Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice

Business and Marketing for iOS and Mac Start Ups

Charles Edge

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About the Author

Charles Edge has worked in consulting most of his adult life. He has worked with large, multinational consulting firms, started consulting firms, worked to sell firms, and helped to develop offerings and business in both large and small firms. He's worked hourly, on retainers, and even converted customers from an hourly consulting firm to managed services. Along the way, he's earned a lot. He has been working with Apple products since he was a child. Professionally, Charles started with the Mac OS and Apple server offerings in 1999 after years working with various flavors of Unix. Charles began his consulting career working with Support Technologies and Andersen Consulting. In 2000, he found a new home at 318, Inc., a consulting firm in Santa Monica, California, which is now the largest Mac consultancy in the country. At 318, Charles leads a team of over 40 engineers and has worked with network architecture, security, and storage for various vertical and horizontal markets. Charles has spoken at a variety of conferences including DefCon, BlackHat, LinuxWorld, MacWorld and the WorldWide Developers Conference. Charles' first book, Mac Tiger Server Little Black Book, can be purchased through Paraglyph Press. Charles recently hung up his surfboard and moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, with his wife, Lisa. Charles can be contacted at krypted@mac.com.

Acknowledgments

The acknowledgements sections I've written in the past have been for technical books. This one is about how to do business. And business acumen begins with your parents: the first time they help you get a savings account, when they tell you to put a little aside instead of spending it all on candy, and when they teach you all the little details that help you get a better understanding of humans. So, thank you to my parents and the rest of my family for guiding me through all of those formative years.

Then there are the teachers. This includes the ones that taught you specific things they were supposed to teach you that are easily understood as linking to business acumen, like how to do t-values and p-values or how to properly run a general ledger. The world is a complicated place, and without some seriously awesome guidance in our schooling, none of us would likely be where we are today.

Then there are my coworkers. This includes business partners, bosses, coworkers, and employees. This also includes people you interact with at other companies. I can only hope I've taught all of those people as much about business as they've taught me.

And finally, everyone else. Every interaction with another person in the business world, be it at a hotel bar with someone whose name you've never known, or someone who kicked your butt negotiating a contract, is a learning experience if you let it be. This extends to the people that wrote the books I included in the Further Reading sections of each chapter, but also regular non-business Fiction and Non-Fiction, as it all builds into a deeper understanding of the world around us.

Notice that there aren't any names here. That's because there are just way too many to name. I love you all for all you have done for me.

Introduction

I have worked in consulting most of my adult life. I worked with large, multinational consulting firms, started consulting firms, worked to sell firms, and helped to develop offerings and business in both large and small firms. I've worked hourly, on retainers, and even converted customers from an hourly consulting firm to managed services. Along the way, I learned a lot. And then I took a day job. There, I took some time away from consulting and later had the chance to work with and enable the Apple services arm of some of the largest consulting firms and managed services providers in the world. And along the way, I don't think I've learned a damn thing… But I just can't help myself but to write a whole book about it anyway!

Going from a small hourly based consulting firm to starting a managed service offering and then working within enterprise-class environments gave me a new perspective on being a traditional consulting firm and a Managed Services Provider, of the ways that business blends together. And mentoring former competitors has enlightened me to the challenges that others have that I didn't and challenges I had that they didn't. I certainly can't speak to the iterations that guarantee success; but I hope this book helps you choose whether or not to take such a journey, along the path, and ultimately, to find success.

In this book, we'll look at a number of scenarios that give readers insight into how to deal with some of the most common challenges they'll face while starting a consulting company. Some of these can be applied generally; others, are specific to managed services.

Chapter-by-Chapter

The book is structured in three general parts: running the business, developing the business, and what to do once you get things up and running. Each chapter then covers the following:

Chapter 0: *The Joy of Being a Sole Proprietor.* In this short chapter, we'll cover the life of a sole proprietor and the challenges you'll face when you decide to grow.

Chapter 1: *Build the Offer.* In this chapter we look at defining what your product actually is. Are you going to be a flat fee managed service provider, or will you mix your services? We'll look at questions around hourly vs. unlimited support, sanity check network segments, and how to validate that your pricing is correct.

Chapter 2: *Beyond Services* In this chapter, we go beyond selling services and into selling subscriptions to websites, selling hardware, selling bandwidth, and other areas where you can add revenue streams to help fund your startup.

Chapter 3: *Hiring and Human Resources.* In this chapter, we look at hiring, training, and retaining engineers. We also take a pretty cold and calculated look at when you have to let some of the best employees you've ever had move on of their own accord and what kinds of drastic moves might help you retain them.

Chapter 4: *Accounting 101.* In this chapter, we look at the most exciting aspect of your organization: keeping the books. Many a business owner hates doing this. I have always loved it. Oh, and taxes. Because… taxes…

Chapter 5: *Buy Software to Automate the Business.* Chapter 5 covers putting automation software in place. This includes software to monitor the health of remotely manage devices and then proceeds to software to perform ticketing and dispatch, ultimately looking at tying into other aspects of the business, including e-mail automation, billing, and contract management.

Chapter 6: *Make Friends: Develop Partnerships.* Chapter 6 is about partnerships. Partnerships can mean tons of new customers coming in, or they can be a waste of time. Here we look at finding the right partner, building a good relationship, and converting those partnerships into customers.

Chapter 7: *Engage in Free and Guerrilla Marketing.* In this chapter, we look at getting the most bang for your marketing dollars. You'll get tips on easy ways to maximize your investment, some ideas, and, of course, some resources for chasing down even more.

Chapter 8: *Using Public Relations.* In this chapter, we focus on Public Relations. PR is getting your organization in front of the press, including quotes in the press, customer stories that mention your company's name, and other assets, with or without hiring a PR firm.

Chapter 9: *Advertising.* In this chapter, we look at paid advertising. In Chapters 7 and 8, we weren't actually paying for advertising, but now we've got some money and we can afford to do so. This begins, of course, with paid search.

Chapter 10: *The Art of Selling.* The previous few chapters were about creating a sales funnel. That's how you get in front of customers. We have one more step before people start giving us cash: the sales process.

Chapter 11: *Diversifying Your Portfolio.* Here, we look at more you can do for customers, beyond managed services. This includes software development, project management, and other forms of services. But the most important aspect here is to get rigorous about how you handle new business opportunities.

Chapter 12: *When to Stop Growing.* This chapter is about harmony. Slowing growth doesn't need to happen permanently, but it can be dangerous to grow too fast—especially when you are not able to leverage enough capital for contracts you are selling. To many, this might sound like basically the best problem they could ever have. To others, who are jeopardizing sometimes decades of work, the idea of possibly bankrupting their company is frightening.

Chapter 13: *Sell the Company.* In this chapter, we look at selling your company. But we can't stress enough that selling the company should usually not be your impetus for starting the company. Additionally, we'll look at various ways to merge with other organizations.

Chapter 14: *The Part-Time Owner.* But what if you don't want to sell the company? In this chapter, we look at some alternatives, such as becoming a part-time owner, starting more companies while running yours, and leveraging profits to build more equity.

