

2019 Guide to Small Business Success

JANUARY	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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Set Concrete Goals

What do you really want to accomplish in the new year? Maybe it's launching a new product or service. Or selling an existing product or set of products online. Decide what your biggest goal is, and set timelines that support it. For example, if you plan to launch a new offering, mark target dates for developing your idea, testing it and incorporating feedback. If you want to start selling online, set deadlines for building an e-commerce site and choosing fulfillment and shipping services. Share your goals and timelines with your team to gather input and get everyone on board.

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Create an Event Calendar

Attending conferences, trade shows and other industry events can help you stay on top of trends and find fresh approaches to challenges. Research events related to your industry or target customers, and list those with the greatest potential. Strong contenders will align most closely with your goals or have attendees who are looking for the products or services you offer. For example, if you're trying to find clients for your bookkeeping service, try a conference for new business owners. Check registration deadlines and sign up for email lists to get updates.

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Thank Your Team

It's difficult to stay on track without help from your team, so celebrate Employee Appreciation Day on March 1st. Do a little something special for your team, whether it's a catered lunch, a group outing or even the option to leave a bit early. It doesn't need to be extravagant, but any gesture of appreciation should be authentic. Consider writing a note or card to each of your employees that expresses your gratitude and what each person's contributions mean to the company. These gestures often provide a motivational boost and foster goodwill that pays off long after the day has passed.

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Spruce Up Your Website

If it has been a while since you've looked at your website, review it and try to see it through fresh eyes. Is it compelling? Easy to navigate? Ask a few employees for their opinion. If you use a web analytics program, check if there are pages that visitors tend to leave. Once you've done a careful review, work with your web design resource to tackle one or two key areas. Be sure to use SEO best practices to make the site easier to find. If the upgrade is significant, plan to promote new features and benefits through your email list and social media pages.

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Share Your Small Business Pride

Celebrate your business, your customers and your community during National Small Business Week, which happens May 5–11. Offer a small discount and refreshments to thank your customers, or host a demo or workshop related to your business. Look for ways to include other local businesses — for example, by promoting a discount at a nearby restaurant when customers show a receipt from your store. Announce your promotions online, and extend the messaging to your social media by hosting a drawing for your followers.

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Give Your Business a Checkup

As you approach the midpoint of the year, evaluate your business's performance to date. Review your sales and expenses — how do they compare to this point last year? If there have been significant changes, what might be contributing to them? Look for opportunities to trim costs — perhaps you no longer use certain services or could try a new supplier to save money without compromising quality. If sales are up, do you need to hire to keep up with customer demand? Meet with your accountant to review your financial reports, and set financial goals for the remainder of the year.

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JULY

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Take Time to Give Back

If there's a lull in your business, this could be a particularly good time to pitch in and volunteer with a charitable organization. Talk with your team about the causes they care about, then follow up with relevant organizations. Once you choose a day and time to volunteer, communicate the details, including the schedule and what to wear and bring. As an alternative to volunteering, organize a fundraiser or drive for a community organization and invite customers to contribute. Offering a small discount as an incentive could help encourage more donations.

AUGUST

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Learn Something New

Thanks to online platforms, it's never been easier or more affordable to build your skills. SCORE offers free webinars and on-demand courses on everything from marketing to pricing to financial management. Coursera and edX host thousands of free and low-cost courses on a range of topics in partnership with universities worldwide. Many courses are self-paced, so you can fit them in whenever is most convenient. You could also choose a less formal approach — for example, setting aside time each day for a week to learn new software.

SEPTEMBER

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Get Ready for the Holidays

With the end of year approaching, make a list of everything you'll need to prep for the holidays. Depending on your business, this may include buying inventory, supplies or client gifts. It could also mean hiring seasonal staff. Think ahead to events or promotions that will require extra planning time, such as a Small Business Saturday or holiday event with other neighborhood businesses. Once you've made your to-do list, mark the essential dates, such as deadlines for finalizing client gift lists, placing orders and preparing marketing materials.

OCTOBER

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Prep for Cold & Flu Season

As temperatures drop, stock up on hand soap, sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and other supplies to help prevent the cold and flu from spreading. Share prevention tips with your team and post them around the office. Emphasize their importance, since a flu spreading through a small office can bring work to a grinding halt. Advise employees to stay home if they're sick or suspect that they're getting sick — and reinforce this message throughout the season. Lastly, consider making the flu shot available at your office. Your local health department may be able to help with this.

NOVEMBER

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Start Your Tax Planning

The end of the year brings a deadline for taking deductions and making purchases that could lower your tax bill come spring. Set up a meeting with your accountant or tax advisor. Ask whether it makes sense to stock up on inventory and supplies and prepay certain expenses (e.g., business insurance or rent) before year end. Consider buying technology or equipment your team needs, especially since first-year depreciation limits for many of these items have increased. Ask your tax advisor about other provisions that could impact your business.

DECEMBER

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Take Stock of the Year

A busy holiday season and year-end deadlines can leave little room for reflection. Yet making time for this — even if it's just jotting down notes — can help you find opportunities for improvement and change in 2020. Look back on the goals you set in January. How much progress have you made? What, if anything, got in your way? Hold a wrap-up session with your team to learn what went well and what didn't from their perspective. Look for ways to thank your employees, customers, vendors and others that contributed to your business's success.