



8x8

Within Reach: 5 Small Steps to Achieve Your Big Goals

Tips to Help Your Small Business Unleash Its Full Potential



Maybe you have opened your doors for the first time and are thinking, “Now what?”

Or perhaps you have been in business for a while and feel like you have plateaued. No matter what stage your business is at, it is never a bad idea to list your goals and consider the steps needed to achieve them.

Whether your goals are to sell more products, grow customers or improve engagement, this guide outlines five steps that may seem small, yet can yield major results. Any business owner can follow the steps laid out here, regardless of the industry they are in or how long their business has been open. If you are committed to helping your business reach its full potential, then this guide is for you.

Step 1: Identify your ideal customer

No market need is the most commonly cited reason for why startups fail, according to research by data analysis firm **CB Insights**. You may have an idea of who your product or service is for, but do you solve a big enough pain point for your customers? Does your marketing successfully convey this message? If you answered no to either question, or you are unsure, then the first step is to identify your ideal customer.

You have probably heard the adage, “You can’t be everything to everyone.” Applying this to business, it means that your product or service isn’t going to appeal to every person on the planet, so don’t even bother. You will waste time, energy and resources chasing down customers that don’t want or need your product. At the same time, you will overlook those who do.

Businesses can fall into the trap of casting too wide a net at any time. No matter what stage your business is at, resist the temptation to go after every kind of customer—it rarely works.

How do you identify your ideal customer?

Here are a few questions to start with:

- What problems or challenges does my product or service solve from a customer’s perspective?
- What objections might a customer have to my product or service?
- Why should someone buy from me and not a competitor?
- Who can afford my product or service?
- Who are my current customers?

This last question is an especially good one to ask. You may have an idea of who your customers are, but perhaps your perception doesn't meet reality. Equally informative can be examining who your best customers are. What are their characteristics—size, location, industry? What do they buy from you and how frequently? What feedback have they given you? What makes them “my best customers?”

Identifying your ideal customer isn't a one-and-done exercise. You should routinely examine who is buying from you and adjust your marketing and other efforts accordingly. Michael Dell, founder of Dell Inc., explained in a 2014 interview with [Inc. Magazine](#) why Dell had to open new lines of business to respond to changing customer behavior:

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“The point is, you can't keep doing the same thing and expect it to keep working. We had to do something different, but the really hard question was, ‘What is it?’ We made plenty of mistakes along the way to answering that question, but the most important thing we identified was that we needed to know more about our customers and what problems they were really trying to solve in their businesses—even if they didn't neatly fit into an existing category of ours.”

— **Michael Dell, founder of Dell Inc.**

Taking a step back and identifying your ideal customer will help to dictate how you spend your time, energy and resources. However, it is equally important to continually evaluate who your ideal customer is and adjust accordingly.

Step 2: Get in front of customers



“If your business is not on the internet, then your business will be out of business.”

— Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft Corporation



Physical phone books are a thing of the past; the internet is the primary way customers find your business. You need a website whether you sell online or not. But it is not just about launching a website and waiting for customers to come. You need to optimize your overall web presence to get in front of customers. There are three steps you can take to build a stronger web presence.

1. Manage your Google My Business directory listing

Google My Business is a free tool that allows business owners to verify and edit details about their business. This information shows up in places like Google Search and Google Maps. At a minimum, update your business location, phone number and website, though you should also add your hours of operation and upload photos. As more consumers discover businesses through Google My Business, proactively managing your listing can mean the difference between success or failure.





2. Update your website's metadata

This is the data that Google scrapes in order to list businesses in search results. The closer your metadata matches what people are searching for, the higher your website will rank. The three most important metadata elements you should optimize are your website's page title, page description and main title (also known as the H1). Many website builders provide fields for these elements—you just have to enter the information.

Your metadata should reflect what your business does, not what it is called or what you think you do. Let's say someone is searching for an eye doctor. If they have never heard of a particular practice before, what are the chances they are going to type in "Dr. Smith's Family Eyecare" or its aspirational tagline, "Creating better vision for the future?" Not very high. Rather, a prospective patient will search for "eye doctor," "eye doctor for kids" and "glasses." If you are Dr. Smith, then your website's metadata should contain these phrases. Apply this principle to your business—when your website metadata meets users at their point of need, you increase the chances of customers walking through your doors.

