The 5-Minute Guide to Streamlining Your Online Business

- SPECIAL REPORT -

Like many small business owners, you probably got your start because you were tired of working for someone else and had grand dreams of working when you want while still making a decent living.

Unfortunately, your original vision of what it would be like to own your own business is so far from reality that you've considered throwing in the towel more times than you can count.

While the truth about running a business is vastly different from the dream most small business owners initially followed, there is a way you can finally achieve your goal of being your own boss.

Most small business owners fail to indeed turn their business into a successful money machine, allowing them to finally take a step back and relax because they fail to implement processes and systemize their business.

Creating a streamlined business through systems and methods will allow you to free up more of your time so you can spend it doing what you want instead of what you have to do. If you're a new business owner or aren't sure what exactly it means to create processes and systemize your business, this 5-minute guide is for you.

What are Processes?

The first step in streamlining your business is to understand what a process is and learn how to develop effective processes that will allow your business to continue to run smoothly, even if you're out of the office.

A system includes the tasks, procedures, and policies that you use in your business to deliver your product or service to your customers. These processes will encompass everything from your external operations, like connecting a salesperson with a potential customer, to your internal processes, like how to accurately invoice a customer.

Having well-documented processes and procedures in place is extremely important to the success of a company but is something that is often overlooked.

In the Disney Institute Book, Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service, author Theodore Kinni writes, "Think of processes as a railroad engine.

If the engine doesn't run properly, it doesn't matter how friendly the conductor acts or how attractive the passenger cars look, the train will still not move, and the passengers won't pay their fares. A process is the engine of Quality Service. "

As a business owner, your goal, along with making a decent living and having more free time, should be to have a business that will continue to run smoothly, without you having to do everything.

The truth is, you canÕt have one without the other. Without processes in place to streamline your business, youÕll never make the kind of money you want, and you wonÕt have the time to do what you want.

Putting processes in place doesnÕt make you a robot. Nor does it limit your customers to a one-size-fits-all experience. Streamlining your business by documenting your processes will allow you to do business exactly like you have, only better and more efficiently.

Top Four Reasons to Streamline Your Business with Processes

While there are many reasons why you need to implement robust processes in your business, here are the top four reasons that will have you start implementing procedures to streamline your business today.

Save Time and Money

If you've noticed that there are many inconsistencies in how things are done in your business on any given day, then you probably cost yourself a ton of time and money. It's not a bad thing to have routines in your daily business schedule.

In fact, Lee Cockerell, Walt Disney World Resort's former Vice President, says that positive routines create positive outcomes. When you have positive routines in place that allow you to continually deliver the same quality service to your customers, every time, you'll start to notice that your business is saving not only money but time.

To help make things run even smoother and save yourself even more time, you can introduce technology into the equation because technology tends to run the same way every time. With proper processes in place, you'll also start to run the same way every time.

Create Consistent Experiences

We've all trusted our friends and family to provide us with recommendations on where to eat or which company to hire to complete work around the house.

Moreover, we've all had times when we've been disappointed in the results of trusting their

recommendations. Maybe the waitress ignored your empty glass, or the service technician didn't show up on time.

So, you head online to check their review to see if it was an isolated incident, only to discover the reviews are all over the place. Some people love the experience, while others hated it.

To keep your business from becoming an unreliable experience for your customers, you have to streamline and put processes in place. This doesn't mean that you have to force everyone into one way of doing things.

However, it does create a baseline for your customers, so they know what they can expect when they do business with you. Consistency is at the heart of any reputable company. You can create that consistency by developing and sticking with defined processes that guide your customers through their experience with you.

Easily Troubleshoot Issues

It doesn't matter how streamlined your business is or how many processes you have in place; you will inevitably have to deal with an issue that comes up during the course of business. Having procedures in place provide two ways that can make handling these issues much more manageable.

First, having processes in place make finding the issue much easier. When you talk through the problem with your staff, you can use the same terminology to signify the same thing, thanks to your processes.

When you can identify what usually happens, and where something within the process isn't working, it is much easier to make a few tweaks or modifications than it would be to start from scratch.