Chapter 15: *Buying Companies.* Inorganic growth is risky. Why would you incur the risk to grow inorganically rather than just building a better offer than the competition? Usually, time. Consider this, if there's a market segment you want to go after and there's an incumbent, then the time it takes you to build a competing offer is time that the other company is likely even further innovating, putting you further and further behind gaining market control. In Chapter 15, we'll look at what to consider when acquiring a company, as well as what to do when talks break down.

Chapter 16: *Running a Consulting Practice Inside a Larger Company.* Finally, consulting practices happen in larger companies as well—most notably in software companies. While many attributes match those of stand-alone companies, there are a number of differences as well and many, many lessons to be learned, especially for those who are moving from a standalone practice to a company.

At the end of each chapter, we'll also take the liberty of including a Further Reading section. Don't worry, you don't have to read all the books. If you did though, you should probably just be given an MBA. We're all pretty busy. So, while there's usually more value in reading a book than listening to it, please note that a good number of these are actually available on Audible.

Ultimately, this book is meant to be lessons that I share with you, not a rulebook. You have a business. Maybe you've been in business for a long, long time. Maybe you've been helming a business for awhile. Whatever your situation, you're probably way smarter than me. And not all of these lessons will work for you, given the values you have and how you want to run your business. But maybe something I put in black and white here can actually be used to make you enough dollars to warrant the amount of time you spent reading the book!

First, Let Me Talk You Out of This…

Before You Start a Company

The stress of starting a company can literally kill you. Starting a company can lead to wrecking every relationship in your life. Starting a company will cause you to grow old faster. You are likely to go bankrupt. You will hire people who are likely to hate you eventually. You will not “be in charge of your own destiny,” as your clients will be in charge of your destiny. In short, it’s gonna’ suck.

You will work more hours than you ever knew about. You will give large sums of money to lawyers and accountants. You will spend time away from the real world, building a business, instead of building relationships with friends and family.

Yes, Ross Perot sold Managed Services Providers for 10+ billion dollars. You won’t. Yes, you can hang out your shingle after working for a consultant, passing business to consultants, or hiring consultants. Don’t. You think you can do it better than the consultants out there that have let you down for one reason or another? You can’t. Again, this is gonna’ suck.

If you find success, you can still go bankrupt from poor financial planning. If you find success, you will be sued. If you innovate, you will be copied. If you hire people, they will leave you. And you will keep on until you sell out or go out of business.

Instead…

It doesn't have to be this way. You can work for someone else forever. You can collect a paycheck. You can get a safe 401k. Maybe you can consult a little on the side. You can have a lovely and safe life. You can… live…

That on-the-side thing. It's called the gig-based economy, and we'll talk a little about that throughout this book. Maybe you drive an Uber or work at an Apple Retail Store as well. To use older terminology, it's "shoestring" and allows you to pivot if need be.

OK, OK, so the Surgeon General doesn't talk a smoker out of smoking with a label, and if you continue reading, just do me one REALLY BIG FAVOR. Do whatever it takes, including folding the business that is your baby, in order to be happy. Do what you love. Be good to those you love. And try to keep your business going while you're at it!

CHAPTER 0

The Joy of Being a Sole Proprietor

I tried to talk you out of starting a company in the previous section. If you're still reading, you went ahead and decided to do it anyway. Or maybe you did it after reading that, or maybe you did it 30 years ago. The next phase is to get enough clients to make how much money you want to make. And in the next few chapters we'll look at doing so in a deliberate fashion.

It's not that hard to become a consultant. The job can coexist with other jobs, provides flexibility, and you don't have to worry about other people. If you want to take a day off, just reschedule your appointments. You can limit the amount of time you work so you can focus on your family and other pursuits. I know a lot of people who have been sole proprietors for decades and not only love the gig but make enough money at it so that they lead a comfortable lifestyle.

Staying Sane

Still, there are some tips that I can provide to help keep you sane. Some things to keep in mind as a sole proprietor:

- It's usually all about boutique service. There are a lot of really cheap options out there. And some of them are just as good as you. No offense. Same with me. But there's a level of service you can provide that makes you worth every penny. Don't skimp on providing those extra little things to customers that only boutique shops can.

- Being a sole proprietor allows you to focus on relationships with key customers. Life is too short to work with crappy people. If you choose to grow, you'll have to. But at this size, unless you plan on growing and replacing yourself with others at your customers' customer, work with who you want to, not whoever calls.
- Don't compete on price. If you start a company and are jumping at every project, then trying to do so cheaper than anyone else will run you ragged. Most customers who select vendors based on price have a certain expectation of how they can treat those vendors. Again, life is too short for all that. I'm not saying not to explore every opportunity that comes to you, but think about this: would it be better to bill 2 hours at $200 per hour or 8 hours at $50 per hour?
- Keep it simple. A lot of what we cover in this book is about scaling your operation—things to consider when you're building a firm. And many of these systems work great for solo practitioners as well. But build systems to fit your size. You'll definitely want tools that make it easy for you to track things. But as an example, you won't need a tool like Marketo to message customers.
- Practice the 80/20 rule. Twenty percent of your customers likely account for 80 percent of your business. Make sure to feed those customers with as much TLC as you can. And don't be afraid to let some of them go, even if they were hard to get.

- Outsource or refer everything you can. The longer you can delay hiring for accounting, dispatch, etc., the easier your life will be. Before you start hiring for these tasks, ask if you can just have a part-time person come in and do it or hire a service.
- Take care of yourself. I can remember when customers called at 4 AM and I jumped out of bed to go help them. Triple-time was nice, but if you find you do that a lot, you can increase those after-hour rates to try and reduce those kinds of calls.
- Set a schedule. If you're new to working for yourself, it's easy to let your personal life eke into your professional life, or to let your professional life start to consume all the time, leaving no time for a personal life. Set a schedule to go to the gym before you start work, then be onsite for your first customer at 9 AM, or whatever works for you. And set aside time for family and friends. You know, so they don't forget you exist.
- Deal with billing disputes swiftly. If a customer goes past terms, then they've probably forgotten, are having financial challenges, or are disputing the work that was done. Whatever the case, if you let accounts receivable pile up, you won't stay in business long. Get to the source of any delinquent accounts quickly, and understand that it's often that the customer is too busy to dispute an invoice.
- Take cash-on-delivery for as long as you can. This will keep your books streamlined.

- Get tax help immediately. I've seen dozens of solo practitioners go out of business in their first year because they hadn't planned on quarterly tax payments.
- Sponsor the community. You know those calendars with ads for the local high school PTA group or entries in church newsletters? Sponsoring your local community is not only a great way to meet potential customers but a passive and easy way to get your brand in front of others.
- Don't grow beyond sole proprietorship unless you are committed to the endeavor. You might have the business to warrant expansion, but it's not worth screwing over the people that choose to work for you if your heart is not in it.

The first customers are always the hardest to recruit. These usually come from your circle of friends. And since you don't yet fully know your value, you are likely to undercharge them. As you pick up more customers, you'll end up increasing those rates, and that might cause some attrition. That's fine, provided you're still making enough to make the gig worthwhile.

