

The Three Parts Of Your Business That Must Work Without You

If you run or Manage a business and intend to be around in years to come or even, if you intend to sell up and sail away into the sunset, then automating key parts of your business is an exercise you must do sooner rather than later. It's OK in the early days to "muddle by", but, as your business grows, finding those areas that can be done quicker, cheaper and more efficiently is the only important role you have as the Business Owner.

If you are still using your own time or, (worse still), paying others to do things that can easily be automated, then you are wasting your own company resources and assets. Working IN a business is not smart. It is the nearest thing you could design to a "job". A "Job" with extra stress and less holidays. Working ON your business and looking for ways to make things happen, just as you want them to, but without your, or any other paid employees time being spent, is the best thing you can do for your business, your sanity and your bank balance.

There are three key areas that every business owner can gain quick wins. Automating these functions is the first step to designing a real business. Oh, and in case you are wondering what I mean by a "real business", let me explain:

If you run a coffee shop, even if you own the whole damn thing, you have a job unless you can create a coffee shop that works without your own involvement. In short, can you afford to not work, pay others to work without supervision, and still turn a profit? If the answer is no, of course I can't! Then you have a job, not a business. If you have developed a fantastic new service that every bank and Insurance company would want, but only you can deliver that service, then you have a job, not a business. Of course, every small business starts out like a job. It's hard work getting started and it's just not possible to do it without hours of hard graft at the coal face. But, if you intend to make your coal mine into a thriving business one day, one that, perhaps, somebody else would pay good money to buy from you, then you'd better start thinking about automating the first mine, getting it to work without you doing the digging and buying another mine and starting again.

The first 3 parts of your business that are easiest to automate and can be done with common software solutions are listed below. I have even sorted them into an order from three to one. Number one being the one thing you can do now that will give you the biggest "bang for your buck".

Number 3. Personnel and HR –

The people that work for your business are almost certainly your most expensive asset. However you contract to pay them, whether they are full-time taxed employees or even if they are zero-hour contract staff, when they are working for your business, you must ensure they have all of the tools they need, that they are empowered to make decisions and that their work is part of a totally honed process. People based assets are expensive to own, but when they form part of a properly planned process, they are the best asset you will ever have. Here are the three easiest ways to automate this part of your business:

1. Positions and Profiles

Job titles are one thing. Positions are another. In smaller companies, people with simple job titles can be responsible for many different parts of the business and can have a very fluid reporting and authorisation requirements. Cloud technology and very inexpensive SaaS products can allow you to decide exactly what position each employee will hold, what skills they have and what information they are allowed to access. By setting “profiles” for every employee, you can protect your information and enable strong governance throughout your business.

2. Workflow and Process

A lot of business owners overlook the importance of creating processes for work that must be done. Many highly successful people are not even able to articulate the difference between “Workflow” and “Process”. Here is a simple way to understand it: If I asked you to make a list of the jobs you need to do in order to make a cup of tea, you would, most likely, not struggle to come up with a long list of jobs in order that they must be completed. By doing so, you have just created your best “process” to make a cup of tea. But, now add to this the need for many people to work together to make the tea, and you have a process that needs to be broken into two-or more “Workflows”. Then you need to decide if it is possible to boil the water before it is added to the kettle. Obviously not, so the person boiling the water has to finish their “workflow item” – Boil water- first. But even they can’t do their job until the water is put in the kettle. The person doing that job will have to make sure it is done on time and that the kettle boiler is told it has been done. Many simple processes that your clients want to be completed as fast as possible can be written inside software as processes and each employee can work together, knowing exactly what their workflow is and when it needs to be done. Systems that automate workflow, notify employees of jobs and allow approvals and checks to be done automatically create massive improvements in customer service levels, reduce human error and make for vastly happier employees.