When business processes work smoothly, their key combustion points are controlled, allowing your business to deliver quality service to your customers without a hiccup. However, when combustion points are out of control, you have misfires in the service process.

Customers are inconvenienced, and unless their problems are solved, those combustion points can quickly turn explosive. Being able to identify and control combustion points is an integral part of being able to deliver service through business processes.

The other way that you can more easily troubleshoot issues when you have processes in place is through the saving of time.

When your employees are utilizing procedures and routines, it provides them with the stability they need to adapt to any challenges that may arise.

Being organized helps to reduce the number of fires that need to be put out. When problems do arise, your employees can more easily find the source and spend the time necessary to solve them immediately.

Create Extraordinary Experiences

Having baseline systems in place that become routine, allows your team to create an extraordinary experience for your customers more efficiently.

When you have processes in place to deliver your services consistently, and they become like second nature to your staff, and you begin to realize the time and money you save, and how troubleshooting problems easier, you'll find that you and your team end up with a little more freedom. That freedom is where the magic can happen.

Effective systems and processes make the routine things in your business run smoothly and consistently. This frees your employees up to go the extra mile and do the extra stuff that can turn a good business into a great one.

Putting Your Processes into Practice

The only way you will be able to streamline your business and focus on its growth is by documenting your processes and putting them into practice.

So, you may be wondering how you can go about doing this? Here are the steps you need to take to put your processes in place and streamline your business.

Step One: Document What You Do

The first step to creating processes that work is documenting what you already do in your business. As you go about your work during the week, write down what you do on a daily basis, and have your employees do the same.

Document the steps from a high level. Include bullet-points for each step. All you're doing here is making a list of the core tasks that make up your job.

Once you have developed this guide for your business, make sure that all of the processes that have been documented use the same terminology, calling each area in your business by consistent names.

Work closely with your leadership and managers to put the guide together and make sure everyone is following it, including yourself.

Step Two: Be Honest

As you read through your processes, ask questions about whether it is working, and be honest with your answers. While nothing may be wrong with the process, it can still not be delivering the wow to your customers.

If there is something in the process that you feel could be done better, don't hesitate to change it. You always want to look for ways to improve your process. Your goal here is to streamline and simplify by applying technology where possible and finding new ways to deliver that wow factor to your customers.

Step Three: Experiment

When it comes to evaluating your processes be creative in your approach and find new ways to keep a fresh set of eyes on them. One way you can accomplish this is by holding an "audit exchange" with your managers. Have each of your managers examine other departments and their processes, both to find hiccups and generate new ideas.

You will also want to open this process to your frontline team members because they are the ones who are working every day on the procedures you create.

Step Four: Follow Up

When you streamline your business and implement new processes, it is imperative that you continually communicate through the entire process. As you experiment with new ideas, look for honest feedback from your staff and tweak the procedures accordingly.

As you implement these new processes, you should expect resistance. By soliciting feedback from your staff, you can be honest with them about why the changes are being made and how they can help you implement them.

By including your team in your decision making, when possible, will continue to help give ownership over the process and minimize the negative impact of the changes.

Step Five: Constantly Re-Evaluate

Streamlining your business isn't a one-time endeavor. Your processes will continuously change as your business and market change. Never settle.

Always re-evaluate what you're doing and continue to find new ways to improve. Finding new ways to deliver that "wow" factor to your customers will allow you to continue to grow as a company.

If a mishap arises, look first to your processes to see if that is where the problem lies. Being able to first rule out process snags, as opposed to placing blame, is a more efficient way to respond and will make a huge difference in employee morale.

Systemizing your business with stable processes for all your business tasks will allow you to streamline the daily activities in your company quickly. With a more streamlined business, you will find that you have more time to focus on the essential tasks that will allow you to grow your business.

Look for new technologies to help you automate as many repetitive tasks as you can and develop robust systems to create repeatable and scalable processes.

Streamlining and systemizing your business is the only way you'll be able to achieve your dream of building a successful company that runs smoothly even when you're not there.