Be Deliberate

It's never too early to be deliberate. Find your niche and actively seek out customers that help you win in that niche. Over the years, I have known consultants that specialized in Point-of-Sale (PoS) systems for Mac and iOS, and I'll never be as good at doing what they do, so I refer business to them. The same is true for accounting systems, digital signage, and specific technologies. This also helps differentiate you to potential customers.

If you want to play in those spaces, then you'll have an easier time of recruiting customers that you can retain long-term.

While you're building your initial base, you'll likely end up taking on customers that aren't a part of your core. Maybe you are learning while you go or just doing a specific type of work so you can afford more ramen noodles next week. Whatever the case, it's best to be transparent with the customers about what kind of relationship you have with them. The same is true in life.

Think about what you want out of this. Is it to be flexible? To have a part-time job that puts you closer to retirement? To be in control of your own destiny? One of the great things about being a consultant is that you have instant gratification a lot of the time. But the tradeoffs are that you're doing all the work and that work comes in fits and starts. The more you understand your own intention, the more you can adapt and use the slow times properly.

It's All About Character

Be a good steward to your customers. Solo practitioners often work with customers who need their help. I've seen consultants keep customers because they're afraid to leave them, and I've seen consultants who have their own best interest in mind when making decisions on behalf of customers or providing guidance. If you do what's best for them, then you'll be paid back many times over.

If you're hanging a shingle out as a consultant for the first time, or if you've been doing it for years, let's start with what you want to do for your customers. In Chapter 1, we'll cover the offer you make to customers, or the package of goods and services you provide, and the price you choose to charge for those goods and services.

CHAPTER 1

Build the Offer

The most important task in front of you is to decide what you want out of this business you're starting. Maybe you just want to make a little money on the side from your day job. Maybe you want to create a "lifestyle business" so you can work 20 hours a week and spend time with your family. Maybe you want to conquer the world. Either way, your most important task is to make a goal and decide what you want this thing to become. Then put milestones in place to build what it is that you actually want.

Once you understand what you're doing, you can start building an offer that reflects your goals and values. By creating an offer that authentically reflects what you're looking for, you'll quickly find that lots of projects are going to take you away from your core goal. And you'll have to make a decision whether to pivot or to stay with your original plan.

In this chapter, we'll look at that offer. How do you research what should be in the offer? How do you structure the offer? What are common types of offers? How will you structure billing to reflect an appropriate profit margin? Wait, do you need a contract? We'll start with researching what should go into an offer.

Note One aspect of the offer to consider is specialization. You can and should charge a premium for your services if you own a vertical market in a given geography, especially if there are specific skills needed to deliver services for that vertical market.

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Before You Get Started: Take Care of Yourself

Sometimes we get busy. You know those times when we have 8,000 things going on at work, picking up the kids from school, taking them to swimming lessons, turning in a proposal after dinner, and grabbing that call from the other side of the world at 1 AM. The next thing you know, you can easily forget to take care of yourself. You end up getting sick, performing poorly due to fatigue, and ultimately getting even busier due to craptastic performance.

Getting sick doesn't end up doing anyone any good. And persisting on long-term fatigue can have devastating results on not only your health, but friendships and family as well.

But we can't always control the work–life balance. Or can we? What are some things we can do to stay well, both mentally and physically?

- **Time tracking**: There are courses and methodologies and books. You don't have to buy one, but it's never a bad idea to get some form of time-tracking and organization going.

Pro tip Start as simple as you can, and move to other, more mature business systems as you grow into them!

- **Exercise**: When we get busy, one of the easiest things to let go of is our exercise routines. Maybe others see the time we spend at the gym as an indulgence, or maybe 8 hours on a flight isn't conducive to a quick run. But not letting go gives us better self-esteem, makes us more resilient, and gives us time to let our brains relax away from it all, so those creative juices can get to flowing!

- **Eat healthily**: Exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle, but eating properly is critical as well. We all need plenty of calories and a healthy mix of foods. Stay away from fast food and enjoy the art of cooking whenever possible.
- **Get help from others**: When you're spinning your wheels, reach out to others for help. No one expects us to be perfect, so we can admit it when we aren't and accept help when we need it!
- **Automate more**: If you have to touch a piece of paper or perform a manual task, search an App Store to see if that task can be moved to an automation on a device. And if you have a bunch of apps that you have to manually move data between, look for whether or not you can automate that process as well!
- **Subscribe to the Morning E-mails**: I like getting business reports in the morning. They set my tone for the day. Build reports and have them sent to you so you can stay on top of trends. Avoid bad knee-jerk reactions based on crappy sales or delivery in a given day and focus most on the trends in front of you.
- **Wake up to the day's most important news**: The 24-hour news cycle can destroy you. Limit what you read and access and isolate what actually matters to you.
    - Top of Form
    - Bottom of Form
- **Hire more people**: I know, I know, we all get to a point where we just feel overworked all the time. If that goes on for too long, we have to accept the fact that being overburdened isn't going anywhere and we need to bring in more humans.

- **Be diligent about building a better mousetrap**: Is there waste in your day? Are there processes that, with a small tweak, would be able to be more efficient? Can you remove steps without removing quality? I like to set a quarterly or monthly task for myself to think about how I can do better at all things!
- **Learn to say no**: Early on in our careers, we tend to say yes to more things than we need to. But as we progress, there are a number of things that we no longer enjoy or take any benefit from. We still want to help our communities and stay involved in a lot of things, but ultimately, we have to learn to say no here and there in order to maintain our own sanity.

If you're so busy you can't take care of yourself, just stop making yourself so busy. It's never too early to get started. Life is too short. I hope one or more of these tips help to spark an idea that saves you time and money and makes your life just a little bit better.

Research What Should Be in an Offer

You've decided to start a company! There are few finer things to do in this world, and few more frustrating. Before you can start selling stuff, you need to know exactly what it is you are selling, and exactly how much to charge for it. In the beginning, you can be the person who does computer stuff. But if you want to grow (and be happy while doing so), then you'll need to draw lines between what you will do and what you will not do. Or, more to the point, what you would prefer to spend your time doing, which is often to chase profitable long-term contracts.

As we'll show in Chapter 13, those long-term contracts build more value for the company than anything else you can do. Long-term contracts also give you a more scalable business model to allow for building strong teams with long-term career potentials, without the fear of bankruptcy. Support contracts come in a lot of different flavors, though. Let's look at a few these can easily include:

- **Hourly support**: As the name implies, customers pay you hourly to do work for them. You can grow a business and make a lot of money doing so. But you will always have a direct correlation between the cost to deliver a service and the profit you can make off that service.
- **Retainer-based support**: You are paid to deliver a certain number of hours per month, on retainer. These usually come with either an expiration date or roll through to the end of a contract. Retainer customers should receive prioritization over hourly support customers to provide hourly support customers with a reason to upgrade to retainer programs, but without making them feel like second-class customers.
- **Managed services**: You are paid to deliver an unlimited amount of services in exchange for a fixed fee every month, usually billed on a per-user or per-device basis. For smaller customers, the offering can include cloud mail, storage, backup, and more as well.

