FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE EDITION

Small Business TRENDS

The magazine for successful small business owners

HOW TO TAKE A VACATION FROM BUSINESS

Do You Know the Difference Between Delegating and Abdicating?

20 Ways to Boost Your Entrepreneurial Creativity

Can the 30-Hour Work Week Fit Your Business?

Enjoy Your Vacation With These Essential Apps

How to Renew Your Spirit and Get Your Mojo Back

SPOTLIGHT: Turning Skateboarding & Skimboarding Passion into Profit

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Small Business TRENDS

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Exploring freedom, independence

Anita Campbell
CEO and Publisher
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Running a business can be invigorating, exhausting, rewarding, frustrating, liberating and frightening -- all at the same time. And I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Why? Because it is empowering. Running my own business makes me feel strong when we overcome challenges. I feel free to control how I spend my time. I thrive on being independent.

Those themes of freedom and independence as an entrepreneur and business owner are explored in this month's edition.

Our team of writers, under the direction of Executive Editor Shawn Hessinger and Assistant Editor Joshua Sophy, have crafted a strong selection of practical insights.

Check out the pointers for how to take a vacation without worrying. Learn the difference between delegation and abdication -- and whether the 30-hour work week is right for your business. Discover apps you can use to monitor your business remotely.

Be inspired by the Small Business Spotlight on Origin Distribution, a company that turned the owners' passion for longboarding and skimboarding into profit.

Oh, and if you've temporarily lost that creative spark, we show you how to get your mojo back.

Wishing you much success

Anita

PS, check back next month for The Sales Edition of the Magazine in August. For a copy of our Editorial Calendar, visit http://sbt.me/3qo.

Small Business Trends News Roundup

Move over YouTube, here comes Facebook -- again!

Facebook has been moving into YouTube's territory. Remember the news earlier this year that Facebook video can now be embedded on other sites -- just like YouTube? Well, now the popular social media site says it will begin sharing ad revenue with video producers -- just like … well, you know. Sense a pattern here?

But don't count YouTube out just yet

If you haven't been to the world's largest online video site recently, you soon may not recognize the place. YouTube recently announced a boatload of new features. Improved comments, subscriber notifications, an improved Creator Studio app, 360-degree video, and a new creator community are some of the changes.

Aussies first in flight

Forget what you know from the history books. Sure, Kitty Hawk may be where human flight began. But the latest news is about the first unmanned commercial drone flight. An Australian startup called Flirtey deserves that honor, at least in U.S. airspace. The company was the first to receive FAA approval for drone delivery ahead of others like Amazon and UPS.

Yahoo is boosting its small biz creds

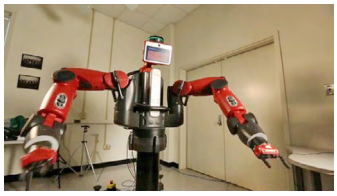
It's one of the Internet's most famous brands, but Yahoo hasn't been on the radar of many small business owners recently. All that could change, however, as the tech giant tweaks its small business offerings. This month saw a new Yahoo Gemini Ads App and Google Trusted Stores for Yahoo Merchant Solutions.

Small businesses are "free" -- but not to misclassify

In this month when Americans celebrate independence, one federal agency is setting some boundaries. The U.S. Department of Labor issued Administrator's Interpretation No. 2015-1. The department says it is meant to clarify when small businesses may classify a worker as a contractor as opposed to an employee. Still, some say it goes too far.

How about a salad prepared by a robot named Julia?

No, this isn't science fiction. Robots, it turns out, can be used for lots of things besides factory work. Named for famous TV cook Julia Childs, one is even being trained in the culinary arts. All of this raises a question. Could robots be your future employees? Could they pour a latte or manage inventory -- and free up time in your business?



Shawn Hessinger
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HOW TO TAKE A VACATION FROM BUSINESS

A relaxing vacation from your hectic work life can do wonders. You will come back with fresh ideas and renewed energy that can take your business to the next level.

Entrepreneurs and small business owners are notorious for not taking vacations. Sixty-six percent of small business owners find it difficult to take vacations, according to the June 2015 Office Depot Small Business Index.

And that's a shame, because a relaxing vacation is good for your business. You'll come back with fresh ideas and a new, positive attitude. What seemed like crushing problems or ever-present worries get put in perspective.

Your personal life will benefit, too. So many business owners make sacrifices and put in long hours each week. A vacation is an opportunity to reconnect with your spouse and kids.

The trick to a worry-free vacation is proper planning. Follow these tips to get ready for vacation and you will soon be slipping into a pair of flip flops:

1. ASSIGN A DEPUTY

You'll need someone to be in charge when you're gone.

If you have managers in your company, they know their roles already. If you have more than one manager on your team and they are peers, it may help to designate one of them to be the main person in charge, in case of emergency.

Accept that mistakes will happen. Be sure your deputy knows he or she has your full confidence.

But what if you don't have managers? That's when you have to be clearer with your employees. They may need special instructions as to their authority and how far that authority extends. Make sure they know when to reach out to you.

2. CLEAR YOUR PLATE

You won't like thinking about that stack of unfinished projects when you're digging your toes in the sand, with sunscreen in one hand and a margarita in the other.

If you haven't got a staff to delegate to when you're inching out the door, here's how to clear some of this stuff off your plate before you leave. Simply log an extra hour or two each day for a week or two in advance, whittling away those projects. That's much better than pulling an all-nighter just before you're due to drive 12 hours to the beach.

If you are a procrastinator, start with the easiest task first. Finish it — and the feeling of accomplishment may just get you fired up enough to tackle another project. And another.

Projects delivered before deadline make clients happy. And happy clients are less likely to fill your email box with missives or bug you by phone while you're trying to decompress in paradise.

3. LET PEOPLE KNOW

Tell key people, such as clients and others who are used to dealing with you personally, that you'll be away. It sets expectations. Knowing that, most people will not make urgent demands just before you leave.

Notify them a few weeks before your departure. Then provide another reminder a few days before you pack your bags. Here's an example of a "going on vacation email" to send to clients and other key people:

"Just a short note to remind you that I will be on vacation August 10 – 25, enjoying the sunny ocean at Myrtle Beach. For any

product or service issues, Joe can assist you at [phone / email]. For anything else, please contact Mary in my absence at [phone / email].”

There’s another benefit to keeping clients in the loop. Discussing your vacation plans makes you a bit more human in their eyes. You’re no longer just the owner of a business. You and the other person may find you have a common interest in snorkeling, for example, and can better connect.

4. UPDATE YOUR MESSAGES

Some people like to create an auto-reply message for their email. That way, when a new email comes in, the sender gets an immediate response back that they’re out of the office. Simply adapt the message in Tip 3 above.

For Microsoft Office 365, set up the Automatic Replies feature. Or use the Rules and Templates functionality for Outlook desktop versions.

GMail and Google Apps email have an out-of-office reply feature that is easy to set up.

Don’t forget your voicemail, either. Consider leaving a recorded message alerting people that you’re out and will be returning messages more slowly than usual. Here’s a sample vacation voicemail message:

“Hi, this is [me]. Thanks for calling! I’m out of the office until [date]. If you have an urgent matter, please call Brittany at [number]. She will be glad to help. Otherwise, please leave a message and I will get back to you when I return.”

