

How to keep busy with your business during lockdown by Martin Saban-Smith

One thing is for certain, there may not be a light at the end of the tunnel just yet, but there can be if, as a business, you switch it on.

Although business for many has pretty much ground to a halt and slowed to a near halt for many others, now is the ideal time to examine our businesses and see how we may be able to diversify what we offer to our customers and how we may be able to offer it in a different way. Or, bring in something new to offer them.

By adapting to the changing economy, we can still provide a service to our customers and actually IMPROVE our business as a result. Here are some things I've thought of that every business can do with any extra time they may find they have:

- Update your website with accurate information
- Bring your website up-to-date with current best practices
- Improve product descriptions
- Improve your bookable services - perhaps you can find a more streamlined way of doing it.
- Add any products that you can either post out to people or make them downloadable
- Change the photos on your website to more recent ones

These are just a few things you could do in one area of business. Doing this won't bring in much money though, but it will put you on a better footing when all this trouble has passed.

What's more, with many of us and our customers in, or close to the 'at risk' group, they are being forced online to seek entertainment and company from others. I believe that after this, a lot more business will be conducted online, both via clubs and by individuals as they further learn the benefits of the internet, and in particular social media.

Many of you have been in business a lot longer than I have and I would think you have a heap of contact details of clubs, individuals and businesses sitting there not doing much. This is a goldmine of opportunity to reignite past acquaintance and develop new and future business. (Forgive me if I'm teaching you to suck eggs on this). Have a think about these:

- Think of ways you can use those details to reconnect - probably by letter if you didn't go through the GDPR debacle and get in touch with them, but not before giving them a reason to reconnect with you.
- Finish the website rebuild with new and updated content and product and introduce it to them - show them the benefits of using your website
- Sold work to people in the past? Turn some more things and show it to them in an email, or put it onto the website
- Rethink your pricing for when this all finishes and tell people you have a new structure
- Open and promote bookings for the autumn on a deposit scheme for new bookings on a rolling-rebooking format just in case this goes on for longer than the summer
- Basically, keep your name in front of people so they remember who you are when they are looking for new business later.

And finally, (well, not finally, there is a LOT more that can be done) if you are not keen on social media, then now is certainly the time to engage in it - Demos have been cancelled, events have been postponed, and it has taken a huge toll on all industry. Most of them are on social media somewhere, and being in self-isolation, or forced to work from home, they are looking to engage with like-minded people to alleviate the boredom and frustration.

Social media is not a monster (this is probably better posted in the newsletter than here), and it will prove to be a valuable lifeline for self-isolators and businesses as they have few options other than to diversify into other (often unexplored) areas of online business.

Not all aspects of social make money, and certainly not particularly quickly. *Social Media is where the audience is congregating now* - online, not at demos and events for the foreseeable future.

So I urge you to look online and look closely at where you may be able to diversify your business into utilising the internet more than you may do now. Think about:

- Online demonstrations via webcam for clubs missing out on seeing you in person
- One to one teaching (difficult, but not impossible)
- Q&A sessions online
- Blog posts giving ideas on running a business
- Top Tips on things like tool care, advice on storing sanding discs....
- Your advice of a perfect extractor set-up
- Offer something relevant and inexpensive for download - perhaps write a paper on workshop set-up
- Have you done designs for your work you could scan and make available as a download? Do that.
- Share all the above on a Facebook page and/or Instagram account.
- Use social media to engage with people - it may not bring you a fortune, but it will begin to develop an audience for you online that can follow you and engage with you.
- Already for a social media presence? Use it to engage with your audience - they follow you because they like what you say - Speak up!

Anything you can do for NOW can stay there for use LATER when business gets back to approaching normal. Keep moving forward whilst others are sitting back.

I understand that a lot of this may well be new territory for some and there may be a learning curve with this. What better time to learn and implement a new skill when everyone is having to change the way they work and diversify their business?

By switching the light on at the end of your own business tunnel, the way through this will be a lot brighter.

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