- **Hybrid approaches**: I've seen a pretty substantial number of companies out there that are afraid of allowing for unlimited support. For example, many will provide an unlimited amount of help desk services for a set price. Some go further and include a few hours a month of onsite work. These hybrid approaches are a good temporary fix for customers wanting a fixed price for all of their service needs. Unless done really well, they don't usually scale to a lot of consultants, due to operations costs caused by having too many ways to bill customers.
- **Fixed-fee projects**: Most companies that offer any of the above services will also provide project-based support as well. These projects fill the gaps that can't be accounted for in a purely managed services business. If you deliver managed services and do not yet do project-based work, then you will need to find a partner to deliver those services, or the companies who do come in to do those projects might end up carving out parts of the business from your hard-won customers.
- **Managed Leases**: This is really just Managed Services with a lease to the hardware (and maybe software and insurance) tacked on so that those in charge of running IT can be proactive with budgeting.

I tried to list these in order of complexity. Standard hourly support is the first and simplest to deliver; there's no commitment from either party. As you get later in the list, the relationship becomes more complex. As relationships become more complex, customers are often required to sign annual or multi-year contracts. And of course, the longer the term, the less a contract costs and the more prices are fixed against inflation.

Pricing

Pricing is one of the hardest things to get right in a business. Sell too high and no one will want to buy your services; sell too low and no one will respect the services you deliver, or you won't make enough margin to get by.

There are a lot of factors in choosing how to price your services. There are no magic bullets. But there is guidance. We're going to provide a little guidance on a per-billing type basis:

- **Hourly**: You can ask for whatever rate you want. That doesn't mean you can get it. Whatever rate you can get is basically what you end up with. It's usually supply on demand. You can look on Craigslist and find many a provider willing to do work for $35 per hour. If you look in more traditional channels, you're more likely to find support for close to $200 per hour or much steeper day rates for various specialties.
- **Retainer-based Support**: You usually need to provide a discount of 10% to 20% when you sell longer-term support contracts. For example, if you think a customer needs to purchase 20 hours per month, and your standard rate is $120 per month, then they might buy that bucket of hours, which would normally cost $2400 per month, at a discount of $240, which would move the cost down to $2,160.
- **Managed Services**: Managed services moves the conversation away from hourly or daily consulting (time-based consulting) and into a fixed-fee model. A common rate would be $60 per computer per month. Continuing on with the $120 per month number, this would mean you wouldn't likely want to

spend more than a 1/2-hour per month working on a given computer so that you can preserve a similar rate. But if moving to an MSP model, you finally get to do all that proactive management you were trying to get customers to do for years. So your MSP pricing can often be looked at as an average amount of time spent working on a system provided you are able to extract usage data. Keep in mind that when looking at Managed Services, you want to make a good margin, but if you take too much margin, you will not be able to retain customers.

- **Hybrid Support**: A number of organizations enter into Managed Services contracts and then struggle with how to bring new services online that provide value to their organization. Managed Services is meant to provide a customer with a predictable cost to maintain their existing assets. Many will move into cloud hosting models for additional services such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM), cloud storage, and project portals. Many will then need assistance setting those services up. You can charge a separate hourly or project-based rate for bringing on these new services. Just make sure not to endanger your Managed Services contract to get a few extra bucks out of these other services. Keep in mind that you can always find a partner that might be able to do a better job at the services you're providing as that's the focus of their organization. And, they might do bilateral referrals to boot!

- **Fixed-Fee Projects**: A lot of services companies have made a lot of money doing fixed-fee projects. Here, you estimate how long a project will take and describe the project in a Statement of Work (SoW). You then build in an appropriate level of padding to the project and provide a customer with a fixed cost to complete the deliverables. Once awarded, you do whatever it takes to complete the deliverables defined in the SoW. Most large organizations will need to operate in a fixed-fee modality with their vendors, given that line of business managers are typically held to remain within a budget for such things.
- **Managed Leases**: Leases are tricky. Chances are that someone else can do the lease better than you can unless you reach a critical mass of thousands of devices being leased out. For example, Dell, Apple, HP, and others can take this burden and often bundle warranties and even your Managed Services contract into the lease. If you're not already leasing hardware, then I strongly recommend giving up a few points of margin here in order to let a leasing company or vendor work with your customers so you can capture more revenue.

You'll also want to verify that your rates are geographically appropriate. If you're in Manhattan, you can charge more for services than you could if you were in Boise. They're both fantastic, but the disparity of rates can be substantial. If you can bill 1,200 hours a year, you'll be in great shape. Reverse-engineer an hourly rate out of that. Think of a number you want per year and divide that by 1,200. That gives a good baseline. Then scout the competition.

Start with Upwork, Angie's List, and Craigslist (or whatever your local equivalents are to these sites). What is the average rate for the other companies listing their services? You likely won't be the cheapest vendor, although many build very successful businesses around being the low-cost provider. That's a hard game to win at, with low margins, but it can certainly be done. You likely won't be the most expensive vendor either. It takes a lot of customers and referrals in order to organically raise rates to that point or to be the best (and no one is, or has ever been, the best, so don't forget to check your ego at the door). Finally, browse around to see what rates your competitors have posted on their sites.

You could even call around to your competition. But if you think about it, would you welcome a question from your competitors about what your rate is, just so they can undercut you every chance they get?

Tip Once you finish your research, think about whether or not you want to post your offer. Many will only hire people with posted offers, but they do give your competition insight into what you're doing.

As you grow and get better, more efficient, and known for what you do, then you will find that you can charge more for hourly work. If you rely on managed services customers, then you are likely to be at market rate, as most companies who purchase these types of services are not looking for quality contractors—they're looking to fix costs.

Note Throughout the book, we'll also look at costs. For now, just plan to spend about a quarter out of every dollar you make for credit card processing, accounting, technology, transportation, insurance, etc.

Building the Offer

Now that you know what others are charging, look at what you were planning to charge and see if it makes sense. If there's a huge disparity, you need to figure out why. You don't want to be triple the cost of the next highest paid vendor. Nor do you want to be the lowest, as people might not perceive a high enough level of value in your services. Once you establish a relationship with customers, it's hard to increase your rates without customers leaving you. Next, let's explore the more common offers: hourly, retainer, managed services, and fixed-fee.

The Hourly Offer

If your offer is to sell hours of your time, then you have a pretty simple task. Or do you? What kind of work do you want to do? For example, I know several consultants that make a pretty sweet living only doing work on Apple devices in the homes of the rich and famous. Likewise, I know a lot of consultants that won't go to a residence and will only do work in companies. Remember, and I will repeat this so that it sticks, do what makes you happy, and you'll find success. Or you won't. But at least you won't be miserable!

You've set an hourly rate. But let's make sure you are being holistic by answering these questions:

- Travel: Do you charge for travel? Or do you include travel in your rate? Do you charge hourly and have a small trip charge? Keep in mind, if you're not up front with what you're going to do, then you could very, very easily spend half your time on planes or driving around your coverage area without an appropriate amount of compensation.