Important: put a reminder in your calendar to swap out those messages as soon as you get back. Don’t be the person who still has that old vacation voicemail message playing weeks later.

5. PLAN FOR PROBLEMS

Don’t automatically assume everything will go wrong in your absence — it won’t! But as you’re getting ready for vacation, do try to anticipate potential scenarios that might blow up.

Brief your team. Explain what you would do in each situation.

> Discussing your vacation plans with your clients makes you a bit more human in their eyes. You may discover interests in common and connect better.

And assure them it's okay to contact you if they feel the situation is beyond them. It's better to interrupt your vacation for an hour, than to spend days fixing a mini disaster on your return.

6. SPECIFY EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Make a list of two types of emergency numbers to give to key employees.

The first set of emergency numbers is your own, for employees who might need to reach you.

A mobile phone number is best. Give an alternate, too, just in case yours is turned off or the battery is dead — perhaps your spouse's mobile phone.

Specify whether you want texts or calls. A short text message exchange can be less intrusive than a voice call, yet more immediate than email.

Next on the emergency contact list, designate people who may be able to answer questions in your absence. This list could include your business insurance agent, attorney or IT consultant.

7. WRITE DOWN PROCEDURES

Go over important business procedures that you will be delegating in your absence. For example, someone other than you may need to open the shop in the morning or close the office at night. Typical procedures that trip people up include:

» setting the security alarm or turning it off in case it was accidentally triggered,

» running credit card transactions,

» processing payroll,

» rebooting servers,

Bonus Tip: Avoid The Social Media "Dead Giveaway"

It's good planning to let "almost" everyone know you are leaving on vacation. But today there's a big exception: social media sites. Here are some pointers for the security conscious:

- Resist the urge to tell everyone on Facebook that you'll be gone for two weeks. You don't want to take the chance someone might break into your home — or your place of business if you don't have a regular staff — while you're away. Burglars have been known to monitor sites like Facebook.
- Don't use "check-in apps" such as Foursquare that show you at the airport or having dinner in a far-off place.
- Avoid uploading fun family photos from some far off destination to Instagram or Twitter while you're away. Save those photos and picturesque descriptions of that perfect beach on Maui until your return. The photos and the memories will keep. Your colleagues, clients, friends and extended family will love hearing about your adventures just as much when you're safely back home again.

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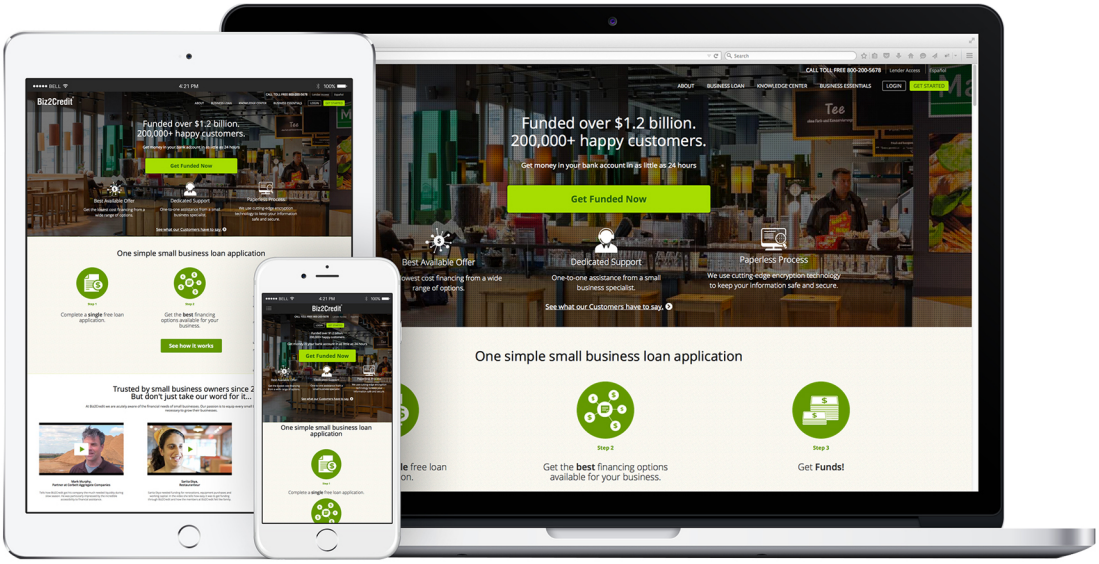

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- logging in as an admin to key software systems, or
- anything the person is not used to handling.

Ask the employee to perform the procedures for you a couple of times before you leave.

Always write down the procedures as a backup, too. (Memory is a tricky thing.)

A quick video of you performing key procedures may be even better. Ask the employee to use his or her mobile phone to record it, so it can be a convenient refresher.

8. PAY YOUR BILLS

Unpaid bills have a way of nagging and intruding in our minds. Who needs that?

Leave for your vacation with a clean slate of accounts payable. Pay invoices, credit card statements and bills that will come due while you're gone. Make sure payroll is set up to be processed while you're gone as well.

9. CLEAR YOUR CALENDAR

This might seem obvious, but the problem arises when people try to go by memory. Or they forget about recurring teleconferences and standing meetings that don't appear on their calendar.

Actually check your calendar — before you leave. And take a moment to consciously think about those standing meetings and calls, so you can tell people not to expect you.

Resist the temptation to take work with you. If you are glued to your laptop or phone, it not only will spoil your time but your family's time, too.

10. DON'T BE AVAILABLE (MUCH)

Resist the temptation to take work with you. If you are glued to your laptop or phone, it not only will spoil your time but your family's time, too. Imagine the grumpy faces of your family as they sit around waiting for you to get off the phone, so you can all go hiking.

Still, most business owners do want to stay in touch. They just don't want to involve themselves so much that it stops feeling like a vacation. Seventy-six percent of business owners check their phones and email on vacation, according to the Office Depot Small Business Index survey.

If you must stay in touch with your business, limit it to a specific time slot each day. For example, you could set aside one half hour each morning at 9 a.m. to field messages that can't wait or check in with staff. Once the 30 minutes are over, give yourself permission to go play with a clear conscience.

11. PACK LIGHT TECH

Luckily, technology has made it easier than ever to stay in touch remotely. For those who don't have staff, but still need to handle a few critical tasks while on vacation, mobile devices are a godsend.

A tablet or even a smartphone can substitute for a laptop while away. Just take the time to download a few key mobile apps in advance if you need to. A good app can make mobile transactions faster and easier.

Documents stored in the cloud can be accessed from a smartphone or tablet. If you don't use the cloud, take a few minutes before you leave to transfer critical files to a thumb drive.

12. SHARE THE MEMORIES

Remember: a little R and R can bring some ROI (return on investment).

Upon your return, share your memories with your team for a few minutes. Not to bore them or make them feel bad that you were on vacation and they weren't — but to reveal your human side. It strengthens staff relationships.

A nice touch is to bring something inexpensive back for team members, if practical. Boxes of saltwater taffy, T-shirts or coffee mugs all around show you thought about your team and you care.

