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Marketing, Data Entry, Admin & More
Virtual Bird



Admin planner

We all know it can be tough as a small business during the quiet times. Whether you've closed for orders due to the posting limits, customers aren't buying, it's the summer holidays, or everyone is settling down for the Christmas period. Quiet times happen at multiple periods throughout the year, such is the way of the customer.

Even if you're happy with the lack of sales or orders that accompanies the quiet period, you may wish to use the time productively to improve your business. With those scenarios in mind, here at Virtual Bird we've created a guide of things you can do during such periods.

This guide is full of ideas to help you improve your business over the quiet period. Even if you're taking some time off, you will reap the rewards in the new season by preparing your business and getting ahead now.

Work on a newsletter plan or free incentive

This is a really worthwhile actionable task to work on this season. A newsletter or free incentive keeps customers engaged with your business and you have a direct link with them, via their inbox. By offering them a free incentive, you're giving them valuable content relevant to their life – in turn helping them out with their life, shopping or business.

Incentives can include: free downloads; such as the one you're reading now, a free e-book, free courses, free webinars, exclusive discounts, exclusive competitions, free product samples, and more. Always make sure that any freebies you offer are exclusive, and also sustainable for your business. Don't offer free samples if you would be making a substantial loss that would harm your business model.

The way you can implement those incentives is super easy. Something like Mailchimp or Aweber both have automation options, where you can create specific lists with specific downloads or freebies for that particular list.

Always make sure your newsletter plan and free incentives are relevant to your customers, are appropriate and not spammy. Of course, it goes without saying, make sure you have a double opt-in and that you have permission from anyone who you add to your newsletter list, or who signs up. This is really important in order to comply with the relevant platforms policies, and of course the Data Protection Act.

Write a business plan

Most small businesses believe that because of their size, they won't need a business plan. This is a myth! Every business of every size needs a solid business plan in order to achieve growth and

become a sustainable and scalable business. A business plan allows you to track your progress, analyse your insights and ensure you're on the right path to achieve your goals. Writing a business plan is something we cover in depth in the business course, but it's really not as hard as it might appear. Don't be overwhelmed and give it a try! If you need any resources to help you write your business plan, just get in touch at ana@virtualbird.co.uk

Improve your skills

A great way to use your time during dips in business is to improve your skills. This could be improving your crafting skills, so learning a new craft, or building on the craft you already do. It could be improving your business skills, so learning how to use that piece of software, or improving your core business skills. It could even be as simple as signing up for the Virtual Bird Business Success Course or reading the Virtual Bird Guide to Business. By making a pledge to improve your skills in the new season, that's a step in the right direction!

Expand your range

No doubt throughout the year you've thought of ideas for your business you'd love to try. Perhaps you want to add a product to your range, or tweak a product you have already launched, or launch a whole new range!

Now is the time to develop these ideas and begin to put the steps into motion. Begin with a brainstorm, work up your prototypes, get market feedback.

Once you've got the bare bones in place, when it comes to the new season, implementing these new ranges will be a piece of cake!

Collect testimonials

Word of mouth, reviews and trusted testimonials are the foundation of small businesses. People buy from trusted sources, so this is a hugely beneficial actionable step for your business and a brilliant use of your time.

Send out an ad campaign, a couple of social media posts, a newsletter campaign and any other marketing methods to approach your previous customers for reviews.

This would also be a great time to implement a review strategy for the new season. Sit down and think about how you can incentivise your customers to leave reviews after purchasing.

This could be with a 'thank you' coupon, or a 10% off their next order once they leave a review.

Whichever method you use, ensure you have a stream of honest, unbiased reviews and testimonials as they will have a massive impact on the likelihood of prospective customers purchasing.

Revamp your website

During the holiday rush, your website can often get neglected. Your stock can become haphazard, important updates get postponed, text becomes out of date & more.

Take this time to update your website, bring it in line with the rest of your brand and correct any errors.

