

Business Refresh Resource

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Powerhouse



There is no rule that says resolutions must be reserved for the beginning of a new year. That's the beauty of business (and life). There's never a bad time to take stock of where you've been and to plot a course for where you'd like to go. With that in mind, here's some helpful guidance on how to "refresh" your business—no matter what time of the year it is!

Take care of yourself. We're going to be controversial here for a moment: self-care usually ends up at the end of any checklist as an afterthought. But we suggest you put YOU first. Healthy you, healthy business (or at least a way better version of a business than the one that's being operated by an overworked, overstressed, overcommitted leader). While you're lovingly tending to the future of your business, remember that your company needs YOU. That doesn't mean manicures or massages or Starbucks (unless those are your things, in which case you do you). But it does mean deliberately prioritizing your health and wellness:

- ▶ Give yourself a bedtime (and try to stick to it!).
- ▶ Set boundaries between your work life and your personal life. Leave the office when you say you will (or close your laptop if you work from home). Choose not to respond to emails 24-7. You know where you struggle with balance, so take one tangible step to make that area better for you.
- ▶ Schedule fresh air and regular active time on your calendar—even if it means going outside just to let the sun hit your face.
- ▶ Give yourself some grace. Nobody successfully pulls off all the things all the time (even if their social media suggests they do). Don't hold the bar higher for yourself than you would for someone you love.

Kondo your office. A clean slate isn't just a psychological tactic. Set order to your work environment:

- ▶ Clear off your desk.
- ▶ Attack the paper mountain (and its electronic equivalent). Revisit what it is you're keeping and whether you truly need to hold on to it. Ask a professional if you're unsure.
- ▶ Make sure that you're stocked with the office supplies you need.
- ▶ Check your business equipment to make sure everything's in working order (and make replacing archaic equipment a priority).
- ▶ Revisit the tools you use. Maybe Excel has worked just fine in the past to track your expenses, but you've outgrown that option and need a good financial tracking software. Perhaps that mailing list app you use was fantastic when you had 100 subscribers, but is now cumbersome with a much larger mailing list. What are the programs and software you're using? Are they the most cost-efficient and effective way to work? If so, fantastic. If not, now is a great time to look at what tools would be most helpful to you.

Figure out what you didn't know you didn't know. What could you learn that would bring more value to your business? When running a small business, nobody is an expert in all things. When expertise or at least a certain level of comfort is required, you have two choices: bring in an expert or learn a new skillset. There is a time and place for each of these options that is unique to your business. We don't mean that you have to go back to school (although there's nothing wrong with that option). There are hundreds of opportunities to pick up a new skill:

- ▶ Find a mentor (ideally someone who has already successfully done what you hope to do).
- ▶ Enroll in a free online course.
- ▶ Dedicate a block of regular time to learning about marketing, Spanish, accounting for small businesses, how to build a Zen garden...(fill in the blank with whatever new lesson might benefit you!).





Build your network. Thoughtfully and deliberately. New people equal new opportunities and new ideas. Create opportunities for you to find a sounding board of other people who might offer a unique perspective and/or who understand the challenges you may be facing. And then be prepared not only to talk, but also to listen (even if what they say is difficult to hear) and to be willing to make changes:

- ▶ Find out if there's a small business meetup or networking group in your local area.
- ▶ Connect with your local Chamber of Commerce.
- ▶ Take advantage of resources and connections available through the U.S. Small Business Administration.
- ▶ Build out your LinkedIn profile. Commit to being more engaged on the platform. (Need help? We've got LinkedIn Optimization tips for you!)
- ▶ Introduce yourself. Is there someone in the space in which your business operates whom you'd like to meet? Be the one to take the first step and initiate a conversation!

Recognize that appearances matter. Image may not be everything, but it sure is important. This is your opportunity to revisit your presence/brand that's in the public eye:

- ▶ Review your website. Is your website content current? Are the links good (and still relevant)? Are you mobile friendly?
- ▶ Consider your physical location. If you have a physical location, are you showing seasonally relevant promotions/decorations, etc.? Step outside and look from a customer's perspective (better yet, solicit your customers' feedback).
- ▶ Assess your social media. Are your social media pages up to date? Sharing timely content? Have you noticed any changes to your core audience or the ways they're engaging online? Think about what you can do to meet them where they're at.
- ▶ Look at "you" as a brand. Are you sporting '80s hair or a mullet in your professional headshot? Time to schedule a new headshot!