Anita Campbell
CEO and Publisher
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Do You Know the Difference Between Delegating and Abdicating?

There comes a time when small business owners cannot handle everything on their own. It's the time when they have to figure out how to delegate effectively to others.

This is the story of a small business owner — let's call him Bob — who goes through a challenge faced by millions of business owners: his business becomes successful and takes off.

That sounds like a good thing, doesn't it?

Here's the challenge: Bob must transition from being a solo entrepreneur, to a business owner with employees.

Bob goes from being an individual contributor, to directing others.

Directing others involves delegation. Quite a few small business owners struggle with learning how to delegate. Delegating and abdicating can look pretty similar at the beginning.

How can you tell them apart? Let's examine Bob's story, to understand how to delegate without abdicating.

MARK GETS A PROMOTION, BOB GETS A VACATION

Bob started his business because he is good at what he does. As his reputation in

the marketplace grew, so did his business.

He reached the point where he could no longer do it alone. So he hired Mark, then Jim, then others.

The roster may have expanded but Bob's workload stayed the same. Bob never got away from being busy all the time as the business grew.

Something had to give.

One day Bob made a big mistake. He forgot to place an order for a critical inventory item. It just slipped through the cracks in all the commotion of a typical hectic week. He had multiple unhappy customers due to the lack of stock.

But Mark came in with a solution. Buy the items from a local competitor to deliver to their long time customers, he suggested. It wasn't a profitable solution but it at least kept the customers happy.

This got Bob thinking, "Mark is a 'get it done' kind of guy. He really understands what matters here. A happy customer is more important than the profit on one transaction. Mark is the kind of guy I can trust to make the right decisions."

So on Friday afternoon, Bob tells Mark he has a crazy idea. If he doesn't get a break soon, he is going to wig out.

So he is taking a week off starting Monday. He's heading up to the forest where there's no Internet, no mobile phone reception. Just pine trees, peace and quiet. He's leaving Mark in charge. Mark already knows everything about the business. It will be

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Delegation can be emotionally challenging for you. After all, the person could fail. What is even scarier is – the person could do it differently from the way you've done it. But you must allow your employees the freedom to perform. Micromanaging will stifle their work and defeat the whole point of delegating.

just fine.

Mark is a little dubious about this. Sure, he is confident that he knows the business. It's just that there are things only Bob has ever done.

Bob won't hear it though. He thinks Mark is just being modest. So with a flourish, he hands the keys over to Mark and heads out the door with a big smile on his face.

LET'S STOP OUR STORY FOR A MOMENT

Delegation involves several steps. The first step is to determine the right person to delegate to.

"Right" does not necessarily mean "presently qualified." Delegation is a multi-step process.

Being qualified isn't enough. The fact that the target of your delegation is presently qualified can actually get you into trouble. It can lull you into short cutting the necessary steps of delegation — and turn you into an abdicator.

After selecting a person to delegate to, you need to train and instruct that person. Then you need to give assignments and authority.

It does no good to make someone responsible for paying vendors if they can't sign the check. You can't instruct an employee to keep the store appropriately staffed if he or she isn't allowed to alter the schedule. Sometimes we forget the authority we ourselves possess.

It pays to think this through. It's not a bad idea to ask the person what authority he or she thinks is necessary to carry out the assignments.

If you find yourself bristling at the person's reply, consider whether it is because the person is overreaching or if you are just uncomfortable giving away the authority required to get the job done.

Delegation can be emotionally challenging for you. After all, the person could fail. What is even scarier is – the person could do it differently from the way you've done it.

We are often more attached to our methods than the outcomes. Get clear if you are going to delegate. Outcomes are the only thing you truly manage going forward.

You must allow your employees the freedom to perform. Micromanaging (really, managing at all) will stifle their work and defeat the whole point of delegating.

Your intention needs to be to free yourself of these particular responsibilities — completely.

Plug into the possibility that your qualified staff are now a part of your brain trust. Their ideas and innovations are an extension of you. Let them bring something to the table.

MONITORING AND FEEDBACK ARE CRUCIAL

Just because you have delegated doesn't mean you wash your hands clean of the whole thing.

Monitor results and outcomes. Do the results meet your expectations? If they do, offer praise. Positive feedback encourages people to keep up the good work.

If results are not up to par, understand it is your responsibility to help the person make adjustments. Try to determine what went wrong and what's needed, including:

- Did you train your employee properly?
- Does he or she need a refresher?
- Were your instructions clear?
- Did the employee understand the outcome you were seeking?
- Did he or she have the resources needed?
- Did he or she really have the necessary authority?

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THE 6 STEPS OF DELEGATION

To effectively delegate, and not abdicate, you must do these steps, in this order:

- Select
- Train
- Instruct
- Assign
- Authorize
- Mentor

If you've stopped anywhere along these steps — you didn't delegate, you abdicated.

The earlier you stopped, the worse the abdication was and the higher the potential damage.

Once you understand that there are six steps involved, the difference between delegating and abdicating starts to look clearer.

Circling back to our story of Bob and Mark — whatever happened with Mark?

TANNED, RESTED AND BACK ON THE JOB

Bob strolls back into work with a new spring in his step. He's asking himself why he waited so long to take some time off. After all, Mark could have covered for him long ago.

Mark is already in the office. He looks up haggardly and says, "Oh man, am I ever glad to see you."

Bob inquires, "Why, what's up?"

Mark then launches into a litany of unexpected happenings. This broke. That person was late. The supplier shipped the wrong size. The company's latest customer wants a price break.

Mark wasn't prepared for any of this.

Bob barely got past step one of a six step process before he disconnected. He didn't train or instruct.

So here's Mark, all stressed out that he "failed" — when it was Bob who failed him!

Bob abdicated rather than delegated.

So now Bob has some work to do. It's not just that he needs to clean up from last week. He needs to step back and prepare Mark so that next time, Mark can take it all on.

Mark is up for it. As for Bob, knowing now what he needs to do to delegate properly, he will get it right next time.

After all, Bob is going to need another vacation soon enough.

Kenneth Vogt
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20 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR ENTREPRENEURIAL CREATIVITY

Creativity is too abstract to be commanded. But it can be nurtured and channelled.

It's happened to us all. You've got a great idea. But somewhere along the way, your brain fizzles. The inspiration that got you started is just gone. Or you have no energy left in your over-scheduled workday to come up with new ideas.

Here are 20 ways to get those creative juices flowing again, jump-start new ideas, spark innovation, ratchet up the excitement, and get things done!

1. GET ACTIVE

A little exercise, even a 30-minute walk, can boost your mood. Exercise causes your body to release chemicals called endorphins that relieve mind-sapping stress and make you feel good. One study from the Netherlands found that regular exercisers did better on creativity tests than sedentary people.

2. BRAINSTORM

Brainstorm with co-workers, colleagues or clients, together in a room or on a conference call. Someone will make an observation and, boom! Creativity takes off like a brush fire.

3. TAKE A MENTAL BREAK

Take a few minutes here and there during the day to listen to a song, look out your window at the birds, or check out funny cat memes. Or just let your mind wander and daydream. One University of California study found that letting your mind drift boosts creative thinking. It might be just what you need to climb over that last mental hump.

