

FOCUS

**HOW TO STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR ONLINE
BUSINESS FOR MORE RESULTS**



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Chapter 1: Procrastinate Your Way Out of Business

Procrastination can be the death knell of any business and that is doubly true for your online business. Working for your self requires a form of self discipline to get the work done as well as strong time management skills. If your previous work history has involved working for someone else then you may not totally grasp this concept as yet, but read on as we learn about the perils of procrastination.

What is Procrastination?

Procrastination is where you put things off or find excuses for not doing a task that needs doing. Some of the common procrastination techniques employed by online business owners can include spending huge amounts of time on social network sites like Facebook or twitter; taking phone calls when you are supposed to be working on a project for a client; taking too many long lunches or simply not bothering to get out of bed before lunchtime. All of these examples are timewasters. If you are wondering if something you are doing is a procrastination technique ask yourself "does this (whatever you are doing) contribute towards my business?" If the answer is "no" then you are procrastinating.

The Danger of Shiny Objects

The internet is full of lots of shiny objects - temptations and distractions that steer you off course when you are supposed to be focusing on your online

business. Both Internet Marketers and Service Providers are prone to chasing shiny things when they are supposed to be working for their clients. But the shiny object syndrome has an added dimension that stems far beyond procrastination - shiny object syndrome can undermine the very fabric of your business model.

For example let's assume you decide to be an Internet Marketer and you decide to create and offer products to potential clients - they could be ebooks, courses or even physical products such as DVDs or CDs. But then you are doing a spot of research online and you come across a flashy banner claiming you can make \$300 in the next 15 minutes. You can't resist clicking on the banner and you are taken to a sales page that tells you that for just \$97 you can get this wonderful secret to untold wealth. Of course the sales page does not tell you that you can also lose \$500 in the same length of time and the course you have just out laid money on doesn't tell you that either.

BUT that is not the worst part of that little example - the worst part is that you have just stolen time and money from your business! You allowed yourself to be distracted when you were supposed to be working on your own business model. You have spent almost \$100 that could have gone into your business and you are spending time looking at a course that you might read once and never implement the ideas.

Online businesses are a little different to traditional bricks and mortar businesses - they don't have nearly as many overheads and the entry costs

are usually pretty small. But all Internet Marketers will tell you that you need either time or money to grow your business, while Service Providers will tell you that time is the most important commodity. So if you want your online business to succeed then you can't afford to waste either time or money - don't let yourself be distracted by shiny objects.

Wool Gathering is Great for Sheep

You are building a website for a client - it is due in two days. You are sitting at your computer, which is a good thing, but the screensaver is on. So what are you doing when you are supposed to be working for your client? You are wool gathering. Wool gathering is the term used for people who seem to sit down and start their work, but who then seem to drift off into space. Writers call it writer's block; artist's call it creative dreaming; most of us call it day dreaming, but the bottom line is that if your brain is not focused on the task at hand, then you are wool gathering and that is another huge time waster.

As humans we are not machines. It can be difficult to stay focused on the task at hand especially if the work is boring, or repetitive. If you find yourself wool gathering, get up and take a short walk around the room. Have a snack or get some fresh air for five minutes. You will come back to your desk a lot more energized and this should make it easier to stay focused on your work.

Why Staying on Top of Your Business is so Important

Having a boss is usually pretty conducive to getting your work done - no one wants to lose their job. But when you are working for yourself in your online business you are the one who has to motivate or inspire yourself. One of the reasons that people chose to run their own online business is that they can have the freedom to pick their own hours, but here is the key. In an online business you often have to work longer hours than you might in a 9-5 job, especially when you are getting your business model established. The days of the rags to riches overnight are long gone and while running your own online business is still a great way to live you do have to work to make it work.