If you don't have a website, now is the time to get one. You can get one from us at Virtual Bird for just £50. This ensures you'll be ready in the new season to process your orders in a manageable way!

Make sure social media is up to scratch

As with your website, your social media profiles can become neglected during the holiday rush.

Ensure your logo and cover photo are current and aligned properly, make sure your about section is

up to date, your photo albums are organised, your posts are professional and your call to action button is enabled.

To make the most of your social media overhaul, you can also book an audit to ensure your social media is perfect for prospective customers for just £10 from Virtual Bird.

Ensure your business is legal

Hopefully you've already ticked this off the list, but now is a great time to ensure you're legal. Revise your terms and conditions, make sure your privacy policy is updated.

It is a legal requirement to have terms & conditions which conform to the Consumer Contract Regulations, and to have a Privacy Policy which complies to the Data Protection Act.

If you don't have these in place, you're liable for a fine or worse.

If you need terms and conditions or a privacy policy, you know where we are!

Marketing planning

Now is a great time to evaluate your marketing plan; assess the previous year's posts and note what was successful and what not so much.

Bring those successful posts in your 2016 marketing plan and incorporate them into your advertising, social media posts and other campaigns.

Make a note of the campaigns you want to run throughout the year, this could be newsletter campaigns, press campaigns, and any other marketing avenues you wish to explore.

Do your accounts

Don't put it off, please! The deadline for last tax year is 31st of January and the penalties are severe if you miss the deadline.

Organise your books and submit your tax return now so you're not stressing when the time comes.

If you need your books organising for you, get in touch with us.

If you want the whole process sorted for you, seek out a chartered and recommended certified accountant.

Check on your figures

Once you've done your books, you'll have your years figures in front of you. I like to do my books monthly so that I can keep a closer eye on the incomings and outgoings of my business; but yearly may suit you better.

Use the figures you have to determine your profit margin and overheads, work to make them healthier if you can.

Make sure you're earning a decent wage from all the hard work you're putting in!

Stock up on stationary

I know lots of you reading this will squeal when I say this, but yes, stock up on stationery.

Notebooks, pencils, pens, washi tape, Filofaxes, diaries and more. Make sure you've got it all.

Now is a great time to buy because they'll all be in the sales.

You can also get personalised business stationery from us at Virtual Bird from just £4.00!

Read a business book

Yep, you know what I'm going to say... use your time in the best way possible and read a business book.

The Virtual Bird's Guide to Business will help you bring in the new season in a really motivated and enthusiastic way & will help during your admin planning!

Available on Amazon for £1.99 – Just search "Virtual Bird's Guide to Business".

It's a bargain and an investment in your business, if you can't justify £1.99 then it's time to reconsider your options.

Create some standard replies you can personalise

Customer service can take a lot of time when you're running the ship by yourself, but it's really important to reply to customers as soon as you can.

A lot of emails and messages tend to be along similar lines, and you can make life easier for yourself by drafting some standard replies that you can personalise.

This isn't automating or cheating, this is just making life easier for yourself whilst ensuring your customers get the attention and information they need.

There are several ways you can do this; your email client should have an option to do this, and Facebook has a nifty feature called "saved replies" that is made for this exact purpose.

Schedule, schedule, schedule.

Spend some time scheduling your posts, newsletters and blogs for next year. You don't have to schedule everything ready to go, even if you begin drafts or notes of what you'll post when it will help.

The hardest part of writing content is often brainstorming the ideas and what you're going to say.

Even if you bullet point or summarise what you're going to say in each type of content, your life will be so much easier when it comes to publishing the content.

Look into collaborations

Small businesses thrive on collaborations. The nature of such small businesses, predominately handmade, means that the audiences of such businesses are quite small.

Enter a collaboration with another business and you double your target audience.

Use this time to research and approach possible collaborators.

Ensure the collaborators are complimentary to your business, so for handmade clothing businesses, you could team up with a baby shoe maker.