4. LOWER THE LIGHTS

One German university study found that

dimming the lights can boost creativity. Next time you're suffering from creative block, try hitting the dimmer switch or swapping out a light bulb to lower wattage.

5. HANG OUT WITH CREATIVE TYPES

Surround yourself with people who are creative thinkers, designers, musicians, artists, writers and others. Creativity begets creativity.

6. ASK FOR ADVICE

Have a roadblock that you just can't seem to get around? Ask for advice from someone who doesn't work for you. This may be a mentor, friend, spouse or peer. Emphasize that you want constructive criticism. Then listen. Other people can see what we miss because we're too close to things.

7. WRITE IT DOWN

Whether it's meeting notes or ideas that pop into your head in the shower, be sure to write ideas down. If you have a meeting using a whiteboard or flip chart, snap a picture of the notes using your phone. Memory is a fleeting thing. Poof! That great idea will be gone and you might not think of it again.

8. SET GOALS

Goal setting may seem counterintuitive to what we think of as free-form creativity. But goals help us focus. Capture goals in

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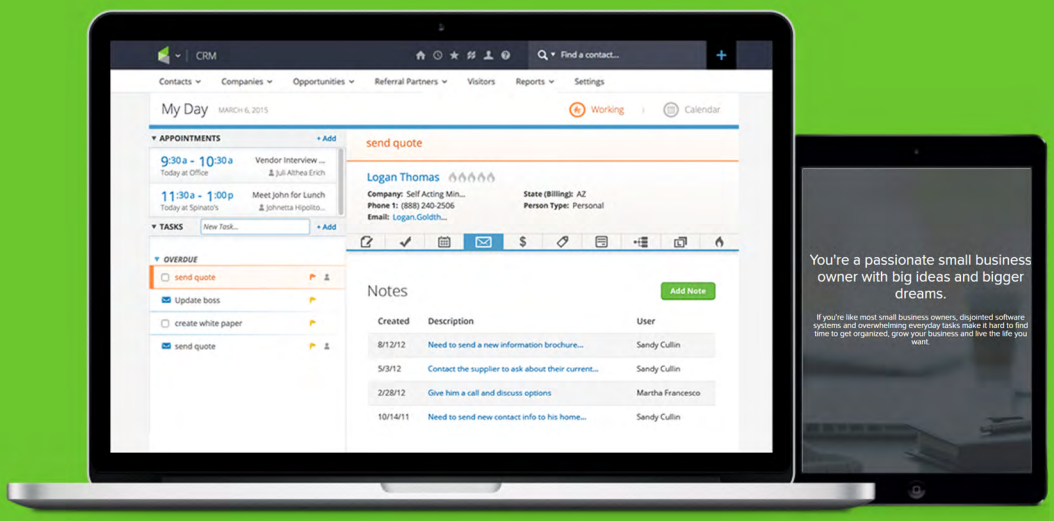

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writing, review them often, and let your mind mull over them subconsciously. Goals lead you to innovate in business. As they say, necessity is the mother of invention.

9. ATTEND A CONFERENCE

Get out of the office for a different viewpoint. Separate yourself from the day-to-day routine by attending a conference. You will learn new ways of doing things and meet new people, all of which change your perspective.

10. ASK QUESTIONS

Have you ever heard a child innocently ask "why" in a way that caused you to think about something you never questioned before? Adopt that same technique. Ask "why" and keep asking it at every step. Ask "what if". These questions get you challenging the status quo.

11. REVEL IN YOUR MANY HATS

As a business owner you wear many hats. You may be your own copywriter, PR agent, accountant and sales rep -- all in the same day! Wearing many hats is often seen as a negative, but it has some positives. It provides variety in the workday. It helps you gain a well-rounded view. For example, instead of just seeing a problem (such as a past due invoice that fell through the cracks) you may also spot the flip-side opportunity (to create a recurring subscription model thereby avoiding future lost invoices).

12 BREAK IT DOWN

Break problems down into smaller, more manageable pieces. Instead of trying

to think up a completely new product in one sitting, try to incrementally improve existing ones. Instead of trying to change an entire process in one fell swoop, focus on a single step. Once that is done, tackle something else. Small changes add up to big innovations.

13 UNPLUG AND GO QUIET

Turn off your phone, shut the door, put up a "do not disturb" sign, go for a long drive alone, or find a quiet place. Give yourself time to think without distractions. Encourage employees to do the same from time to time.

14 KEEP A JOURNAL

The act of writing out your thoughts is an outlet that can spur creative ideas. Start a journal with a blank notebook or Moleskine. Or start a blog you keep private.

15. GO OUT FOR A DRINK

Now and then, it's good to trade the coffee mug for a cold hard one. Don't overdo it. Too much alcohol creates stressors that suppress creativity. But alcohol in moderation, such as a glass of wine or a beer occasionally, can relax your mind to explore new directions.

16. "WORK" YOUR IDEAS

We tend to think of creativity as a one-time burst of inspiration, almost like magic, but in reality being creative can be practiced. Come back to your ideas later. Analyze them. Research them to make them more complete and solid. Discard the bad ideas. Refine the good ones.

17. DOODLE

Scribble in the margins of your notes during a meeting or a conference call. Don't worry about how it looks -- you're not going for Picasso here. Unless you're an artist, the doodle itself isn't the goal. Instead, the act of doodling spurs creativity. You relax and quit struggling to force creativity, and instead give rein to your creative subconscious.

18. OPEN UP YOUR SCHEDULE

It's hard to be creative when weighed down by a mountain of tasks and deadlines. Make space in your day for creative thought. Outsource, delegate or automate. Help employees free up a bit of time, also. In the long run, doing less can pay off.

19. TAKE A VACATION

Go away on vacation or a long weekend. Remember: "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy." That means dull not only in the sense of being boring, but also in the sense of losing your edge. Encourage employees to take vacations, too.

20. START AND DO IT!

Plunge in feet first without thinking too hard. Don't let fear paralyze you. You can worry and second guess whether your ideas are good enough -- forever. Stop thinking about the need to be creative, and just start your activity.

Aubrielle Billig
Staff writer
@AubriBillig

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Enjoy Your Vacation, Work When Necessary With These Essential Apps

Apps that monitor status and automate activities help business owners enjoy relaxing and refreshing vacations without office-related worries.

No matter how amazing, super-performing and highly productive a person may be, breaks are needed to refresh both mind and body. That's why it's important to take a vacation away from the hustle and bustle of running your small business.

Many small business folks, however, find it hard to leave their business "baby" with someone else. Or, if they're solopreneurs, they don't have a "someone else" in the first place.

What if there's an emergency? What if an important person contacts the business? Worries like these can wear down a person, defeating the whole purpose of a vacation.

To truly get the most out of their time away, small business owners need to find a way to achieve some peace of mind. That's where the business productivity apps listed below come in handy.

These business productivity apps will monitor the critical pieces of your business, help you act if a business emergency occurs and enable you to take advantage of business opportunities you encounter on vacation.

If you can't leave it all behind, then work when necessary with these essential business productivity apps and solutions:

ALERT AUTOMATION AND WEBSITE MONITORING APPS

The apps listed in this section will monitor everything from your website to emails. And they can look for everything from important messages sent by clients to negative comments on social media. You'll be able to rest easy knowing that if an emergency does occur, these apps will bring it to your attention immediately.