3. Focus on backlinking

Getting links back to your website is known as backlinking. Are you a member of the chamber of commerce, or are you sponsoring a local event? Ask for a link back to your website. If you have a LinkedIn profile, add a link there. Each quality backlink can boost your website's Google ranking.

There are other steps you can take to strengthen your online presence, such as using Google AdWords, but the above should set you on your way. No matter what you do, don't forget one crucial step: track the results. See where leads come from and replicate each success.

Step 3: Build a social media presence

93% of people plan to buy something from a small or medium-sized business they follow, according to [Twitter](#). That's the power of social media—it is the modern-day equivalent of patroning a local business because you know the people who work there.

Social media allows you to build trust and affinity with customers. Successful social media strategies are less about self-promotion and more about sharing your story, engaging with users and expanding your network. Social media management platform [Hootsuite](#) recommends that 80% of your social media content should inform, educate or entertain your audience, while the remaining 20% should promote your business or products.

We tend to think of social media as being one of four platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest—but social media can be defined as any digital community. This includes Google My Business, Yelp and YouTube. It is on these platforms where conversations about businesses take place and where there is an opportunity for business owners to improve customer experience and get people in the door.



Should you be on every social media platform? Depending on your goals, you may only need one or two. Facebook is great for local marketing, while Instagram can help you reach a younger demographic. If you want to raise awareness among professionals in your industry and beyond, consider creating a LinkedIn Page for your business. Experiment and see which social network helps you connect with your ideal customer (going back to Step 1), generate leads and increase conversions.

Whichever platform you choose, be sure to engage with your audience. Respond to reviews and comments. Develop relationships with those who might talk about your business. Participate in discussions related to your industry. Simply commenting on someone's post can start a conversation and begin to build a relationship.

Social Media Best Practices for Small Businesses

Set goals

- Make these realistic

Upload photos and videos

- Aim for high-quality ones

Share authentic content

- Engage, inform and entertain

Post regularly

- Stick to a schedule

Interact with your audience

- Respond to comments and join conversations



Don't be discouraged if your posts don't gain traction right away. Immediate gratification isn't the name of the game. Rather, you are building a long-term relationship with your social media audience. Keep posting engaging content that is true to your brand. Even if you don't get any response on a post, that doesn't mean your effort was in vain. Social content can resurface later and can be repurposed, such as in emails or PR.

While it is not often talked about, don't shy away from paid media. People that otherwise may not have heard about your business may see a promoted post, click on an offer and become customers. Paid media is faster, easier to track and more targeted than traditional advertisements and often doesn't cost much.

As with building a web presence, be sure to track results. Access the insights provided by social networks and create a baseline that you can improve upon over time. If you are not seeing the results you want, then reevaluate your strategy. You may be on the wrong platform or perhaps your content simply isn't resonating with your audience. Look to the accounts you follow and even your competitors' accounts for inspiration. The good thing about social media is that there is a lot of content out there already that you can share with your audience or provide commentary. You just have to find what works for you and for your audience.

Step 4: Plan for the unexpected

Almost 40% of small businesses never reopen following a disaster, according to [FEMA](#). Disasters can include fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, power outages and cyber attacks. The cost of recovery and repairs, lost business, ruined inventory and fines can derail even the most successful business.

A major disruption doesn't have to be a natural or manmade disaster, however. It can be a positive event that turns sour. For example, you may launch a successful social media promotion that brings in more orders than you can process. Shipping times are pushed out, and before you know it, all of your newly won customers are complaining that they paid for a product that hasn't arrived. Suddenly, your achievement turns into a crisis.

The unexpected can happen at any time. It is how you prepare for these events that can tip the scales toward survival or extinction.

Developing a business continuity plan is essential and greatly enhances your odds of reopening after a disaster. Your plan should be created proactively before disaster strikes. Make every effort to mitigate risks and decrease the chances of something bad happening that is within your control to prevent. You will want to regularly review and update your plan so you are prepared to meet new or evolving challenges. [Ready.gov](#) provides a comprehensive guide for creating such a plan.