Approach your ideal collaborator professionally, explaining why you think your products would work together and how it could be mutually beneficial for the both of you.

Analyse insights

Keeping on top of your insights is super important, so have a session where you analyse your insights.

Check out the performance of your page/website. Utilise Google analytics, and the relevant social media back end sections.

You will be able to view the demographics, activities and behaviour of visitors to your page/website.

Use the results to tweak your future business undertakings.

Check on SEO

SEO is the bread and butter of your business, that's how you get found in search engines. Without SEO you're invisible so it's really important to evaluate it.

If your website is built using WordPress, there's a really nifty plugin called Yoast. Use this plugin to check the performance of your SEO and make amendments where necessary.

This also applies to Etsy too; your titles, tags and description all form the platform for SEO on Etsy so ensure they're perfect for your product.

If you need help with your SEO or an Etsy audit to check on things, Virtual Bird can help for just a tenner!

Update your branding

A lot of businesses like to make their brand seasonal, so if you've done so it's time to change it back. You could also use this time to update your branding completely, have a total rebrand if you feel your current brand doesn't reflect your business appropriately.

If you do update your branding, ensure you have a vector file of your logo as this is really important if you come to need banners and the likes down the line.

Make stock

When small businesses take custom orders, they can often get overwhelmed and struggle to find the time for making stock.

Use this time to make some stock so you have something to offer in the new season, especially for those after holiday sales!

You could build stock for your website, Etsy or a specific market night.

The more planning and making you do now, the easier life will be next year.

Organise your work space

I cannot stress this enough, a tidy space means a tidy mind.

Organise your work space, clean everything, put everything where it lives.

Label things, you will love yourself for this in the new season; you won't have to spend 2 hours finding that thing you know was in a certain place the last time you checked.

Having a clean, tidy and organised work space will make for happy business next year.

Set your 2016 goals

I'm very goal orientated and I encourage all my clients to set themselves goals. By setting goals, it gives you something to work towards, something to aim for.

Even if you don't achieve the specific goals, you'll have achieved something by aiming for them.

Set your goals by week, month and year. Your yearly goals can be bigger and more ambitious but try and keep your weekly goals to a more achievable level.

You could begin by having 1 weekly goal, 3 monthly goals and 5 yearly goals. If you feel you need to add to them as time progresses, you can do so.

By having a starting point, you're already investing in your capabilities as a business owner.

Clear the to do pile

Ah the "to do" pile, everyone has one, a list of things they just keep putting off until another day.

Whether you keep postponing the items on your list because of lack of time, lack of energy, lack of motivation; now is the time to address them.

You can address them in one of three ways... You can do them, get it done, get it out of the way, and over with. Alternatively, you can evaluate whether the task needs to be done, if you've put it off for this long does it really need to be done? Will your life or business be any better off for doing it? If the

answer is no, then forget all about it. The final way to address jobs on your list is to outsource them; that way the job gets done but you don't have to worry about it.

Improve productivity

Productivity is really important for small businesses, if you want to earn a sustainable hourly rate, you need to be productive.

You can use this time to try and streamline any of your processes to make yourself more productive. This could be as simple as investing in a piece of software to do something for you.

My favourite is "If this then that", it automates some of the small things in life that will save you so much time. Another popular one is Zapier.

This isn't about turning your business into a zombie, this is about focusing your efforts where they can be the most productive.

Clean your devices – inside and out

We live in a technological world, everyone has at least one device; and these devices can become sluggish, dirty, filled with rubbish and other things just from being used in our daily lives.

Take some time out to clean your devices, delete all the rubbish, wipe down the screen, uninstall programs you don't use, run a virus check, clear dust from the fan.

All of these things will make your device run a lot smoother and faster once completed.

Sort your emails

An organised inbox makes me happy, like weirdly not normal happy. I often get clients say to me, how do you have such organised emails... and the answer is simple, filtering.

Filtering will be your new best friend, I promise.

We've all got emails we need to keep but never read, a filter will mark them and read and put them in a folder.