Alert Automation

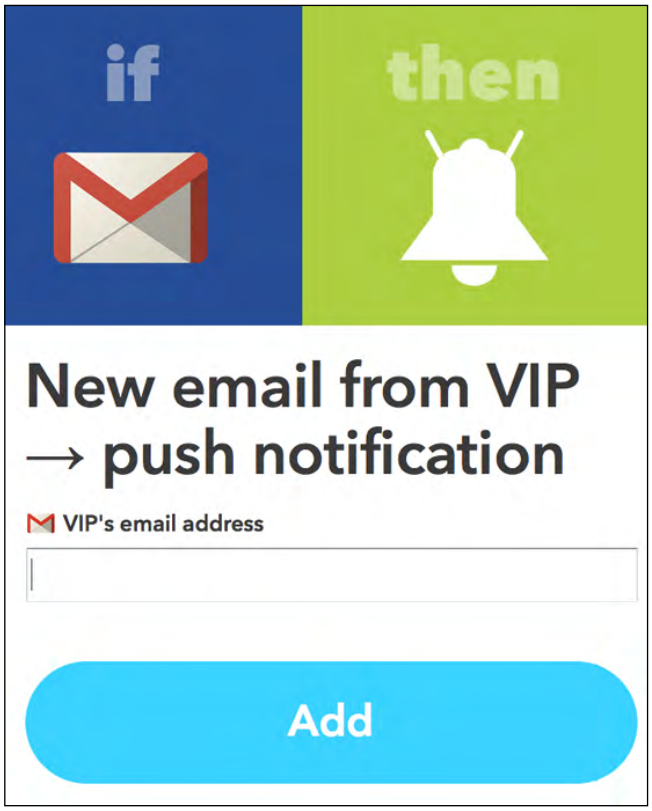
These apps are all about addressing "What if…" moments. Both of them provide tons of ready-to-use formulas that will jump into action when triggered. Let's take a closer look.

IFTTT

Available online as well as on iOS and Android devices, IFTTT (short for for "IF This Then That") is a free solution that enables you to use "recipes" to kick off actions triggered by hundreds of different events. Here are some examples of IFTTT recipes that anticipate a variety of scenarios:

- If you get an email from a specified "VIP," it will notify you on your iOS or Android device.
- When an email arrives in your Gmail inbox and has a specific label applied to it based on your filters, it will notify you on your iPhone.
- When an email is received with a specific subject, it will send an SMS to your Android device.
- When a stock you're monitoring goes up or down, it will send an iPhone alert.
- If motion is detected inside your business after hours by, say, a Belkin Wemo Room Motion Sensor, the system will send you an alert.
- If your Nest smoke/carbon monoxide detector goes off, IFTTT will send you an alert, too.

This barely scratches the surface of what you can do with IFTTT and, as you can see below, it's easy as pie.



Zapier

Zapier offers "Zaps" that enable you to automate actions set off based on pre-configured triggers. Unlike IFTTT, however, making the most of Zapier requires paying a fee. Then again, Zapier seems to integrate with many more systems (e.g. Zendesk, so you can get alerts about new customer serviced tickets) than IFTTT. So this fact may well justify the cost.

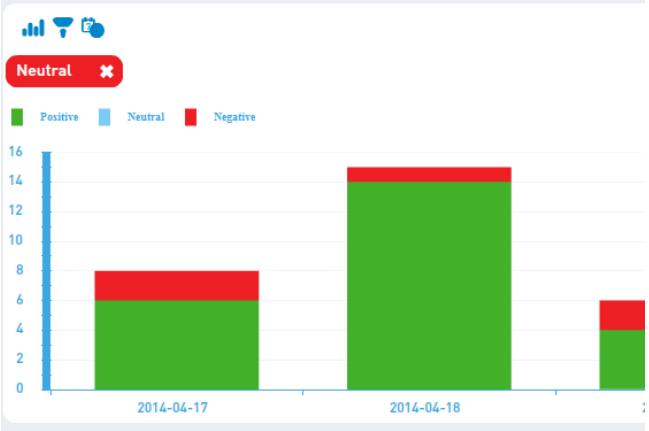
Unlike IFTTT, Zapier does not offer an app for mobile devices which means that you'll need to connect to the site online if you want to set up triggers and alerts. However, alerts can be sent to your mobile. And,

since you'll be doing most of your setup before your vacation in any case, this may not be a big deal.

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING

Worried about what's said about your business while you're away? The app below is your key to blowing that worry away.

Sentiment



Sentiment is a social media monitoring solution that includes two super handy features: sentiment monitoring and alerts.

As you can see below, Sentiment looks at the social media messages you track (e.g., mentions of your company name) and uses a special algorithm to rate each message as positive, neutral or negative:

By itself, this is a very useful tool. Add configurable alerts and Sentiment just became your online reputation patrol.

An alert can be triggered based on the sentiment of a message. If a negative sentiment is detected, you can take a moment out of your vacation to hop online and address it immediately.

Sentiment does not offer a mobile app. However, alerts can be sent to your email triggering a mobile alert using IFTTT or Zapier.

WEBSITE MONITORING

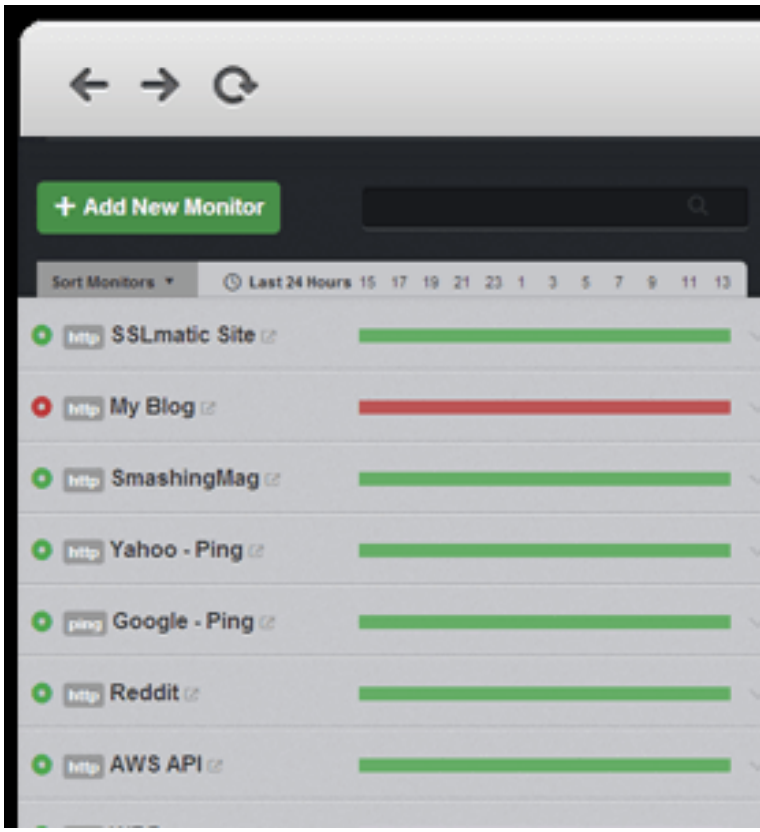
These days, your website is almost an employee of your business serving as the receptionist that greets online customers, the cashier that conducts transactions and the bouncer that keeps unauthorized folks from logging in to protected areas.

