

The Entrepreneur's Business Health Checkup



E. QUINN
CONSULTING

**Complete
Your
Business
Stress Test
for Success**

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Introduction

Business is constantly changing and your business is no exception. New competitive products, services and industries are being developed, along with new rules and regulations, new business tax codes, and new employment standards. In order to stay up to date with all these developments, you need a rigorous plan to tackle any changes head on. You have to be proactive and anticipate changes, that way you will be able to stay ahead of the competition. This innovation will enable you to attract more business and increase your bottom line.

Developing a plan around the following 12 areas will let you determine whether your business is on track for growth, or whether improvements and opportunities exist. This assessment will keep you abreast of changes inside and outside of your business allowing you to have clearer planning strategies.



Vision, Mission and Core Values Statement

Creating a company vision and mission clarifies your business plan, which then can be communicated internally to core staff and externally to customers/clients, suppliers, and your local, regional and national communities.

- Do you have a written document of where you see your company 1, 2, 3... 5 years, with well-defined goals and objectives?
- Do you have a mission statement?
- Do you have a vision statement?
- Do you have a core values statement?

Action Steps

Write down what your company vision is and what steps you need to take in order to realize that vision. A vision cannot simply be a dream, it needs to be carried out.

Organizational Structure

Revisiting your organizational structure may help in business strategies, (i.e. company-owned facilities and machinery may benefit from being held by a separate holding company, by leasing buildings and equipment to operating groups.)

- What type of organization is your company: a Sole Proprietor, Limited Liability Company, Subchapter S, Partnership or C Corporation?
- What are the legal advantages and disadvantages, and tax consequences?
- Do you have an Operating Agreement?
- Do you evaluate your company structure often?

Action Steps

Gather up all the paperwork relevant to your company's organizational structure and analyze it. If the analysis is too difficult for you or your staff, hire trusted outside expertise. Find any ways to streamline your structure and take advantage of any possible tax breaks to maximize your bottom line.

Financial Management

Financial planning is an essential part for a business' growth. It provides clarity and understanding of what your business has accomplished and where you plan to take your business in the years to come. Many treat financials as a need for taxing authorities and major financing needs. Management accounting plays a crucial role in day-to-day guidance of your business operations.

- How often do you review financial statements: P & L's, Cash Flow analysis, Income Statements?
- Do you use these documents in your daily decision-making?
- When making major purchases, do you evaluate your financial statement first?
- Do you know your present net worth?
- Do you review your financial statements at least twice annually?
- Do you have a forecast for your business for the next 24 to 36 months?

Action Steps

Keep your business receipts, write down any statements you do not have a physical record of and graph the revenue, costs and profit, and organize all these financial statements in hard and online copies.

Sales System, Sales Strategies, and Sales Team

Developing a sales system or program defines your sales goals, giving your team and leadership the what, how, when and where they are going to achieve specific sales objectives. Developing strategies might mean looking at how successful businesses attract quality customers/clients, while maintaining existing ones. It also entails having a plan for invigorating your inside and outside sales team by bringing vital energy and excitement to their roles. Highly paid sales professionals gravitate to the most respected businesses that provide an environment for their professionalism.

- Do you have a sales program or system?
- How do you generate new sales, and process those orders through your system?
- Do you have a defined sales strategy?
- Do you have a training program for your Sales Team to increase sales volume?
- Have you identified a Sales Team Leader?

Action Step

Establish a sales system with a clearly defined sales team and strategy. Each team member should have a role in the sales strategy and you should decide how to reward good sales and or when sales targets are met, like through commissions or other kinds of bonuses.



Marketing Plan and SWOT Analysis

Your Marketing Plan is an ongoing research tool of your marketplace, be it your local town, city, region or country(s). Studying the demographic, psychographics, buying trends or needs of a population can help discern how to position your product or service in a market. What are your competitors doing and what can you do better to win new customers? What is your strategic model for entering a particular market? I.e. Lowest cost, Best Value, High End or Mid-Range. Do you work toward identifying your weaknesses and improving on them and determining your threats and finding ways to prevent possible negative outcomes, while emphasizing your strengths and taking advantage of your opportunities?