Plan to plan. Your calendar is your friend. Use it:

- ▶ Commit regular blocks of time to planning throughout the year (not just at an end-of-year assessment). Review, adjust, implement. Again and again. Go ahead—pull out your calendar now.
- ▶ Connect your social media and website activity with the calendar. Can you tie your products or services to calendar events? What holidays, special occasions, seasons, etc. lend themselves to unique product offerings or promotions? Think ahead about how your social media presence and website can reflect such content.
- ▶ Give yourself a break. Block out planned vacation time now. (Yes, of course life will throw up obstacles and roadblocks that will perhaps curtail any such plan—but intentionally set aside time now and commit to giving yourself time off.)
- ▶ Keep yourself accountable. If you've been paying attention, you've already added scheduled time for fresh air, physical activity, and off-the-clock time to your calendar, right? Just checking.

Remember that teamwork makes the dream work. Do you have a team? Need to grow one? Whether you've been wearing all the hats or delegating responsibilities, now is a good time to plan ahead to give you the support your business needs:

- ▶ Think about where you most need help carrying out your business mission. What would your ideal team look like and how can you start to create that? (Map that out now.)
- ▶ Consider personnel. Would a new employee bring you value (and can you make room in your budget for one)?
- ▶ Get fiscally creative. If your budget is tight, could you bring on part-time or freelance help? Or seek out interns at a local college?
- ▶ Reflect on your team's performance. If you already have backup, what do they need to do their jobs best? Are there trainings or opportunities to expand their skills? What do they bring to the table and how can you help them enhance those attributes? Are folks in the positions that are the best possible match for their experiences and talents?





Brace yourself. We're about to talk about business plans. We left this section for the latter part of this discussion because people tend to hyperventilate and panic when they think about this element of business. There's no need for alarm (we promise).

Do you need a business plan? Wonderful! (We've got a template to help you create one here!) Your job is to commit to creating one. Follow along with our template so you've got some insight into the kinds of questions that are going to be important.

Do you have a business plan already? Fantastic! Now is a great time to revisit your business plan/action plan/any planning documents from the previous year. Did you get to where you thought you would? Accomplish what you outlined? What worked and didn't work? Why or why not? Keep in mind, this should be a judgment-free exercise. You're not looking to beat yourself up over where you feel you fell short. Instead, take notes and let those reflections inform how you move forward:

- ▶ Identify where you succeeded wildly. Pat yourself on the back and do more of that.
- ▶ Be honest about where you crashed and burned. Don't hold on to what's not working for you or your business. Can you fix what's broken? Then do so with new goals and actions. If you can't? Put it lovingly to bed. You now know better—you now do better.
- ▶ Rinse and repeat.

Follow the money. Make sure your financial house is in order:

- ▶ Enlist the professional help of an accountant or bookkeeper (if you need to and haven't done so already).
- ▶ Assess the economic health of your business. Do you know where your money has gone? Whether you were profitable or not? Where/how you could operate in a more cost-effective manner? If you have a financial pro on your team (or are comfortable wearing that hat yourself), this is the time to sit down and talk all things money.
- ▶ Plan for the financial year ahead based on what you now know.

Commit to giving back. If it's true that it takes a village to raise a child, then it's also true that it takes a village to grow a business. And being a good villager means you take and give. Think about how your products and/or services could help others in need. See where you can give of your time and/or expertise. (We promise the return on that investment is phenomenal.)

One last thing (and it's important)...

Don't get so caught up in survival mode that you forget to grow. Sure, there are the day-to-day mundane tasks and problems. And often as a small business owner, you're busy putting out proverbial fires. But make a new commitment to take things to the next level—even if it's with baby steps. Commit to reaching for more, to stepping out of your comfort zone, and to daring to dream that better is possible.