Small businesses don't just need to worry about natural disasters. Cybersecurity threats targeting smaller firms are on the rise. As security software company [Symantec](#) reveals, employees at small businesses are more likely to have spam, phishing and malware threats land in their email inbox than workers at large corporations. Training yourself and your employees to spot malicious email and shoring up your digital defenses, such as using malware protection software, can help to mitigate cyber threats.

You should also prepare for positive disruptions. As mentioned, perhaps a promotion gains traction, or you get favorable coverage from an influencer or publication. What do you do when you become an overnight success?

Ready.gov provides a comprehensive guide for creating such a plan.



Again, preparation is key. Have enough cash on hand to fulfill orders or extend your line of credit to get over the hump. Be prepared to bring in extra help, such as independent contractors or friends and family. However, don't make a commitment to hire full-time until you are sure your success is sustainable. Work with suppliers and manufacturers to set up payment plans so you don't get hit with bills that are due all at once.

Of course, communication is vital during times of feast or famine. Communicate with customers, employees and other stakeholders about what is going on, what the disruption means for them and the steps you are taking. You may want to have a [crisis communications plan](#) in place.

You can't plan for every event or disaster. Just know that disruptions are bound to happen, and it is how you prepare and how you respond that makes the difference.




Step 5: Put technology in your corner







Small businesses that use digital tools experience higher revenue growth than those that don't, according to research by accounting and professional services firm [Deloitte](#). As more consumers and employees become digitally connected, there is an exciting opportunity for small businesses to engage in different ways. Mobile applications and online services also make it easier for smaller companies to be more productive with fewer resources.

Technology can be your secret weapon in reaching your goals, and one that doesn't have to break the bank. There are many free software programs and applications available, or ones that cost a nominal fee. In fact, the choice can be overwhelming.



Start by identifying what tasks you can offload or automate. The key is to identify technology that is simple to set up, easy to use and provides a tangible benefit to your business. Here is a list of applications and services along with a brief description that you should consider for your business:

What is it called?	 Dropbox	 EVERNOTE	 FRESHBOOKS cloud accounting	 G Suite
What does it help me do?	File hosting, storage and collaboration	Note taking and organizing	Invoicing and accounting	Collaboration and productivity—includes email, spreadsheets and file sharing

What is it called?	 Hootsuite ™	 MailChimp	 quickbooks	 shopify	 Square	 Trello
What does it help me do?	Social media management	Marketing automation and email marketing	Accounting	eCommerce	Payment processing, point of sale management and payroll	Collaboration and task management

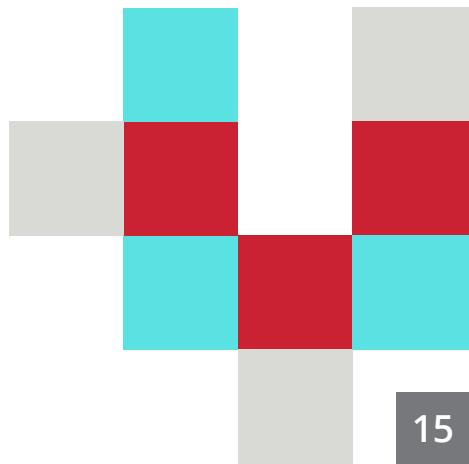
This list is by no means exhaustive. Ask your personal and professional networks what tools they use—you may discover an app, product or service that proves useful.

As mentioned in Step 4, communication is vital for business continuity. Having a fast, reliable communications system helps you respond to customers at any time, not just during a disaster. Take a look at your communications system and determine if the tools you use help or hold back your business. You may lack such features as an auto attendant, music on hold and call forwarding to your cell phone. You may even lack a separate business phone number from your personal one. Not having these features can look unprofessional and prevent you from providing an ideal customer experience.

Consider a communications solution like 8x8 Express, a complete small business phone system that delivers voice, video and chat in one application for just \$12/month. 8x8 Express includes 50+ cloud phone features, lets you create a new business number or keep your existing one and takes just minutes to set up, making it ideal for small offices and home-based businesses that want to connect better now.

You began your business with a vision and a passion, but managing the day-to-day may have gotten in the way. By using technology to your advantage, you can focus on what you do best and let the rest take care of itself.

When you follow each of the steps outlined above, you can bring your goals to fruition by better serving your current customers, attracting new ones and preparing your business for whatever comes its way.





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