Procrastination can be your biggest enemy. Most people don't notice the amount of time they spend on social media sites. Other people can day dream for hours without realizing it. That is why procrastination is such an insidious underminer of your business - most people don't know that they are doing it. In the next two sections we are going to talk about the importance of prioritization and scheduling - two tools that will help you avoid procrastination and stay focused on your online business.

Chapter 2 - The Importance of Prioritization

Setting priorities is a crucial time management tool that when used effectively can ensure that your business goals stay on track. If you start your day with a clear idea on what needs to be done first you will get more achieved through the day especially if you schedule your time, which we will discuss in the next chapter. Most people use some form of to-do list to keep track of what needs to be done and when but a to-do list can be dangerous if it is not used correctly.

The Dangers of the too Long To-Do List

One of the biggest problems with to-do lists is that they can often become a rod that we hit ourselves over the back with. If you have more things on your list than you can comfortably do in a day then your list is too long.

When you are faced with a too long to-do list you will get to the end of your day feeling weary and dejected because you haven't finished all you set out to do. If you feel this way over a long period of time it is going to be harder for you to be motivated in your business and eventually you will be tempted to just throw out the whole business because it is all too hard. Ideally you want to finish your day feeling pleased with what you have achieved and motivated to start work again the following day.

The key to a good to-do list is prioritization. Most online businesses have three core components - clients, administration/support and building the

business. Ideally you will want to work on each of these three components every day. Basically if you fail to do the work necessary to bring money into your business (clients, or buyers) then your business will not survive. If you ignore the administration and support side of your business then you won't know if your business is actually working or not and if you ignore the business building side of things then you will find it hard to remain competitive in your area of expertise.

When you come to write your to-do list think of

1. Where is the money coming from;
2. Where is that money going and is it enough and
3. How can I grow my business today?

How to Prioritize When all of Your Clients are Important

If you are a Service Provider then you know the importance of making each client feel as though they (and they alone) are the most important person to your business. But often the very nature of providing services means you are going to be working with more than once client at a time. If you are selling products then you might find a similar dilemma in your customer support area - who gets priority over whom?

This problem does take a bit of juggling. What you want to consider is

1. Do you have clients that can be dealt with in a short space of time (less than 30 minutes)? If Yes then do them first.

2. Do you have deadlines for work to be delivered? If Yes then do that work next depending on the most urgent deadline first.
3. Have any of your clients already waited a long time for resolution (more than 2 business days)? If Yes then they need to get something from you even if it is an email saying "Sorry I am working on it".

Do not make the mistake of thinking that the highest paying client you have should take priority over some of your smaller but regular clients. If you are building your online business as a long term venture then you should focus on regular repeat clients rather than the one client who spends one large sum of money once.

The Importance of Delegation

Regardless of what type of online business you are in sooner or later you are going to have to either hire staff or outsource work to freelancers so that your business can grow. Delegating tasks is the secret weapon used by all good managers and business owners and a great way of getting things done on your to-do list. In terms of prioritizing if you are able to delegate some of your admin or support issues, or get someone else to be working on the job you have due Friday while you work on the one due tomorrow then you will be better placed to meet your client demands. Delegating gives you the chance to work on those aspects of the business you are good at, while ensuring that the other components of your business are getting the same amount of attention.

Delegation can be hard for some business owners especially if they have high standards and they want the very best for their clients or customers. However all good Internet Marketers and Service Providers will tell you that delegation is crucial if you want your business to grow. There will always be a limit to what you can do on your own so get into the habit of outsourcing or delegating early on in your business and you will find prioritization a lot easier as a result.

There are many benefits to prioritization. You will get a lot more done and you will be pleased with your progress through the day. This will become a motivating factor in your business. Higher productivity equates to business growth and as your business grows you will be closer to the ideal internet lifestyle you were dreaming of when you started your online business. Achieving this lifestyle is so much easier if you put your customers first and build your business based on the "what can I do for my clients today" premise. That is why prioritization is important.