If worrying whether your site is up and operating well keeps you from relaxing on vacation then the apps below will help rid you of your concerns.

Pingdom and Uptrends

Both Pingdom and Uptrends are website monitoring tools. What makes them super useful however is their ability to monitor more than just whether your site is up or not. These solutions can also monitor if your site is functioning well when executing its broad range of tasks.

Your free time will no longer be plagued

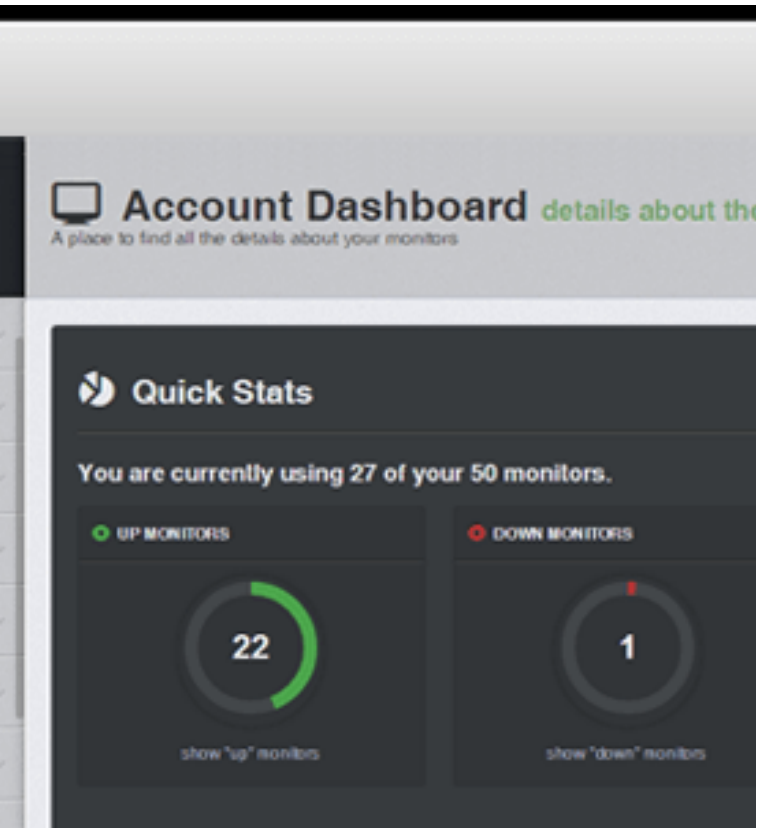


with questions such as "Is my site still up?", "Can users log in?", "Are folks able to buy the items for sale on my site?", "Is my site responding quickly enough?" and more. When all is said and done, the usefulness of, and peace of mind provided by, these tools extends well beyond your vacation time.

Uptrends offers mobile apps for iOS, Android and Windows phones while Pingdom offers mobile apps for iOS and Android devices.

UptimeRobot

Less complex and less expensive than the previous two apps, UptimeRobot monitors the most important aspect of your website: whether it is up and accessible. Though it offers no mobile app, UptimeRobot offers several alert options for your mobile device including SMS and email.



APPS FOR TAKING ACTION WHILE ON VACATION

If an emergency does take place while you're away, it's best if you, or someone you delegate to, can take immediate action. Here are a couple of apps that'll let you do just that.

Caller101

Caller101 enables you to blast out emails, texts and phone calls to dozens, or even hundreds of people simultaneously. This is a great way to mobilize the troops for action without wasting too much of your away time.

Meldium

At first glance, Meldium looks like another online password manager and, to some degree, it is. However, this online password manager takes it one step further by enabling you to create Meldium accounts for the folks covering you. Once they log in, these people can access the systems you've designated without once having access to your passwords for those systems.

Once you're back from vacation, you can

restrict or remove any Meldium accounts at will and rest assured that no one can log into your systems because they don't have your password.

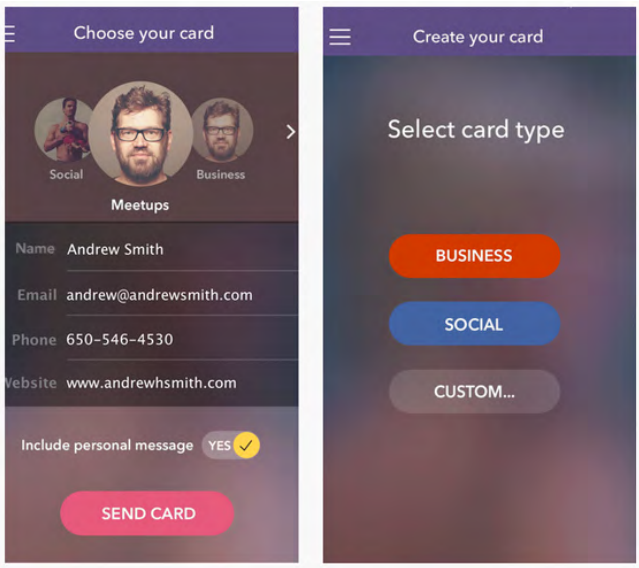
MIXING BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE

How often have you met folks you'd like to work with while on vacation? Whether a potential client, collaborator or supplier, here are some apps to help you maximize those opportunities.

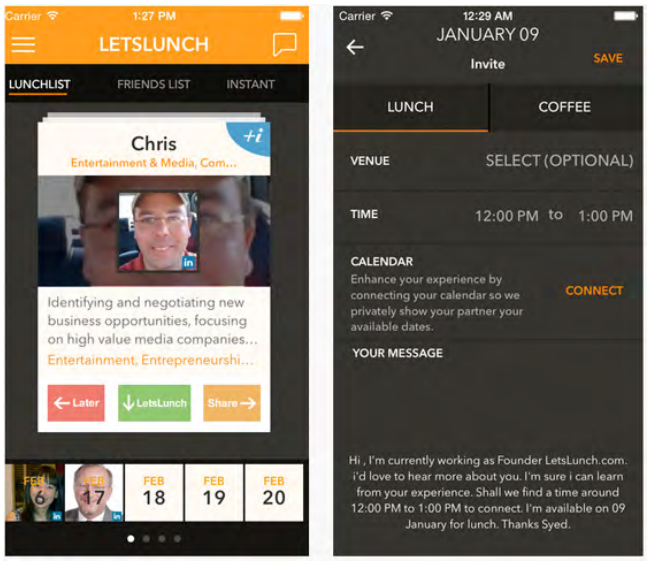
Corda

Corda is a handy app that enables you to leave your business cards at home while on vacation. When you run into someone you'd like to pass your contact information to, simply open Corda, select from one of the many cards you can create for specific situations and send it to them via text message.

The recipient doesn't need to have the Corda app to access and import your information. You can send a personal message along as well so they can remember where they met you.