- Have you created a comprehensive Marketing Plan, identifying your competition?
- What are your industry Trends?
- What Segment of the marketing are you targeting? What are your customer demographics? Why do your customers buy from you?
- Do you have a true sense of the value you bring to your marketplace?
- Have you completed a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis?

Action Steps

Research the demographics around your place of business and determine how to best serve their needs. Determine what kind of service and/or product attracts them most and how to present it to them to maximize your sales.

Management, Employee and Customer Relations

Having a great team is central to your company's growth, so the plan to attract and keep key team players must be well thought out, and have the right incentive and benefits so management team members will want to remain on for a long term basis. Defining your culture as a positive, growing, encouraging place where all members of staff are accepted, wanted and respected, must be intentionally and wholeheartedly developed by senior management and owners. Customer Relations starts from the inside, if there is a good relationship between management and staff, this will naturally transfer to customers/clients. Treat your employees with the greatest respect, and not cheesy cheap tricks. Show gratitude for a day's work by giving out a good wage and benefits when the company can afford them, incentives when a job is well done and a show of appreciation to employees. This recognition will practically guarantee good customer service.

- Do you have a system for gaining and growing talent?
- Do you have a Human Resource Manual, and how often is it reviewed?
- What is your customer relations policy, for both internal and external customers?
- Do you have a well-defined employee handbook and personnel policy manual?

Action Steps

Draw up a strategy to reward employees who are performing to their utmost. Determine the level of reward, be it commissions, gift, etc., for different levels of outstanding employee performance. If necessary, have a lawyer go over the employee handbook and HR manual to spot any potential liabilities.





Products and/or Service Systems

Having product(s) and service(s) that are in demand within the largest segments of a demographic group with the largest disposal income is the ideal target of a successful business venture. Customers and clients that need an item or service on a continuous basis is the ideal business model. Specialty services that bring significant benefits to customers and clients with limited competition are good business endeavors. Being the expert in your chosen sector is the best practice for your chosen business aligned with top quality customer service.

- How often do you evaluate your product/service offering(s) from a price, product, and place and promotion strategy?
- Do you have a definitive system to process your product and/or services?
- How do you deliver to your customers?
- Do you have a quality cost analysis/profit analysis and are you within industry norms?
- What are your quality control procedures and policies?

Action Steps

Establish a market with the broadest appeal and that also caters to higher end customers. Ensure that your services/products evolve along with your customers, so they are attracted to what you have to offer. Perform market research to stay ahead of your customers' wants and demands.

Intellectual Resources

If you have intellectual property and resources, having a qualified and trusted professional will provide the best guidance and advice.

- Are your products and services subject to infringements?
- What is the status of your trademarks, patents and copyrights?

Action Steps

Consult an intellectual property lawyer to see whether your service/product or logo is eligible for a trademark, patent or copyright. Determine whether it's worth it to patent, copyright and trademark your intellectual property.



External Resources

The cost of a good Attorney, CPA, Bank, and business consultant may seem daunting, however if these are high quality selected professionals, the advice and guidance, if followed, will be the difference between the success and failure of your business.

- Do you have an attorney with a business background?
- Is your CPA versed in your industry?
- Does your insurance agency have a business background?
- Have you compared the fees and value of external resources?

Action Steps

Research consultants that will work best for your company and interview them to see if they are the right fit. Ask about payments, services, retainers and hours they are willing to work.

Documentation

Creating procedures, policies, workflows, proposals, design software, project procedures to enhance internal operations and customer communications. Maintenance of records for regulatory and taxing requirements need constant documentation procedures.

- Do you have a method of creating high quality agreements for both internal and external use? I.e. customer contracts, vendor and subcontractor agreements, employee contracts, independent contracts, etc.
- Are your Federal, State and Local Taxes in compliance?
- Are business files stored as hard copies as well as electronically?
- Does your business have a document disposal program?
- Does your business have a document retention program?