Equally important in remaining focused in your online business is the need for scheduling and we will address that in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Sticking to a Schedule

Once you have prioritized the things you need to do in a day you then need to fit those tasks into a schedule so that they all get done. The most important thing to do when working out a schedule is to be realistic about how long things will take to get done. You also need to remember to include things like time for traveling if you go to the gym, or how long that phone call to your mother will really take. No, those two items are not necessary in running a business but your schedule won't only include business tasks. A good schedule will cover the things you do in business, your social events, personal appointments and even some well-needed "me" time. If you have to go to pick your children up from school that will be on your schedule as will be that call you have been putting off to your mother.

When you set up a schedule it is obvious that your tasks are going to be different every day of the week. But a good schedule should start with you blocking off certain times for work, socializing, family commitments and the things you like to do as well like going to the gym. When you have blocked off your day into those main components you can then start fitting in the tasks you have prioritized for the day into the relevant blocks.

What do I do if I Have More Tasks Than Time Blocks?

Prioritize and delegate.

Training Your Clients to fit into Your Schedule

Email and phone calls can be two of the biggest nuisances you will have with your online business because they can be so time consuming if you allow them to be. Given the age of lightening fast response times many people expect for their emails queries to be answered immediately or they expect you to spend a heap of amount of time on the telephone helping them. If you have a business to run the one thing you don't have is the time to spend all day on emails or the phone for that matter.

The easiest way to deal with this problem is to allocate certain times of the day to respond to phone calls and answer emails. For example you could decide that you will only check your emails first thing in the morning and again at about 4 pm. The same with phones - only return calls between 11 am and 12 Noon for example. Outside of those times you can either a) get someone else to take a message for you; or b) leave an answer message on your phone telling clients when you will return their call. With email you should not look at your inbox except first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon. If you are waiting on a specific email ask someone else to check your mail for you and let you know when the email has arrived.

Chat and text messaging can also be a huge timewaster. If you can't bear to leave your phone if you know you have messages, turn it off. Same with chat programs. Show yourself as "busy" and invite people to leave you a

message; then you can get back to them when you are ready, not while you are in the middle of something important.

If your business is still in its start-up phase you may be understandably anxious about leaving phone and email messages to pile up while you are working but your business will be better because of this. Over time your clients will come to know that you will respond within a certain time frame as will your phone clients. In the meantime you are carving out blocks of time when you can really focus on what will be bringing in the money.

The Importance of Doing Things Once and Getting Things Finished

It is a lot easier to remain focused on your online business if you try and only deal with incoming messages the once and that you finish the tasks you schedule for yourself. If you decide to open an email message (or letter if you are still getting them) then plan on completing any action on it so it can be filed away. Don't make the mistake of opening an email then thinking, "oh I will get back to that later". The reason you should not do something like that is that you will carry on with your other tasks but you will be distracted by the email you opened but did not resolve. This will make you less productive overall. So if you don't have the time to action an email, don't open it.

When you are scheduling your work tasks try and do it so that you reach a natural end to a part of a project or job. For example you might be building a website for someone so you could schedule a block of time when you

source all of the graphics for the job. If you are writing a new course as a product you could decide to write the first module or X number of words. Try and set yourself little deadlines and smaller chunks of bigger jobs and you will find you will achieve more over a shorter space of time.

Creating the Flexible Schedule

There is one constant in life and that is "Life Happens" and your schedule needs to be flexible enough to handle life's little ups and downs. Many people running online businesses often work from home at least during the start up phase and this means the potential for things to go wrong thanks to other family members is increased. Children can get sick and require attention at home when you want to work. You might have personal appointments that you have to fit in around your working schedule. Your Mother might decide to come and stay and wants to know why you can't take her out for the day. It will be amazing to you how often people equate staying at home with having nothing to do so don't be surprised that when you do decide to focus on your business and you are trying to sort out a schedule that some one else comes along and makes things difficult.