LetsLunch



Even when you're away on your own, it's nice to share a meal with someone now and then. LetsLunch enables you to do just that by finding folks near you who also wish to sit down to eat with someone, especially if they have some business topics in common.

For an alternative to LetsLunch, check out CityHour.

CONCLUSION

While it's almost impossible for small business owners to separate ourselves from the office completely, it is possible to filter, and thus minimize, interruptions.

The essential apps and solutions listed above will enable you to enjoy your vacation by giving you peace of mind with the knowledge that you'll know immediately if something goes wrong.

Matt Mansfield
Staff writer
@MattSMansfield

If You're Happy and You Know it – Take a Selfie

I'm old enough that I don't fully understand the concept of the selfie.

Maybe it's the "aw shucks" Midwesterner in me. (I literally say "aw shucks" daily.) Or maybe it's my 'I-work-at-home-so-I-don't-shave-every-day' vanity. Or maybe it's my distrust of Facebook.

Or maybe it's the fact that running my own business, running a family, and the occasionally runny nose … doesn't leave me a lot of time and energy for self-portraiture.

That being said, if my sales ever jump like that – I just might recreate this cartoon in real life.

Mark Anderson
Cartoonist (www.andertoons.com)
@andertoons

22 Ways to Renew Your Spirit and Get Your Mojo Back

Under the pressures of business, your energy may flag and your spirits may dip to low points. Taking steps to shake things up is key to getting your mojo back.

Hands down, one of the most challenging aspects of being in business is sustaining our inspiration and motivation. Life has a natural ebb and flow, but it's the ebb that can get us into trouble if we let it linger too long.

You may not be able to control the unexpected challenges that come your way. But you can put tools, tips and suggestions in place to deal with the bad news, the blahs and the loss of enthusiasm we all experience from time to time — and get your mojo back.

Exercise

Get moving! This is especially important for those who have sedentary jobs.

Physical activity is a proven way to change your mood and attitude, not to mention physical appearance and fitness.

According to one study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, sedentary behavior increases our chances of getting a disease or a condition that will kill us prematurely, even if we exercise. Sitting is the new smoking.

Adopt an exercise routine, park farther away, walk the mall, take the stairs, and get up and move around during the day. Use a pedometer or step counter, and work your way up to the 10,000 steps a day that

some health professionals advocate.

Focus on Positive Affirmations

Take a few moments before blasting into the day to focus on a positive thought, intention or idea. It establishes an effective mindset for the rest of the day.

Go to any bookstore, find some meditation books recommended for beginners, and get started. Or subscribe to one of the many websites that deliver daily affirmations right to your inbox!

Physical activity is a proven way to change your mood and attitude, not to mention physical appearance and fitness. Meditate, drink a lot of water and sleep well.

Get Enough Sleep and Hydrate

Most of working America is sleep starved, trying to juggle family and work. It is suggested to get at least eight hours of sleep and drink eight glasses of water daily. Lack of sleep and hydration can drain our energy and motivation. When we get run down is when we can get sick.

Eat Better

Avoid alcohol and caffeine as much as possible. Try to eat foods that boost energy naturally and give you stamina. Avoid the quick sugar shot. It is usually followed by an energy crash that makes you feel worse.

The right foods, at the right time of day, can make a big difference in our productivity and mood. Seek out power foods that boost business abilities, such as apples, walnuts and green tea.

Remind Yourself of Successes

Some people have a tendency to focus on the negative. If that sounds like you, try to break yourself of that bad habit by consciously focusing on recent successes. They don't need to be huge successes — it's more about the little daily successes. Remind yourself of a recent job well done or accomplishment.

When you allocate more of your mindshare to thinking about success, you feel more successful.

Adopt this trick that some people use: set a large clear jar on your desk. Add a marble or a dried bean to it each time you experience a win or achieve a goal. As it fills up over the weeks and months, you will be energized by 'seeing' your successes.

Socialize

Go out and meet people. Or reach out to someone you haven't talked with recently. With social media, Skype, mobile phones and texting, staying connected is easier than ever.

Avoid Negative Nellies

People who are downers will drag you down. You know them as soon as they walk into a room. Avoid them. Surround yourself with positive, uplifting 'glass half full' types. Their energy and positive attitude will rub off on you.

Don't Wallow

We all have natural ebb and flow cycles of energy and motivation. Part of being human is allowing ourselves to be where we are, but making a conscious effort to move ourselves out of these lapses in enthusiasm as soon as we can.

Commit 100%

Throw yourself completely into the activity at hand. The more attention you put

toward whatever you are doing, the less attention you will give to your worries.

Engage in a Hobby

Regardless of what your hobby is — be it painting, playing the guitar, crafts, playing basketball, creative writing or cooking — engage in it regularly. Hobbies allow us to be happy, joyful and get away from stressors that demotivate us. Some people actually find a way to turn their hobby into a business.

Change Your Look

Nothing can motivate you and get your mojo back faster than a makeover or an upstyle. A new hair cut and color, or some new clothes can not only change your attitude but others' perceptions of you.

Whether you are young and just starting out, older and starting to fight some age bias, or in the sweet spot for your career — looking sharp, stylish and professional can influence people's impression of you. First impressions are lasting impressions, so look awesome.

Hobbies allow us to be happy, joyful and get away from stressors that demotivate us. And nothing can motivate you and get your mojo back faster than a makeover or an upstyle.

Plan a Getaway Near Water

Go on a day trip or long weekend near the beach or a lake. Large bodies of water generate negative ions. Negative ions are invisible molecules we inhale. They are believed to increase levels of serotonin in our bodies, helping to alleviate depression and increase our daytime energy.

Find Business Allies

Seek out and find like-minded people who share your values, ideas and philosophy. They will surround you with positive energy and support. They can be from your local Chamber of Commerce, industry organizations, or Web communities like LinkedIn Groups.

Take Care of The Whole You

Taking care of your "whole person" and refreshing your body, mind and spirit is a growing trend, as different generations want different things from their careers. Try taking up yoga, tai chi or Pilates. Or simply schedule and take a real vacation, without work.

Streamline

Go through your stuff: closets, drawers, desk and garage. Clean up, throw out or give away. It is a freeing feeling.

De-clutter your workspace, including your email inbox. Make sure your daily routine is efficient and productive.

Cut back on commitments that take time away from family or hobbies that give you enjoyment.

Take a Class

Give your brain a workout. Take a low-cost or no-cost class offered through cities, counties or schools. There is something for every interest or fascination: music, art, writing, travel, cooking, hobbies, history, business, family or crafts.

Start A Journal

It's amazing what comes out when you let your creative juices flow and just write. Get a special notebook, or start a private blog. Make it your creative, freestyle writing

place. Spend some quiet time nurturing your creativity through writing.

Improve Time Management

We all have the same number of hours, but why is it that some people seem to have more time for family and hobbies, or get more done in the workday? It boils down to how you organize your day, prioritize activities and manage your time.

Plan out your daily and weekly schedule. Block out time for work, family, friends, fun and you.

If you need help, get a time management app or book, such as David Allen's "Getting Things Done."

Tweak Stuff

The best way to keep things on track is to notice when they start to change. Pay attention to whether your output is slipping, you're responding to messages late, or you're missing deadlines. Making small tweaks and adjustments can get you back on track. Then you won't have to make dramatic changes down the road.