3. Payroll and HR Records

There is no hard and fast rule when you need to introduce an HR department into your business. However, know this: When you do, you will see a large cost, one that will grow and give virtually no improvement to your income or profits. Managing HR can be a large cost if left unchecked. Luckily, most employees prefer to manage their own HR profiles and SaaS systems today create beautiful employee portals that will enable an employee to manage their own holidays, expenses, absences, training and many other things. This software can be some of the least expensive software around and can save your business thousands of pounds each year. You can even link Payroll to your Accounting software and create automated systems that do all of that for you with quick, simple monthly checks and balances.

Number 2. Customer and Client Records –

I have worked as a Business Consultant for some of the World’s largest Organisations. I have also consulted on a daily basis to Mom and Pop shops wishing to get their own records straight. Let me tell you, the small business does not have the monopoly on messy customer records. One Multi-Billion Telecoms provider I worked with for 3 years, had no idea how many paying customers they had. They were not able to even calculate their own “Churn”. Churn to a Telco is an essential way to see how well they are keeping clients and

how much it is costing to replace dissatisfied leavers with new ones. Over the course of many years and three successful acquisitions this organisation had built up 14 separate and disparate places where this information was held. They had no idea where or what the truth was. For the small business owner starting out, automating these records and ensuring this information is always accurate and properly protected should be easy. After all, “CRM Software” is probably the most searched for term on Business Google anywhere in the World. So how come so many business owners get in such a mess? The answer to this question is found in the way that CRM software is sold and the ways that a Business Owner fails to plan the basics of what they need. The Web is full of software and SaaS products that boast every feature under the sun. Some of them are even offered free of charge. It doesn't take long for the average Joe to be suckered into a free trial and then to waste hours playing around with CRM features. Most of the time, absolutely no thought has been given to asking the A – B – C fundamental questions:

A) How do I identify different sorts of customer and client?

When I ask my clients about this, they seem to look at me as if I'm the idiot in the room. “Isn't it obvious”? They say. But when I start to ask them if everyone in the World is a “Customer” they say, “Of Course not”!

Ah, so what do you mean by the word “Customer”? “Somebody that has purchased something”, they always say.

Ah, so what if the same customer comes back more than once? What if they have an account and buy regularly? Do you think you would like to differentiate “Clients”? At this stage the penny normally drops. It is not only important, but essential to be able to properly categorise the types of “Customer” your business touches. Here is a typical journey, that many businesses seem to settle on, once proper thought has been given to this point:

1. Suspects – Basically a list of people or company names that you suspect might be interested in your products or services. This is the starting point for your own marketing activities.
2. Prospects – A section of “suspects” that you have some information that they might be particularly interested in your products or services. For example, you might own a pet grooming business and start to break your “Suspects” into people that own certain animals. It is much easier to target advertising and marketing toward Prospects rather than Suspects.
3. Leads – You would be shocked if I told you how many of my own customers have no idea what a lead is. A Lead is a Person or a Company that has expressed interest in what you do. “Expressed Interest” can be many different things. They might have enquired via your website, they might have clicked on an ad on Facebook, they may just have called you to enquire or ask for a price list. Leads are the lifeblood of sales and Leads must be approached and worked on immediately. Creating a lead and then leaving it to go cold is one of the single biggest travesties in business.
4. Opportunities – An Opportunity is created for your company to sell something as soon as the person behind the Lead has decided what he wants and when he wants it. This is a pivotal point in sales (in any business). A Lead is not specific about what they want. A Lead can have “general interest”. But once a particular product or service can be linked to that Lead (You know how much they intend to spend) and once a timescale is known

(You know when they want to spend money), then it has to be treated differently. One main difference is that you can't forecast revenues from leads. From Opportunities you can start to plan stock, resources and cash-flow.

B) What information must I have at my fingertips for each type of customer?