- Range of Services: Do you work on servers? How about firewalls? How about really, really big firewalls? Do you write scripts or code for customers? Are you willing to drive out to fix a printer? In the beginning, many will do whatever a customer is willing to pay them to do. But the earlier in your consultancy that you choose to limit the type of work you do, the more quickly you find your niche and focus, and partners to bilaterally refer work to.
- Billing Methods: Do you warranty the hourly work or charge to continue fixing a problem?
- Billing Terms: Are you going to invoice customers, take payment up front, or accept credit cards when you complete the number of hours or days that a customer wants to use? If you are invoicing, do you need a Purchase Order (PO) first? What terms will you extend if not taking payment up front?

These are important, because they need to impact the offer. If you need to charge an extra $10 per hour up front to cover these costs, then you want to know that in advance. Now if you bill out 40% of your time at your projected rate, how much are you going to make?

Note If you charge before doing work, make sure not to spend that money until you actually deliver the services you were paid for.

The Retainer Offer

Retainers are usually similar to hourly or daily offers. A customer is paying you to deliver time to them. But they are committing to a given number of hours or days per month.

- Are overages handled by charging more the next month? Will you charge more for hours that are over the retainer than you would for hours in the retainer? Will you need a specific person at customer organizations to approve overages, or can anyone call in and request services?
- Does retainer time have to be spent each month or will it continue building up until a customer cancels their contract? When does time expire? Remember that it's a bad idea to spend money before you've earned it, even if a customer has given you all the monies!
- Is there a maximum amount of time that a customer can build up (like 2x their annual contract)?
- Who's allowed to engage your services? Keep in mind that you're entering into a long-term contract, so be careful before you let just anyone buy your services.
- Travel costs: Similar to the argument about hourly contracts, will you waive travel requirements for a retainer commitment?
- What's the term of the contract? What happens if a customer leaves prior to the end of the term? I am always willing to give a higher discount to people in order to get more business and longer terms on contracts.

Retainers are a great way to get from a new hourly startup to starting to establish predictable, long-term income that usually gives you enough comfort to go out and hire some people already. But the ups and downs of dealing with hours and overages can get in the way eventually. Some have opted to move to the next step of Managed Services.

The Managed Services Offer

Managed Services is an all-inclusive support contract. You can choose what exactly "support" means when building the offer. But Managed Services is about outcomes, not time–as was true with the previous two types of offers.

Note I'm going to be up front about something before I start writing this section, though: I do not like managed services offerings that try to limit services based on a time-based model. When using MSP services, customers want a controlled, predicable cost. If you can't make this work, then I doubt your offering will sell as well as you think it will.

Since Managed Services can mean different things to different companies, let's look at what it means to you, which shapes how you structure your offer. The following are some questions you need to ask yourself. While you read through these, make sure your answer to each is included in your offer, which is likely to manifest itself in the form of an actual contract that customers sign.

- What is the scope of your services? What devices will you support, and which users can call or engage with your services?
- What is the duration of the offer? If a customer signs a contract for 3 years, will you give them an extra $5 off per device?

- What are the support hours?
- What is the Service Level Agreement (both inside the support hours window and outside that window)? Keep in mind that when it comes to Managed Services contracts, everything is negotiable.
- How are tickets created? Can customers just call in or do they have to use a form to open tickets?
- Are "truck rolls" included in your offer or is it just remote support?
- How much self-help do you expect customers to use? Will you invest in "zero-tier" assets or those used to allow your customers to perform pre-built automations? These should help lower costs, but will customers actually use them?
- Can customers bundle hardware (more on that in Chapter 2) and/or leases with your services?
- How will you monitor devices? If you don't, then how can you claim you're meeting expectations? If you do, how do you react to incidents on devices? But more importantly, can you automate ticket creation from a monitoring tool, and then have a script resolve the ticket, close the ticket, and e-mail the person using the device that the device was fixed? 'Cause if you can, you just saved how much money?!?!
- When pricing, did you factor in the fact that you'll eventually need managers and directors to manage managers, etc?

One of the most critical aspects of Managed Services is tightly managing scope. Alternatively, you don't need to have any services out of scope. I've seen MSPs include bandwidth, software, leases for devices, and upper-tier Chief Technology Officer-style services with their offerings and still do so based on the number of users or devices that a customer has. Typically, this type of service comes in at a minimum of double the standard device charges for other MSP business, but MSPs can take advantage of the scale in purchasing and scaled-down cost in managing a homogenous set of technologies to eke out more profit while providing a superior product to customers.

Keep in mind that if you choose not to include upgrades in your offer, you can still charge separately for them, even if you don't try to include everything ever. To do so, you would usually provide a SoW. The most common way to fund an SoW when you're already in a Managed Services relationship with customers is with a fixed-fee contract, covered previously in this chapter.

The Fixed-Fee Offer

Really, this is called a SoW. If you do the same SoW for multiple companies, you can think of it as a solution instead. Because you're in a close-ended relationship with each customer that lasts the duration of the SoW. You can provide a SoW that estimates hours as well, but when we work with more and more mature customers, they will want a fixed deliverable or set of deliverables.

Every SoW should have the following sections, even if they're short:

- Title Page: I like to put the customer's logo and my own logo on the title page.
- Scope: What are you going to do for the money you're being given?

- Expiration: How long is the offer valid for? You know, because you don't want a customer trying to award a job 5 years later, after you don't do that type of work anymore.
- Customer Responsibilities: What does the customer need to do (other than pay you) in order for you to build the solution the customer is paying you for?
- Deliverables: A clear list of what the customer can expect as an outcome. This is different from the scope in that it's to set expectations, not the work that will be done to meet those expectations.
- A line to sign off: I've seen dozens of acronyms for this, but there should be a line at the bottom that says something along the lines of "this work is done and we both approve that the matter is closed."

Ultimately, the fixed-fee contract can have challenges. If a customer asks your team to do things outside the scope of the agreement, then a conversation needs to happen before that work commences. Otherwise, once you start work that is "out of scope" you might end up owning additional projects without being able to bill for them. You might also estimate the time incorrectly when writing a bid and end up having to eat overages. This is all part of growing your institutional knowledge of how to estimate, and people go through it in every industry that provides a service for a fixed cost. While there are challenges, though, working with customers under a fixed-fee contract is likely one of the easiest of all billing types–as nothing should be open-ended.

Build the Contract

Once you have a solid offer that is easy to talk about on an elevator, you can then put that in writing–and thus make it impossible to talk about in an elevator. Doing so means that you are creating a legally binding contract that customers will sign. Many don't use contracts when they first start out; all use contracts as they mature. You need to protect yourself from levels of liability (see the section on E&O Insurance in Chapter 4).

Here are a few sections that should be addressed in every services contract:

- **Definition of services**: Define the services that are included in the contract. This includes the specific deliverables, as well as any details that shape those deliverables or tasks that need to be included as part of the deliverables.
- **Scope**: The Scope of Work, or SoW, is a list of the tasks that you'll be doing for the customer. The more detailed, the better. I've met some people that like to skimp on this section as they're afraid a customer will shop an SoW around. If that happens then so be it. I'd rather have another vendor be on the hook for a customer who's only shopping around for the cheapest solution anyway.
- **Term of agreement**: Show how long the contract will be enforced. If you're selling an annual managed services contract, then you'll want to call out that the customer will be bound to pay for the services described in the contract for 1 year.