Action Steps

Establish a simple and efficient documentation system that handles how to store documents, what to do with incoming documents and how to find them when stored. Create a disposal system for when some documents are no longer needed.

Licensure & Certifications

Updating and keeping licenses and certifications for your business is a necessity. This can be accomplished by using outside services, some specialty PEO companies provide services that notify management and staff of pending expirations, notices of continuing education.

- Do you have a procedure that assures your licenses and certifications renewals are completed in a timely manner?
- Are you abreast of all continuing education courses?
- Do you have a procedure to keep Federal, State and municipal regulatory requirements current?
- Are your associations and board affiliations current?
- Are you investigating and obtaining licenses and certifications that can enhance your business in your sector?

Action Steps

Consult with a licensee expert to ensure you have all the requisite licenses for your business and any possible ones you may need in the near future. Find out about any fees associated with obtaining the licenses and set aside money for them.



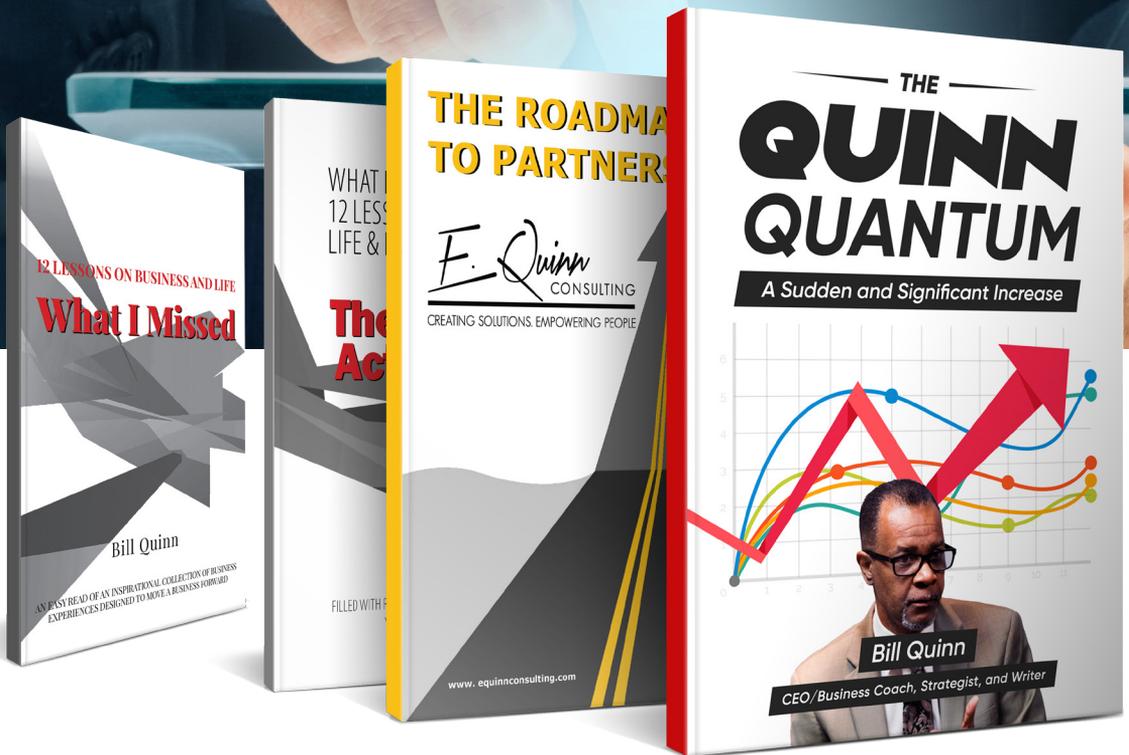
Taxation

Having an internal or external monitoring system for tax needs should be developed by your business CPA or tax advisors. Professional Employer Organization (PEO) companies can provide these services.

- Do you have a procedure for monitoring and maintaining all tax obligations?
- Quarterly payroll, self-employment tax, income tax, etc.
- Real and personal property tax.

Action Steps

Establish a monitoring system for any given tax needs so you will be prepared for any unexpected taxes. If needed, hire a tax consultant to set this system up.



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