One person – One record. That's how it must be. One Company – One record. A company can have a person inside it. But you don't need another record. Just make sure your records reflect the movement of people. One way to do that is to create the notion of "types or profiles". A Person can start out their life on your records as a "Suspect", but as time moves on, their status will change. They may be associated with a company, they may not, they may buy something. They may come back more than once and buy regularly. Being able to define the way that your business wants to work with Customers and Clients is essential. As these people move and progress through your records, you are going to want to keep indelible records of what they did and when. If you pull the record of an important repeat client, you will certainly need different types of information immediately to hand inside that record than you would have needed if it is a new Prospect calling to ask for information. At the outset of your customer record creation, you must be absolutely sure what information you want and where it should appear. It is far too late to go searching for order details in another system, when your client is on the phone yelling at you. It is vital that even if a person changes their "type" or "profile" it MUST be the same record. Systems that allow duplications are a disaster and must be avoided at all costs. The secret is about allowing records to MOVE, not be deleted and re-created. There is another, very important reason, that you absolutely MUST get this part right at the outset. European law has created rules for every business on the storage and protection of information held about people. GDPR is designed to ensure that people have the right to decide how much or how little information you get. At the end of the day, every person on your database has "the right to be forgotten" and you need to ensure you have the tools to deliver those rights. Don't get caught up with features that say "GDPR Compliant" etc etc. There is no such thing. Just decide what information you need and how you want to protect access to that information on behalf of your clients. Then, choose a system that enables you to create the records you want.

C) Who, in my own business will need access to this information?

This is not just an important part of the GDPR laws. Of course, you will need to protect sensitive information from prying eyes. But this goes deeper, much deeper. The reason is that devices able to store, retrieve and edit information are everywhere nowadays. If you allow your data to be put onto (potentially) hundreds of devices from PC's to iPhones across your business, you won't have to wait long for the mess to hit the fan. Here's where "profiles" of users are important. You should decide who gets to see what, when and how. You should decide whether an employee can edit a record or whether that has to be done centrally. Moreover, if an edit is made, you must decide who gets notified and what records can be seen to check who did what and when. This method is called "Maintaining a single point of truth" and is essential to your automated records.

Number 1. Accounts –

Not only is this function an easy part of the business to automate, it is the one area that most small business owners hate with a passion. Earning the money is big fun. Getting it in the bank is fun. But accounting for its final resting place and keeping track of every percentage point is a sole destroying grind. A few hours work done at the front end, selecting the right software and ensuring that everything you earn or spend has the correct reference will create accounts that literally do themselves. This is not only a time saving exercise. It is becoming law! Most Governments are now insisting that Sales Taxes are done digitally. There will soon be no paper returns and if your VAT is already accounted for automatically, most accounting software packages will create the return records for you, just check and send at the end of each quarter. If you employ an Accountant either in your business or you partake the services of an Accountant, then choose one that is expert with your chosen software and you should even consider putting your whole accounting package in the cloud. After all, there is no risk or mystery any more with "Cloud" software. In the simplest terms, all that "Cloud" means, is that you don't have to own or keep a copy of the software on your own PC's. You and your Accountant can log on the Web at any time and see exactly the same information. Most cloud accounting (SaaS) Software as a Service solutions have an automated receipt scanning solution as well. So, just scan and click on your mobile to enter a receipt for any business expenditure. Organised properly, putting your accounts into an automated system will transform your business life and free your mind for more important tasks.

If you run a business, automating key parts of it is essential for growth and long-term success. Working on your business, rather than in it, is the way to achieve this. There are three key areas that businesses can easily automate for quick wins: personnel and HR, customer and client records, and accounts. Automating personnel and HR functions can protect your information, enable strong governance throughout your business, and save you money. Position profiles, workflow and process automation, and HR automation software can make this easy. Customer and client records, when properly categorised and managed, can become the lifeblood of sales. CRM software can help automate these records and ensure they are accurate, secure and GDPR compliant. You should decide what information you need, who gets access to it, and how it will be used to maintain a single point of truth. Automating accounts can save time, effort and labour costs. Consider adopting cloud accounting software with automated receipt scanning solutions. Your accountant can even access your accounts remotely, and the software can help generate tax returns and sensitive government compliance documents. By automating these three key areas, you can transform your business, free your mind to focus on more important tasks, and eventually create a business that works without your constant involvement, allowing you more freedom and potential to grow.