There are two ways that you can help reduce the "Life Happens" factor in your schedule; firstly you need to plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time to take care of client or business needs and secondly you need to learn to say "no" every now and then. A couple of examples for planning ahead might include factoring a couple of additional hours to finish a client project that can be used for an emergency; you could factor in a couple of

evenings through the week to catch up on work left unfinished during the day or you could add an extra week to a client deadline so that you are not left clambering around with hours to go on a deadline trying to finish.

Saying "no" is always difficult but if you want to seriously focus on your online business then it would be a really good idea for you to start trying. If someone asks you to do something with them or for them and you have work scheduled simply say to them "I am sorry I can't, I have to work this afternoon" or something along those lines. If you take your schedule seriously then you will find it easier to explain to others that your work is something that is important to you and if they respect you, then they will respect that as well. There will always be some people who might say "oh that internet thing" but don't let that worry you. Stay focused on your online business and make a mental note to check out their facial expression when you buy your next new car.

In this next section we are going to look at why becoming a student is a good way to grow your business.

Chapter 4 - Learn To Grow Your Business

You may have thought you finished learning when you left college but the most successful people in all areas of life are people who see learning as a lifelong process. Now you are determined to focus on your online business you need to schedule yourself time to learn. This might not necessarily be book learning although books are always a good source of material. You can learn from your competitors through networking; you can take courses, attend seminars or webinars; you can spend time with a business coach or mentor. Yes most of these things will cost you money but this is one area of your business that should not be ignored.

The Importance of Networking

Running an online business can often be a lonely endeavor. The very nature of the business will mean that in many cases you are only contacting other people via email or Skype - the potential for dealing with people face to face, unless you are working for offline clients, is limited. However there are many opportunities for online business people to actually interact with other like minded individuals in your local community. For example many small towns have a business Round Table organization, Lions or Rotary groups and other business networking clubs. You might be working from home but you are building a legitimate business so there is no reason why you shouldn't join up with some of these groups so you can stay in touch with what is happening in your local area.

Attending seminars and workshops is another great way of meeting new people both in your industry area and who are also working online. There is usually a cost associated with attending these types of functions but again you will be in a position to meet new people who understand your business and what you are trying to do. You will find seminars motivational and informative and you can often meet people who might be interested in working in a joint venture with you in the future which is huge in terms of business growth.

If you are living in a really remote area that doesn't offer a lot in the way of networking groups for business individuals; and for some reason you are not able to attend seminars and workshops then head online and look for webinars in your industry. Depending on your specific industry/business model you will find many opportunities to learn from people who are already successful in your niche. Many webinars are run to promote new products or courses but most of them also offer invaluable information on the call itself and you may also find someone who can help in terms of acting as a mentor for you as your business grows.

Remember there are many different things you can learn about - all connected with your business success. Your local tax office may offer classes on how to set up your books so that filing your tax returns won't be a major mission. You could offer to go and speak at schools, women's groups or senior citizen groups about working online, or certain aspects of your business. Think about the skills you have and what you could offer

any group or organization you can hook up with - remember networking and even learning is a two way process.

Networking should be an ongoing process that will facilitate an increase in your skills and contacts which in turn increases the chances for business growth. A lot of the "learning" that goes on at meetings and seminars actually occurs when you are chatting casually to people over a cup of coffee at the breaks. Just don't forget to take plenty of business cards with you and don't be shy about handing them out.

Why Studying Your Competition is so Important

To keep up with your competitors (and even surpass them) you have to know what they are doing. Networking, seminars, workshops and webinars are all good places where you can catch up with what is going on in your specific niche. They are also a good place to find out how local and national policies and politics might impact your business in some way. Remember that every business has both internal and external influences that can change consumer buying trends which in turn will impact your bottom line so you need to stay informed as much as possible about possible threats to your business.