- **Fees and payment schedule**: Define how and when the customers will pay you. Standard terms are usually 30 days from the completion of services for the month. You can negotiate for a better payment schedule, but in my experience, you might not actually get paid on the better schedule if the customer already does check runs monthly or something like that. Note that you don't want to be a pain in the accounting department's butt.
- **Taxes**: Indicate who pays the taxes, where taxes will nexus, and make note of any tax exemptions (e.g., film industry taxes in Los Angeles, tax exemption for non-profits, and other areas where taxes are different for a given customer than for others).
- **Coverage Times**: What times of the day are customers allowed to call the help desk as a part of the managed services contract? If you have hourly customers, when can they contact you for support? Are there added charges for after-hours support? If a customer can end up getting billed more, then reference who is allowed to accept those charges.
- **Exclusions**: Define specifically what is not included in the contract. If you only support a certain set of applications as a part of a managed services agreement, call out which apps you support. If it's a fixed fee contract, specify that unless a task is explicitly listed, it is not included, and then list any requirements that you need in order to complete the project.

- **Service Level Agreements (SLAs)**: An SLA is important for managed services customers. It lays out things like response and resolution times and often includes penalties for not meeting those targets. I've always felt as though an SLA is important for hourly and project-based customers as well, to help set expectations with customers.
- **Problem Management**: You could also call this conflict management. It doesn't really have to mean getting legal, but it could. I prefer to have an escalation tree that goes from an account manager to a manager, director, vice president, principals, etc. I find that telling customers who to call when they have problems is better than customers just having to guess. And when customers call the wrong person, I never like to correct them unless it becomes a problem; they'll figure out who the right people to call are based on who's actually able to solve their problems.
- **Confidentiality**: Sometimes you or the customer can't discuss projects. It's best to define that. And if you have a deliverable that can't be shared, define that as well.
- **Limitation of Liability**: You'll usually want to define a limit of the liability equal to that covered by your insurance.

You can find a sample agreement in *Appendix C: Sample Services Agreement*, also available at `https://community.spiceworks.com/how_to/2401-it-consulting-contract`.

We've all heard the jokes about the accused who decide to represent themselves in court. The same is true with those contract templates you downloaded off the web and then sent to a customer. Have a lawyer review your contract before you send it to customers. And then have the lawyer validate each subsequent update.

When you're small, you can use a service like LegalZoom or your mom's brother's uncle's sister's kid, the paralegal. But remember that when you flippantly e-mail that contract to a dozen potential customers, you are entering into a binding legal agreement. But it's a low-cost way to get legit. Try to keep this mantra of doing things on a budget, whether it's legal, marketing, or PR.

Service Level Agreements

An SLA is a contractual obligation that you'll meet a certain level of service. That service is usually as measured in uptime in an SaaS (or Software as a Service) or server environment. But in a managed service or consultative environment, service levels are typically measured as the amount of time it takes to close tickets based on the severity level of ticket. Some organizations also look at customer satisfaction, such as meeting a certain standard metric such as net promotor score.

What happens when a customer isn't happy with a contract between your two organizations? Chances are you have stern language that if the customer wants to prematurely end a contract they have to pay the balance of the contract. If you don't define service levels, and remedies for missing those service levels, that kind of boolean enforcement approach is easily thrown out in a scenario where things get legal. The other nice thing about an SLA is that you are up front with what a customer should expect from you.

We'll look at various ways of implementing service levels in the next few sections.

Server Uptime

Service levels for servers are usually the easiest to measure and prove. You can use monitoring tools such as MRTG, Cactii, SumoLogic, and other tools (most notably including managed service automation tools). Many an organization is already accustomed to dealing with service levels in terms of how many 9s worth of uptime they'll get.

The formula to calculate uptimes is pretty straightforward; and simply think of it as ((Amount of Time In A Period – Outage Percentage)/Time)*100. Total outage times in an annual contract would then include the following per year:

- 99.999%: 5 minutes and 16 seconds
- 99.99%: 52 minutes and 36 seconds
- 99.9%: 8 hours 45 minutes and 35 seconds
- 99.8%: 17 hours 31 minutes and 12 seconds
- 99.7%: 1 day 2 hours 16 minutes and 48 seconds
- 99.6%: 1 day 11 hours 2 minutes and 24 seconds
- 99.5%: 1 day 19 hours and 48 minutes
- 99.4%: 2 days 4 hours 33 minutes and 35 seconds
- 99.3%: 2 days 13 hours 19 minutes and 12 seconds
- 99.2%: 2 days 22 hours 4 minutes and 47 seconds
- 99.1%: 3 days 6 hours 50 minutes and 24 seconds
- 99.0%: 3 days 15 hours and 36 minutes

I recommend doing these SLAs quarterly or annually if possible. "5 9s" or 99.999% uptime is incredibly difficult to attain. Imagine that a server requires 2 minutes to reboot. That means if you run an update a few times a year, you're in breach of your SLA. But if you are trying to review these monthly, a bad month up front will have you in breach early in the contract; whereas if it's an annual contract, you have plenty of time to allow the law of averages get you back in good shape.

The uptime of a service on a server doesn't mean the uptime of a node. That means you could run a monitoring tool and see that the server is up (it pings, you can telnet into port 80 for web servers, etc.). But you might need to actually try to load a page to realize that the back-end of the site is down. So that should be monitored as well. Additionally, the node being down doesn't necessarily mean the service that end users interact with (e.g., the website) needs to also be down. You can typically fire up a cluster node pretty easily for patching and maintenance windows. If the 5 9s uptime numbers referenced earlier seem daunting, then you will either never-ever-ever be able to patch or you'll have to cluster a system. Thus, the sharp increase in costs that you should factor (and so charge for) for each of those 9s.

Time to Resolution and Average Response Times

A common misconception about SLAs when supporting endpoints is that they are based on the amount of time you have to close each ticket. I would strongly recommend never entering into an agreement based on that type of SLA. Instead, look at the average time before you make first contact with a customer (often referred to as the response time) or an average time you have to complete a ticket (or provide a resolution).

Many a ticketing system has SLA functionality built in. So, you can set up an alerting mechanism based on the amount of time a ticket has been in your queue. If it's just you, then this is pretty straightforward. But as your organization grows (if you choose to grow) then you'll want to act as a point of escalation for tickets that are close to violating their SLAs.

Note Be careful with automation systems. You might hook up a tool like Watchman Monitoring to your ticketing system and automatically create tickets when there's a problem. I very much like this type of a setup. But, let's say a big software update comes along that causes every device to misreport something with a third-party piece of software. Now you might have to go and clear all those tickets or you'll end up with all of your reports being completely off.

Net Promoter Scores

A Net Promoter Score is a number from -100 to 100 that measures how willing a customer is to recommend a company's products or services to other people. Net Promoter scores are used as an indicator to gage a customer's overall satisfaction with a product or service as well as their loyalty to the brand. This has become a pretty standard measure of how you're doing with customers. Many think it's overly simplified, but the gist is that how likely customers are to recommend you indicates how referral business will work out for you.

