

Dear Subscriber,

Last month we looked at the topic of developing a marketing strategy. Given the challenges you and your business are likely facing in this economy, it is time to incorporate that marketing strategy into an updated business plan for your company. A business plan that recognizes the current conditions can help you navigate your way through these turbulent times.

SCORE is here to help you with your planning and other business issues. I encourage you to review the next section to be reminded of what SCORE is all about and how you can use this free resource to help your business succeed.

If you know of anyone who could benefit from these newsletters, please forward a copy to them with our thanks.

Warmest regards,

Ross Lagattuta
Chairman, SCORE Chapter 243

Welcome to SCORE

SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business" is a nonprofit association dedicated to educating entrepreneurs and the formation, growth and success of small business nationwide. SCORE is a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). SCORE counselors provide mentoring to both start-up and existing small businesses through face to face and email counseling as well as educational workshops All counseling is provided free of charge. The Southern Nevada Chapter of SCORE is headquartered in downtown Las Vegas and provides counseling at satellite locations including the UNLV campus, Henderson, Mesquite and Pahrump. To schedule a counseling session, contact one of the convenient SCORE offices listed below.

Counseling Process

The counseling or mentoring process is generally a series of meetings between a SCORE counselor and the client. The initial one hour meeting provides the counselor with an understanding of the client's existing or proposed business and the issues the client is facing. During the discussion, tasks will be identified for the client to perform after the meeting. These tasks can vary widely depending on the business situation. A follow-up meeting is usually scheduled to review the

results of the tasks and determine the next steps. This sequence will be repeated until the client has reached the final outcome. Because of the variety of expertise held by the individual counselors, it may be decided to change counselors or consult with other counselors to provide the best assistance to the client.

Entrepreneurs and business managers regularly come to SCORE for assistance in the following areas:

Existing Businesses

Marketing and Sales
Planning and Control
Operations Improvement
Cash Management/Financial Control/Profitability
Growth Opportunities
Business Advisor/Mentor

Start-ups

Business Plan Development
Loans/Funding
Advice on:
Licensing Requirements
Legal organization
Business Management

Business Survival Program

Some businesses have issues, problems or opportunities that may be more complex or are best served by on-site counseling at the client's site. SCORE has developed a Business Survival program to meet this need. One or more SCORE counselors are assembled into a team to work with the client at their place of business. For more information on this free program, contact the SCORE office at 702-388-6104.

Ask SCORE

Planning It is never too late

Things were going pretty well and then without a lot of warning your small business seems to have lost momentum and may even be struggling. What happened? And more importantly, what can you do about it?

The downturn in the economy has sent chilling ripples through out the country and even here in Las Vegas. Given the interconnected nature of today's economy, even small, largely local businesses are influenced by trends and events in other industries, and even other continents.

Your past approach to generating and managing growth may not be adequate in the face of what seems to be limited or even declining opportunities. The detailed business plan you've followed since the outset may no longer be applicable in a marketplace where changes-both expected and unforeseen-happen on a daily basis.

It is time to develop a new business plan that recognizes the current conditions and will act like an internal compass to help get things back on track.

Start with an analysis of your market. Keeping up with changes in your marketplace is crucial. Are there new opportunities or threats that you can or should deal with. You might have to conduct some new research to stay up to date, but this doesn't have to be formal research. You might start with a simple customer survey, for example, or check for available research online. Also be aware of what your competitors are doing. Chances are there are still customers out there, you need to figure out how to reach them and serve them better than the competition.

Next, analyze your business objectively. What are your capabilities? your strengths? your weaknesses? Can you use those capabilities and strengths in new and profitable ways to serve your existing markets... what about new markets? Can you overcome the weaknesses? Finally, understand the financial details about how your business operates. What are your margins, fixed expenses, variable expenses, cash requirements, inventory turns, etc. A firm grasp on the financial side is a key to operational effectiveness.

One other note, get a team involved in the planning. Don't do it in a vacuum. Use key employees or advisors (SCORE can help here) as a source of ideas and honest assessment.

Armed with this information, put your plan in writing. It does not need to be lengthy and ultra-detailed. Determine your goals and objectives for the next 9-12 months. Set priorities and develop action plans. Then convert this plan into a monthly budget.

Finally, communicate your vision and plan to others involved with your business especially your employees. Get everyone on the same page and then execute, execute, execute.

Use the plan and the budget to continuously monitor the performance of the business. If possible, identify key indicators that help provide early warning that things are changing. These could be measures like daily sales, backlog, or utilization rates. Keep an eye on these measures on a daily or weekly basis. At a minimum, compare your actual Income Statement with the budget every month.

You can find some valuable guidance for growth planning in two books: Strategic Planning for Small Business Made Easy, the latest in the "Made Easy" series from Entrepreneur Press, and The 7 Irrefutable Rules of Small Business Growth by small business growth expert Steven S. Little. Both are available in bookstores and online.

For more assistance with planning or other business issues, contact the Southern Nevada Chapter of SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business" at 1-702-388-6104 or visit our website www.scorelv.org.