Competition should never bother you as a business owner. Competition shows that there is high consumer demand for whatever your business is selling and in the online environment it is often possible for you to benefit from knowing what your competitors are doing. Joint ventures are where

two or more businesses come together to create a high value launch (of a product, service or package) that is formed from a merger of ideas and products between the individual companies. For example you might be promoting a new type of software. You are at a seminar where you meet another business owner who is about to launch a new gadget that is a perfect fit for your software. By combining the two products into a single launch that will target existing customers of both businesses you have the potential to market your products to an entirely new market segment resulting in business growth.

Joint ventures between two (or more) companies are a win-win situation for both companies and they are a lot easier to arrange when the owners of the two companies actually know each other. Because the internet is quite an anonymous place personal contact with individuals helps foster trust and a common desire to work together for business growth far better than any email or phone call might. The days of hiding your latest product from the world are long gone. By fostering solid relationships with other business owners you are not only learning about their new ventures you can also get their take on consumer buying trends and how their business might be impacted by local or national legislative changes.

How Learning can Increase the Growth of Your Business

We have already looked at how joint ventures can increase your business but most avenues for learning are going to contribute to the growth of your business either directly or indirectly. The more you learn about your

industry area and the more you share what you know the more you are going to be recognized as an expert in your field. This by itself brings an increase in revenue to your company. You will also find that as your own image within your industry grows you will have other business owners approaching you for joint venture deals.

Your new knowledge is going to stimulate new ideas that can be used to grow the company even further. Based on new information you learn over time you might recognize a gap in the market that you could target. By staying informed in your industry area you are better placed to notice changes in consumer buying trends. This will allow you to make changes to your product or service line so that you meet new demands quicker than your competition while minimizing any potential loss that might stem from these changing trends.

The main points you should take away from this section is that

- 1) Learning should be an on going process.
- 2) Just some of the ways you can learn within your business are through networking with other likeminded individuals, attending seminars and workshops or webinars.
- 3) Your on going learning process will result in increased business growth as you will be better placed to take advantage of joint venture opportunities.

You will also be able to notice changes in consumer buying trends and you will have a good idea about what your competitors are doing. Remember

that from a generic standpoint learning encourages your business mind to be open to new ideas while from a specific topic standpoint your continuing education in your field will help increase your ability to be perceived as an expert and that will improve your business's ability to remain competitive. In this next chapter we are going to look at the concept of business plans and why you should have one for your business.

Chapter 5 - Creating Your Master Plan

Every business needs a solid and long term business plan. This plan should include all of the elements you want to concentrate on as your business grows including intangibles like your vision and mission statement. A business plan does need some degree of flexibility in it to keep up with changes in your industry field, but it should be solid enough to show prospective investors, employees and other interested stakeholders where you see your business being in five years time. Even if your business model is offering services to online clients you need to formulate a business plan that show how you intend to grow your business and what are the key things in your business that makes you stand out from your competition.

What is a Business Plan?

A business plan is like a road map for your business. It shows what your business will do and the goals you have for your business. A good business plan will highlight all the major areas of your business and show what makes your business different from those of your competitors. Most business plans outline goals for the next 3 - 5 years including financial forecasts, marketing strategies, operational goals and the impact your business might have on the environment. The environmental aspects of your plan might include your projected carbon footprint for example or how your business might positively impact your local community.

Why is a Business Plan so Important?

It has been said that a company without a business plan is like a journey with out a destination. If you don't have a clear vision on where you want your company to go then you are likely to either spend your time going around in circles or worse going backwards. Your business plan will show what your objectives are for the next 3 - 5 years; the timelines for how long it will take to reach your goals and an outline of your products and how they will differ from others in the market.

Your business plan will be useful in helping you determine when you need to employ staff or outsource part of your business. If you need to raise any finance for your company then your business plan will show potential investors how you plan to repay the money. Your joint venture partners might be interested in your business plan if they are thinking of working with your company over the long term and if you ever decide to sell your business then your business plan will help show potential buyers the essence of your company.