The math behind the Net Promoter Score is pretty easy. Customers that give you a 6 or below are known as Detractors. Customers who provide a score of 7 or 8 are called Passives, and those who give you a score from 9 or 10 are called Promoters. Subtract the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters to get your Net Promoter Score.

A good NPS is hard to generalize, as it's different between industries. But in general any score above 0 is good, any score above positive 50 is really good, and any above positive 70 is best in class. Anything below negative 50 means you really, really need to be doing something different as you have no loyalty with your customers.

Finally, make sure any survey you do, whether it's NPS or some other flavor of the month, is anonymous. And you can have more questions so you can drill down into more specific information, but for any balanced scorecard or other measurement you're trying to run, make sure to consider the NPS as at least one aspect of the measurement.

Remedies

Without remedies there isn't much of a reason for an SLA, except to make everyone who wants the SLA happy. I don't like being prescriptive on remedies, as every customer is different. But I'll try to steer you in the right direction in this section.

If you don't meet a certain level of service, then you have to pay the customer back or provide a discount on services. When negotiating penalties, try to do so based on future services. This creates a liability for your organization in the form of lost revenue; however, it also provides an asset on furthering a contract that a customer might not have otherwise signed. I would be hard pressed to find myself agreeing to a penalty that results in a refund to a client, unless absolutely required to close a deal.

Let's consider the following example. You have a customer that pays you $10,000 per month. You are supposed to respond to tickets within an hour at a minimum 80% of the time. In a given month you miss that response-time window and only make first contact within the negotiated window 70% of the time. An example of a penalty might be a 10% credit on future services for every 10% you fell short. In the subsequent month, the customer should pay you $9,000.

Keep in mind that service levels and remedies are negotiable. This is probably the last thing that gets negotiated. But high service levels cost more for you to provide and so should impact the sales price. Consider as an example the "Fanatical Support" service provided by Rackspace. You pay a lot more for your hosting, but it's the Rackspace innovation that saved the company from failing when they dipped below 90 days in cash reserves!

Finally, what happens if you don't provide a remedy to missing a service level that's defined in a contract? You are in breach of the contract. When you breach a contract, the outcome can be left to the whim of a judge or mediator. They could choose to simply dissolve the contract or enforce their own remedy. It's better to work everything out proactively.

Does This Pass the Sniff Test?!?!

We all have those friends who are great at casting doubt on everything. I don't know if you have any purple (or is it grey, or blue) friends with ribbons tied to the end of their tail, but think of an Eyore. These types of friends have great uses, and this is one. And while many stopped listening to their parents a long time ago, it's never too late to start listening to them again. See what mom and dad say as well. After all, if you have an offer, you have the first parts of a business plan. And they likely have more business experience than you. And if they don't, they're wiser. Not to harp on this, but seriously, find a parent (or parental figure) to check things out…

Even if you've been in business for a few years, you need close business advisors. They are a key factor to the success of any institution (I think I just called your company an institution if you've made it a few years). Instead of parents, it's time to look at a Board of Directors once you've crossed a dozen employees (assuming you're still planning on growing). Why not just pay a business consultant for services?

The Board of Directors comes with contacts. Contacts are the most important thing that your fledgling company can have in the beginning. It also comes with guidance. Pick others who have found success in parallel industries without picking people who are going to compete with you.

Funding Your New Adventure

Oh wait, if you have an offer then you have the first part of a business plan. The next part will be financials. We'll dig into those deeper in Chapter 4. But what is it going to take to kickstart your company, or if you're planning on adding a new line of business or offer, what is that going to require?

Starting a company on a shoestring, often referred to as bootstrapping, means you don't need external capital, other than what it takes to pay your mortgage or rent and eat some ramen noodles. Instead, you need elbow grease and to do various types of work until you can dedicate your time to your mission. This includes things like:

- Hourly computer repair
- Potentially working on OS platforms you don't want to be doing work on (like Windows, Android, or Linux)
- Subcontracting work brought to you from other companies (which is also a great way to make contacts)
- Going outside the geographical boundaries you might have initially set for your organization to cover (e.g., expanding into other cities)
- Taking on completely different work (e.g., if you want to run a development company, maybe doing a little switching and routing here and there)
- A part-time job, such as working at a computer repair company

Taking capital can help you weather the cash flow challenges you'll initially face (most companies pay on terms rather than up front or biweekly like most employers). In time you'll hopefully end up self-sustaining your company, or you might be able to split roles with a day job and run your company for a time to build up some savings. In fact, if all goes well, you may end up seeking external capital in order to accelerate growth, which we'll cover in the next section.

Growth Requires Capital

As you grow, you will eventually seek external capital. You don't have to start off doing exactly what you want to end up doing. But you will find as you build revenue that allows you to be dedicated to your goal that investors will look for you to actually be dedicating all of your time to that goal. After all, they'll be investing in that, and not your ability to do work on the side. I would recommend classifying the various types of work you do and the revenue tied to them from the very beginning.

As you grow, you might actually expand into other areas of your industry. Treat each new line of business as though it was its own company. This means that when you enter expenses, they should be categorized to the new business unit (or tagged if you don't have multiple charts of accounts), and as you take income, that should be similarly classified. This allows you to evaluate each line of business independently.

Note You don't have to take external funding ever! But doing so can help you grow smartly, without incurring too much risk.

One aspect of taking external capital that you should be aware of from the beginning is that if you're growing a managed services business and you're successful, you're going to run into an interesting problem: success could easily bankrupt you. We address dealing with money in far more detail in Chapter 4. It's critical to make sure that you're not just making money but accounting for the money properly, for even in the face of massive success, all your hard work can be rewarded with running out of cash.

While we'll cover investors later in the book, just keep in mind that if you have a good business plan and hit the point where you can't sustainably grow any further without investment, provided that it's a good investment, trust that you'll be able to come up with funds. People love investing in companies that are doing well! Just make sure you have plenty of time to source those dollars by watching trend lines. And when it comes to sourcing external capital, start with banks–unless you have venture capital needs beyond what a bank can get you (e.g., the contacts and discipline to run a company in a more rigid fashion).

Conclusion

Deciding to start a business is a great start. Moving on to the next stage of narrowing your focus is critical. And getting into the specifics of what you'll do and for how much is even more critical!