Those emails from newsletters you keep meaning to unsubscribe to? A filter can unsubscribe from them for you.

The emails you keep missing from your great auntie June? A filter can pop them in a folder marked important for you to read at the end of the day.

With a filter you don't have to wade through a load of rubbish to get to the gems. It might take some time to implement and get right, but once it does, you'll never look back.

Setting up filtering varies depending on which email client you use, but just Google the name of your email client followed by "filtering" and you should get a step by step guide to follow.

Assess your calendar

Go through your calendar and take a look at all of the appointments, obligations and entries in the calendar.

Did you spend time doing things you didn't want to do? Were certain events unsuccessful? Could you have attended a different appointment to make better use of your time?

Analyse the information in your calendar and improve on it for 2016 to really make sure your time is well spent.

Revise your pricing

Increase your prices. No, don't run away in horror, this is for your own benefit. 99% of clients who have undertaken my business course began the course undercharging, that's a lot of people.

It's a lot of people who deserve better, are worth more and needed to value themselves and their product higher than they were.

There's a very good chance you're undervaluing yourself too.

Take a long hard look at your prices, are you treating yourself fairly at your current prices? If not, you need to increase them.

You need sustainable prices to have a viable business – not only that but by having too low prices, you're doing yourself a disservice.

Do a stock take

This one might not be applicable to you, especially if the “make stock” tip featured earlier resonated with you.

But for those with healthy stock levels, do a stock take.

Ensure every platform your stock is featured in is calibrated. The last thing you want is to begin the new season by selling a product you don't have because you forgot to update your stock.

Create promo videos

Current reports and analytics throughout the small business sector tells us that customers and prospective customers respond well to videos.

Spend some time drafting ideas for a video and putting the beginnings of one into place.

Ideas could include: a behind the scenes look at your business, a snapshot of your workspace, promotion information, a video of your products, the making of a product, and so much more.

Get inventive and you're sure to reap what you sow.

Write a press release

It's a common myth that you have to be a huge business to have a press release, you don't.

In fact, smaller businesses often succeed quite nicely when approaching press because of their niche value and their small business status.

With that in mind, write a press release with a clear headline for the story, promote your products in the best light you can, and approach press with your release!

Create a loyalty scheme

Customer service is huge, loyal customers are the foundation of your business.

By being returning customers, they're the goal for your brand. Every business wants to be a market leader in their niche and returning customers are the beginning of that.

So it's time to reward them, let them know just how valued they are as a repeat customer; you could implement a loyalty card, a points system, regular discounts and more.

No matter how you do it, ensure customers know just how much you value their business.

Approach bloggers and reviewers

Another scary one on the list, but as it's the penultimate tip I thought it'd be a nice way to end it.

Bloggers and reviewers are hugely influential on customers purchasing habits, so use this time to check out the hashtags #prequest and #journorequest on Twitter to find out how other businesses are approaching bloggers, and what those bloggers are looking for.

Once you've built some confidence up, approach them with a product or a competition they can use as content on their blog and you will get the chance to be directly placed in front of their audience.

Take some time off

This is the big one, this is the one you absolutely must do this season – even if you do nothing else. Take. Some. Time. Off.

It can be really hard to distance yourself from your business when you're a small business owner, but it's really important to do so.

If you don't take a holiday for yourself, you're at risk of burning yourself out, you're at risk of running yourself into the ground.

You don't want that, customers don't want that, your business doesn't want that.

So, turn off the computer, put down the tools, go and take a bubble bath with a good book; or spend some time with family, veg out on the sofa watching TV, do all of the things you feel guilty about doing normally.

You'll come back in the new season feeling awake, alert, refreshed and motivated!

Final Words

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this admin planner, I really hope you found it beneficial and you took away some information from it.

As a valued reader, please use the code "OW2016" to get 20% off any of our services, this could include audits, terms and conditions, book keeping or anything else we offer. New customers only.

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Thanks for reading,

VB x