise- 'Hot to your door in thirty

minutes or you get it free'. This was the first time a pizza company made it an obligation to provide speedy and quality services with a money back guarantee. Similarly, try to make your service's promise tangible and dependable.

The Niche USP. This involves providing a boutique service or product, targeting fewer customers with a higher price range. For example, your skincare products consist of exclusive ingredients like Manuka Honey; highlight this uniqueness to justify the price to your niche market.

Keep staff in the loop!

Your employees are the foundation of your business, helping keep it afloat among a tide of uncertainty and competition. As such, it is crucial that you meet regularly with them to steer the course of your company in the right direction.

Getting to know you... Your staff will be more receptive to advice, and more willing to approach you with any queries or problems in your business if you foster a friendly team environment. Make it your duty to meet with your employees regularly for staff consultations, helping you to address issues that arise in a practical, efficient and budget-friendly way. Getting to know your employees will also help them to feel a part of the team, and understand their place in achieving goals for your business.

Get together. Though many would shudder at the idea, staff meetings need not be a bore! Set aside one day per month to meet with staff, following a clear agenda that includes everyone in the business, to ensure that everyone is clear of your company's objectives, problems and goals, and the best way to address each of these. Spice things up a bit by enticing staff to attend- offer a small lucky door prize, or include a social aspect to the occasion by planning a group excursion to a local venue. This relaxed environment should take some of the pressure off your staff, and help get discussion going.

Get feedback. Consultations with staff should not be a one way process. Ensure that you not only

receive staff feedback (in the form of monthly progress reports for example) but that you also get back to your staff on how you acted on their ideas or problems. Staff consultations should be a mutually beneficial process, and by highlighting any frustrations or problems early, future problems can be avoided by communication.

Get creative. Don't limit the potential for your staff to bring their ideas to the plate! Encourage the use of an 'ideas' or 'suggestion' box in your business, allowing them to remain anonymous. Also, why not run a brainstorming gathering to collectively consider how best to approach certain tasks, or solve problems together.



OUR SERVICES

Are you driving your business or is it driving you?

Are you at a point where so much time and energy is taken up dealing with the day-to-day running of your business that you have little or no time to think ahead?

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