

business strategies

# Strategies for NOW

## Business growth through the Now Strategy

**What the hell do you do? Crafting a succinct story that answers this question is fundamental to the success of your business, says MARK ROBOTHAM**

**Running a business, whether a startup, SME or bigger enterprise, you need to know basic business practices and disciplines. Over time, these simple disciplines have been complicated through evolution and by academics.**

For many business people this has created a formidable barrier to effective execution.

Meanwhile, the pace of change and competition means that many business owners and leaders have fallen into the old trap of working in the business rather than on it.

Today, effective business strategy and implementation needs to be concise. This way, strategic reviews and plans can be drafted quarterly, if required, without consuming too much time. The market changes rapidly, so we need the tools to adapt to it now.

### What is the Now Strategy?

- By focusing on three interlinked activities: Succinct Story', Operating in a Zone of Passion, and Operating an Actionable Live Plan, and then reviewing these regularly, you will accelerate your business growth and create a work culture that people want to belong to.
- Brand and good governance will provide the glue and the oil to ensure that these three core activities interlink and adapt.

### Do you have a 'Succinct Story' for your business?

Ring up any company – hell, even your own! – and ask the person who answers the phone what the company does. Then ask to speak to one of the staff at random (even the CEO), and ask again, what do you do? My guess is you will get two different pitches and you will still not be any better off in gaining an understanding of what they do.

Call it the elevator pitch, the BBQ story or whatever, it comes down to a simple thing: "What the hell do you do?"

The majority of businesses fail this test.

Businesses need to create at least one "Succinct Story". They should re-craft this story every six months or at least each year when they plan the year ahead.

- **Succinct:** expressed in few words; concise.
- **Story:** a narrative, designed to interest or instruct the hearer or reader.

Note the use of the word "story". Many people, when they talk about their business, are far from creating interest or instructing the audience with the language they use.

### Why is this so important?

Most business is done through word-of-mouth and networks. If your message or story is confusing or longwinded, how can people pass on your name to potential clients that they know?

With a "sexy" story you will solve three fundamental issues facing business: attracting customers, talented staff and investors. People complain about the talent shortage, yet if they have a great story then they won't suffer this problem. Rod Drury and Xero is the best example of this. I cannot see a shortage of people wanting to join his organisation or even invest in his idea.

### The one-minute test

Most people switch off and fail to listen to any detail unless you can answer some basic questions within one minute of speaking to them.

- What do you do? (How does it add value to your customers?)
- Why should I listen to you?
- How is your offering unique?
- How big is it?

*Can you pass the one-minute test with your elevator pitch?*

### Lead your audience

Most if not all companies, particularly technology ones, will benefit from adding a few sentences up front to their current pitch. Use simple words that dumb down your message and lead the audience from real problems into the solution you offer. Give them a reason to listen for more. Remember to take your audience on a short trip to the detailed world you live in. Unlike you, these people do not spend their entire lives living and breathing your product or solution. Ask your son or your parents if they understand what you do? Find words that work for the grandmas of the world and you will open the gate to increased revenue.

### Creating your succinct story

Start by identifying what business you are in and how you add value to your clients. Too many people get hung up on describing either their craft or their discipline, or on educating people about how they solve problems. They are ignoring the obvious question: "What do you do to add value to your customers?"

It is only by using the language of value for your customers that you can create a truly compelling and memorable story. This exercise is best done with people from outside your company, as you need the benefit of fresh eyes. Swatch is a great example of how focusing on the value of your clients can change your business. By shifting the focus of watchmaking to fashion, it became common to own more than one watch.

Spend some time working out what business you are in and how you add value to your clients. Then use this knowledge to drive business decisions and strategy. For example, the next product or service offering you come up with should be aligned to your "business", not simply the next evolution of your craft or product.

### Access value

Compelling need is a common term, but make sure you can describe the pain or problem that you are solving for your customers – and that it is significant enough for them to do something about it. Significant means greater than a 30 per cent differential. If you get a supplier saying to you, I can save you 5 per cent on a cost to your business, you will be stuck with the dilemma, do I bother going through the effort to adopt this new product? Yet if it was a 30 per cent saving, you would immediately be asking when you could have this product!

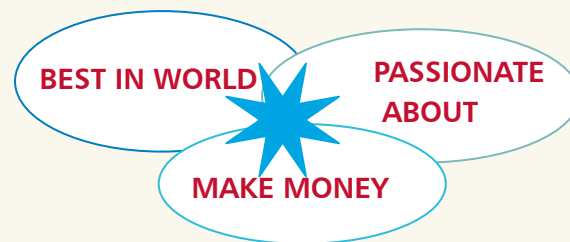
Decisions are made in three ways: financial, strategic and personal. Access the pain of your customers and end users in all three areas. Describe and quantify pain points.

### Ask your customers

Are you having difficulty working out what your business is and the value you offer? It's amazing how many businesses forget to ask their customers why they buy from them. Ask them, or better still get a third party to access your value and how you perform. Likewise, look at your large competitors' websites and their messages – you should address the same pain points. Remember, the pain will be the same, the point of difference won't be!

**“Warning: Entrepreneurialism is like alcoholism. You never know when you have had enough!”**

Warning: If there is no compelling need – change tack! Entrepreneurialism is like alcoholism. You never know when you have had enough! Too many business people focus their energies, passion and money on the wrong thing. If you are struggling to access your business in terms of value statements for your customers, then you may be simply working on the wrong idea. Most successful entrepreneurs work on a few failed ventures before they hit the big time.



Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, says you should focus your business on three things: what you are passionate about, what can you be the best in the world at, and what you can make money from.

Businesses with strong and compelling needs are the ones that excel. If you are having difficulty identifying the problem, and the value that your customers receive from you, you may well be in one of the many mediocre businesses that score a two out of three.

### Checklist

- Do you talk about your business in terms of the value you add to your clients rather than your craft?
- Can you and your staff pass the one-minute test?
- Are your energies, passion and money being invested in your business or craft?
- Do you have a truly compelling need you are solving?
- Is it time to invest in getting some help to work up your "Succinct Story"?