**Coventry Early Years Business bites – Building Business Resilience**

Now more than ever it is important to take stock of where your business is and where you would like it to be in the future. The pandemic of 2020 has caused a great many problems for the small business sector, but it has also created opportunities. This is the time to reflect, readjust and reinvent your business model. It is so easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day running and forget about your goals and aspirations. You need to work on the business as much as in the business. These steps will act as a prompt to help you to review your goals.

* **Don't forget your business plan** - a regular review of your business plan will help you to measure your progress and make sure you are still on track for success. Reviewing where you are against your objectives will help you to make those changes necessary to ensure the continuing success of your business strategy. A business plan is just that – a plan for your business – it allows you to consider where you are now; where you want to be and how you are going to get there. Your business plan should also involve work colleagues who work for you to get their input into your future direction and plans. It gives staff and volunteers a great sense of ownership and fosters loyalty within your team if you involve them in this process.

***Download your business plan template from our Business Toolkit resource page –*** <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/34984/coventry_early_years_%E2%80%93_business_plan_template>

* **Be prepared to be flexible and adaptable to your market** –
* Are your products/services still as attractive as they were?
* What could you do to enhance your offer?
* What are your competitors offering that seems to attract more business?
* Know who your competitors are.
* Conduct fresh market analysis. It doesn't have to cost a lot of money – a simple conversation with your customers can give you a huge amount of valuable information.
* It might also be time to review your prices/fees. Do you review every year? If not, why not?

***Download your competitor analysis template from our Business Toolkit resource page*** <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/34983/coventry_early_years-competitor_analysis_template>

* **Cash is king** – a solid understanding of how your finances work will help you to create and maintain a healthy business (and avoid the pitfalls of unexpected costs catching you unawares), so examine your cash flow projections for the year ahead (and monitor the actual spend at least monthly). Are there any potential problems that could threaten your business? You will need measures in place to cope with any likely cash flow problems. If you haven’t done any cash flow projections – why?

***Download your budget forecast template from our Business Toolkit resource page*** <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/34760/cashflow_tool>

* **Talk to your existing customers** – do your current customers know about everything that you do already? It is likely (as in a lot of businesses) that you are not maximizing the sales that you make to existing customers: it's much cheaper and easier than selling to new ones. Could you extend your product range or offer an additional service? Your customers buy from you because they recognise the value and quality of the services that you provide, so the hard work is already done. Ask them what you might do to meet their needs in addition to what you already offer. Add value to the strong relationship that you have with your customer base.
* **Get more customers** – one of the downfalls of many businesses is that they rely so heavily on their existing customer base that they forget to promote to new customers. Each year you know that you are bound to lose some customers and although in the past these have been replaced don't take this as a given! Think about where your potential customers are, how you are going to reach them and more importantly what messages will you give them about your business that will make them want to buy from you. Use those marketing strategies that you know work well (and you know this because you ask your customers what attracted them to you – right?). Retaining customer loyalty is a massive challenge for all businesses and you must set yourself a target for how many new customers you recruit to your business every year
* **Think about new ways of doing business** – just because you have always done something in a particular way doesn't mean that you have to carry on doing it that way. Of course, if it works then clearly it works, but our customer requirements and working patterns are changing, so it is important that you keep up to speed with their needs and the needs of your business.
* **Increase your on-line presence** – most customers now expect businesses to have a website so that they can find out more about your business and get in touch with you. Make sure your website represents your business effectively and looks professional. Social media marketing has become the best way to promote many businesses. Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook could help you to attract and retain customers.
* **Pause for thought** – even the most enthusiastic business owner can become disheartened and lose focus. Take a step back and take time to really take a critical look at your business. Talk to people who know and use you – what are their impressions and thoughts about you and your business? Talk to new people, go to networking events and gather ideas and new ways of working. Share knowledge and expertise through on-line forums – you do have to give to get back.
* **Bring in new people** – although you may not be in a position to recruit and pay new staff – you can benefit from those conversations that we talked about above and start to foster relationships with people who can bring new perspective to your business. It can also reinvigorate the way you think and feel about your business.
* **What about external expertise and investment** – growing your business and taking it to another level is a hard step and can pose a huge challenge to a business owner. You will need experience, knowledge and possibly money to do it, so it is important to make sure you get it right. You might consider a mentor to help you through the process and develop your ideas and plans to the next level. A business consultant might be able to manage a particular aspect of the business (e.g. marketing). If investment is needed (and it will depend very much on the nature of your particular business) you might consider approaching a private equity investor or business angel