Even if the only person who is going to see your business plan right now is you it should still be done. Your business plan will help sharpen your goals and ideas; it will be motivational when you are having a down day and it will provide you with a benchmark for the different goals you want to achieve with your business. By regularly comparing your forecasts to your actual financial goals for example you will be able to see if your projected growth

for the company was under or overestimated and you can tweak your further future goals accordingly.

What Should be in Your Business Plan?

There are no set formulas anymore for what a business plan should look like however all business plans do include some common elements. These include a cover page, and executive summary or table of contents and an overview of your business. Your plan should also include your business goals, an indication of how you intend to meet those goals, some financial forecasting or targets and what skills and resources you have at your disposal to ensure your business will meet its targets. If you have any supporting documents such as bank balance sheets or proof of potential income then these should be included as an appendix to the main plan.

Now all of this might sound very official especially if you want to just have a business model where you create and sell products to online customers. But that is the whole point of a business plan. It provides you with an opportunity to think of all of the little things that go into making a business successful. You might have the best products imaginable but if people don't know about your product line they are not going sell. So you need a marketing plan. There is no point in selling your amazing product for \$2 per unit if it is going to cost \$3 to produce so you need a pricing strategy. Likewise you need your financial forecasts to show you have thought about the hidden costs of running a business like bank fees and taxes. Can you afford to pay yourself a wage? You might be prepared to work for the love

of it but sooner or later you will have rent to pay and your financial forecasts should reflect this. You might have a good idea for one product but that is not going to get you very far in terms of business growth - your strategic objectives should be able to show your second and subsequent product launches and when they will be rolled out.

If you have never done anything about a business plan before this might sound really daunting. However if you go online you will find a huge number of free resources that will help you to create your business plan.

The Importance of a Vision and Mission Statement

Part of your business overview section in your business plan should relate to your vision and mission statements. Vision and mission statements are part of your strategic planning and they show where the company wants to go and how you are going to get there. A vision statement is like an overview - it is where you ultimately see your business in terms of what it is going to offer others. The vision statement is a long term view of your business overall. From this vision mission statements can be developed to show how your company is going to achieve that vision.

Your mission statements should all be written with the customer in mind. So you want to think about is specifically "What" your company will do; "How" your company will do what it will do and "For Whom" your company will do what it does. The "What" relates to why your customers buy from you - whether it is a service or a product. The "How" is the actual products

and services you will sell and the "For Whom" will be your customer demographics - age, income, and things like that. If your business will only be operating in a certain geographical area then you would mention that in your mission statements as well although with an online business in most cases your customers can come from anywhere.

Once you have written your vision and mission statements your strategic planning process can stem from there. The most effective strategy for new or small businesses is to use the vision statement to idealize where you want your company to go and then think of where you are now. Your strategic planning process will outline where you go from where your business is today to the point where you have reached your vision statement over time. You can set goals with specific timeframes and measurable outcomes to ensure that your business is on track at any point of the process.

The purpose of this book was to help you stay focused as you work on your online business. You have learned just how destructive procrastination can be for your business in that it can cause you to miss deadlines which in turn can impact your service level to clients. Procrastination leads to unreliability and as most successful online businesses are based on trust that unreliability can be the death knell in your business.

To help guard against procrastination that can stem from feelings of being overwhelmed we looked at the importance of prioritization and sticking to a schedule. Prioritization can help you to focus on the three core elements of

your business - revenue generation, administration/customer support and growing your business. If your tasks are not related to at least one of those three core items then you shouldn't be doing them during your working day. Your schedule will keep you on track provided you ensure that you have set realistic time chunks for the things you want to do in a day.

As you read through Chapter Four you would have learned about why learning is so important if you want your business to grow. Never underestimate the importance of networking and building your skill base while staying in tune with what is going on in your industry niche. Finally create a business plan if only for the fact that by doing so you are making your online business your official way of making your income and living the internet lifestyle that so many people dream about. By staying focused and working on your online business everyday you will be successful and your vision will become a reality.