Laugh

Go ahead — think of something that makes you smile or laugh. Finding the humor in life is the healthiest way to live it. Besides, people enjoy being around fun people.

Take Up a Sport

If you have been wanting to take on a new sport, find people and groups to start the process with. Be persistent and make the commitment. This can be a BIG game changer in anyone's motivation, as the journey becomes the most important accomplishment. The "getting started" and commitment will transform you.

Reward Yourself

We should all be kinder to ourselves. Reward yourself when you achieve a goal or something good happens in your business. Small daily wins lead to big wins. It's cumulative. Reward yourself with a new blouse, an extra hour of sleep or scheduling lunch with an old friend. And don't feel guilty. Enjoy it.

Finally, remember that most of us have more ability to control our energy levels, enthusiasm and motivation than we may realize. Don't strive for perfect work-life balance or perfect happiness. You'll just become frustrated when you can't obtain them.

Instead, make daily choices. Take action everyday. Your mood will follow. Your spirit will feel renewed and you'll soon get your mojo back.

Deborah Shane
Columnist
@DeborahShane

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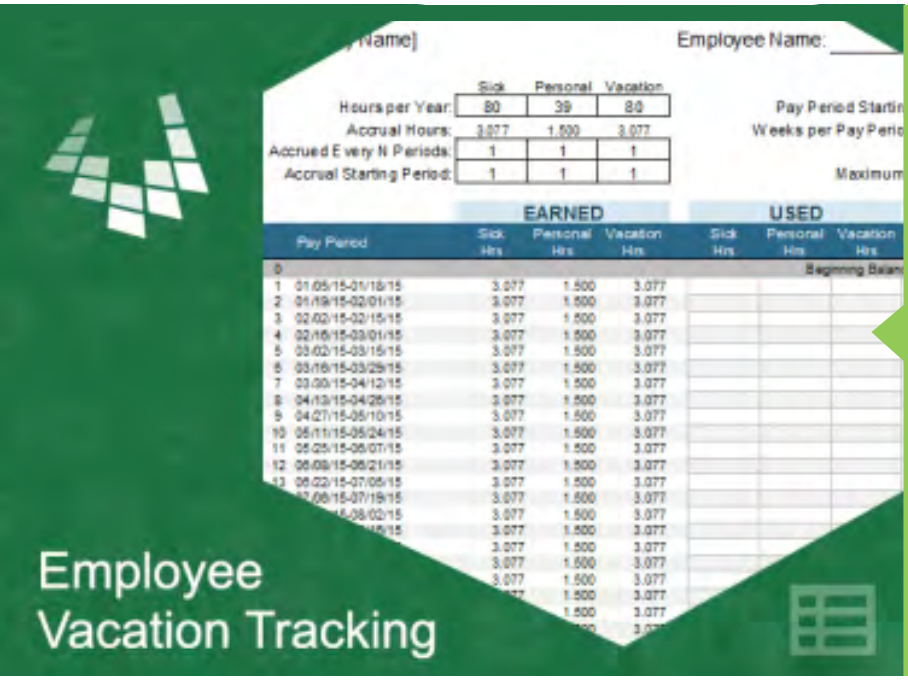

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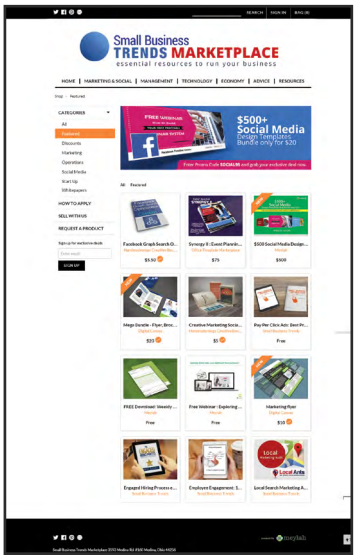

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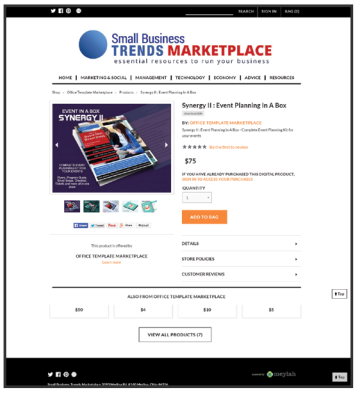

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Origin Distribution Turns Skateboarding & Skimboarding Passion into Profit

What can happen when our passion and work happen to be one and the same? The result will be extraordinary. We deliver our best when we get to do what we love the most.

Building a strong team of passionate individuals can be beneficial for every type of business. But it's especially critical in industries like skateboarding, where personal passion plays such a great role for consumers.

That's why Origin Distribution has built its business by enlisting the help of those who are actively interested in action sports like skateboarding and skimboarding.

In doing so, the Washington state-based company has been able to build products that its customers really appreciate. Read more about the company's philosophy and how it has grown in this Small Business Spotlight.

WHAT THE BUSINESS DOES

Manufacturing and distributing skateboard and skimboard products.

Origin Distribution is the umbrella company over sports and skating brands such as DB Longboards, DB Skimboards and Atlas Truck Co.

BUSINESS NICHE

Providing custom sports products.

Nathan Pauli, VP of sales and marketing at Origin Distribution says:

"The Origin custom builder provides customers the ability to choose all of the details of their personal board. Colors, shapes, graphics and components are all selectable while an image of the custom board updates in real time. Our custom builder experience is much more in-depth and dynamic than others available today."

origin distribution skateboards skimboards

HOW THE BUSINESS GOT STARTED

With a few friends in a garage.

Pauli says:

"Our company was founded as Dashboards Skimboard Company in 2003 by a group of friends building skimboards and skateboards out of a garage. Fast-forward to today and we develop and distribute

boardsports products to 350+ accounts in over 20 countries. As we expanded we eventually took on Origin Distribution as our umbrella company identity and legal DBA."

BIGGEST WIN

Introducing a board called "The Lunch Tray."

Pauli explains:

"The board was an innovative shape perfectly on trend with the riding style of the time and put DB Longboards on the map, spreading our boards to all corners of the globe and inspiring a host of imitators. To this day, the board remains the benchmark standard of the category and is a staple in our lineup."

LESSON LEARNED

Hire only the best team members.

Pauli says:

"Especially with a smaller business, each member of the team can make or break your success. Through making some less-than-ideal hires we've learned to trust our gut and not waste energy and resources on anyone who's not an undeniable asset to our business."

HOW THEY'D SPEND AN EXTRA $100,000

Hiring more people.

Pauli says:

"We do a lot with a very small team. Additional human resources would allow for more individual focus on specific tasks and projects."

BUSINESS MOTTO

Be passionate about the product.

Pauli explains:

"Our team is made up of a group of individuals with a shared passion for the outdoors and human-powered activity. Our best ideas tend to develop organically through first hand use of the products we sell and direct participation within the action sports community we sell to!"

FAVORITE TEAM ACTIVITY

Team barbecues throughout the summer.

FAVORITE QUOTE

"If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine; it is lethal." – Paulo Coelho

Annie Pilon
Staff writer
@AnnieHP

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