Further Reading

- The Art of the Start, by Guy Kawasaki https://www.amazon.com/Art-Start-2-0-Time-Tested-Battle-Hardened/dp/1591847842
- Escape Velocity, Geoffrey A. Moore https://www.amazon.com/Escape-Velocity-Free-Companys-Future/dp/0062040898
- Inside the Tornado, Geoffrey A. Moore https://www.amazon.com/Inside-Tornado-Strategies-Developing-Hypergrowth/dp/0060745819

- Startup CEO, Matt Blumberg https://www.amazon.com/Startup-CEO-Scaling-Business-Website/dp/1118548361
- The Lean Startup by Eric Ries, https://www.amazon.com/Lean-Startup-Innovation-Successful-Businesses-ebook/dp/B005PR422K
- Brave Bootstrapping: How to Grow a Global Tech Business Without VCs, Sarah J Perry, https://www.amazon.com/Brave-Bootstrapping-Global-Business-Without-ebook/dp/B07BD4TL6Z
- Designing Breakthrough Products, by Roberto Verganti https://www.amazon.com/Designing-Breakthrough-Products-Harvard-Business/dp/B005UF57RQ
- Blue Ocean Strategy, by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne https://www.amazon.com/Blue-Ocean-Strategy-Expanded-Uncontested/dp/1625274491
- Zero to One: Notes on Start Ups, or How to Build the Future, Peter Thiel https://www.amazon.com/Zero-One-Notes-Startups-Future/dp/0804139296
- The Startup Owner's Manual, Blank: https://www.amazon.com/Startup-Owners-Manual-Step-Step-ebook/dp/B009UMTMKS
- Emergence, The connected lives of ants, brains, cities, and software, Steven Johnson, https://www.amazon.com/Emergence-Connected-Brains-Cities-Software/dp/0684868768

CHAPTER 2

Beyond Services

Once upon a time, an IT consulting shop needed to keep hardware on hand, such as sticks of memory. Engineers provided more value to customers and extended the amount of time they were working with customers by selling and installing that memory to make the computer faster. While we don't install memory on most computers (especially Apple computers), this is a great example of doing something that makes the life of those who hire you better, while making a little additional profit. Consider instead bolting on additional cloud services, like backup. And focus on things that will make supporting systems better or make your life easier in the event of a problem.

Also be aware of competition. I once had a customer fire my company because we sold them a printer that they then found online for $30 cheaper elsewhere. The part that sucks here is that I'm pretty sure we lost money selling the printer in the first place. You are never going to sell most of what you sell cheaper than anyone else. But you might be able to work out a deal with a vendor who can then give you more customer referrals than all of your possible hardware sales would otherwise be worth.

Having said that, if you deliver goods and services together as a package, then a customer can receive both with one Purchase Order (PO) in the same visit, and ultimately have a better experience. In this chapter, we'll look at various ways to leverage third-party products that help expand your presence with a customer, bring customers into a standardized (and, therefore, more easily supportable environment), and make happier customers, which means more referral business (the best kind in my opinion).

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_2

Note If you are doing consulting part-time, I strongly recommend against selling or reselling anything to customers.

Reseller Accounts

Have you heard of Ingram Micro or TechData? These are distributors, or master distributors. If you're going to sell a variety of hardware and software, you likely need an account with one or both of these. You might also leverage a company like Synnex, Avnet, Arrow, Jabil, or CDW instead. Chances are, as you buy hardware and software to sell to customers, you'll end up finding a lot of different relationships. These will extend beyond distributors and directly to other vendors.

Note Taking on reseller accounts often comes with a credit check of the business. If you're working on obtaining funding from a bank, be careful not to overextend your credit or have too many credit checks.

According to the type of company you want to have, consider the following ecosystem to provide to customers:

- **Cloud Solutions**: We'll cover this at length in this chapter.
- **Hardware and software**: We'll cover selling hardware and software later in this chapter as well.
- **Bandwidth**: If you're going to sell bandwidth, have a telco and a cable option, and play them against each other for the best pricing for each customer. You'll have a local provider for each, so contact them directly. When you do, don't forget to ask them if they can refer business to you.

- **Infrastructure services**: Think of this as monitoring, backup, networking (wireless, switching, etc.), and phones. Yup, I said phones.

In addition to building out a full portfolio of service offerings that satisfy all of your customer needs, also think about other factors. These include:

- **What kind of terms can you get with these companies?** Consider how long you have to pay them in order to figure out what kind of terms to work out with your customers.
- **What is the purchasing process like?** You want an easy and streamlined purchasing process, preferably with a web portal and a licensing/support number. If you need to register a deal in order to get added discounts, then you want that process online as well.
- **How do returns work?** A bad piece of gear can be a huge waste of time to get returned. Find out how vendors handle returns and how much of your time will be involved in each return, before you start selling.
- **How much money are you going to make?** I saved this for last, because as you might have picked up on in this book, I consider the financial benefits to most of this stuff as ancillary. The important thing is customer happiness, etc. But don't sell if you lose money, or don't make enough to make it viable. Instead, in those cases make relationships with organizations who can give you a good referral benefit.

Ultimately, selling stuff can suck if you don't do it right. But according to the type of business you have, you could end up with a very nice additional revenue stream from selling. Just be careful, and make sure you understand what you're doing, and the tax/accounting implications of selling stuff before you start.

Selling Mobility

I used to get smoothies from a little one-person shop, right by my gym. The store is run by a fitness instructor. She doesn't know a ton about technology. But she's really, really smart. And she's been growing her business. She asks me a lot of questions about her devices when I stop in for smoothies, and sometimes they put the concepts I deal with at work into a whole new context. They help me understand how a small business owner thinks about technology. Her questions have changed how I consult with small businesses.

She doesn't have a computer. She doesn't want a computer. She also doesn't use her cell phone for anything. She uses iPads. And sometimes, when an employee has been messing around on an iPad, she sees a little something she might not want to see in the browser history. But, it's a smaller company, and she's happy to keep costs down in the beginning by leaving everything as open as possible and not restricting what people can do. And this is how tens of thousands of new businesses are started every year (keep in mind that part-time Apple consultants aren't the only ones making it work in the gig-based economy).

Sometimes I like to give her helpful tips (consider this free consulting). These are often things like "get an accountant" or "here's an app for annotating PDFs." As she grows, she wants to stay on the iPad forever. This is similar to other businesses that have grown, like Smoothie King, which

Apple famously uses in its marketing documentation as a model, with over 500 franchises using Apple devices to speed up check-out. Or my local coffee shop, which now has 7 locations. But I've also given her tips on how to make a better Apple deployment using third-party tools.

Not all businesses, and definitely not all job functions in even the smallest business, can replace all of their computers with tablets. But many want to, because tablets are cheaper, easier to manage, require less training, and come with much higher customer satisfaction than desktops and most laptop computers. Because of the limited real estate on the screens of most mobile devices, the apps that run on devices are often used for a specific job function. In many environments, stringing together a workflow can require multiple apps, as we discuss throughout this book. But even if you load a number of apps on a device, you will often spend less than many of the popular traditional software packages on the market. Still, at some point, many jobs simply require more complicated hardware and need laptops.

It seems like every year, there are entire industries switching large numbers of desktop and laptop computers to mobile devices. This represents a huge potential source of new customers to the savvy new Apple consultant. Apple started the trend of mobile devices in retail, but since then we've seen proliferation in field services, medicine, and even evangelical environments, allowing for a never-ending source of customers. And sometimes it just takes the mastery of one app or making one friend at an Apple Retail Store or Windows-focused consultancy to make all the difference to your business.

As mobile devices gain so much traction in these environments, interesting questions around security and scalability have started to crop up. Devices get lost and need to be wiped. As you acquire a lot of devices, you want them set up similarly and you want that device configuration to be automated. The vendors have listened to what customers need. For example, Apple provides the following technologies about which you need to be knowledgeable when talking to customers:

- **Mobile Device Management (MDM)**: Solutions such as Jamf Now (www.jamf.com), that allow administrators to manage devices remotely: managing apps, content, settings, and even actions on devices, such as remotely wiping and locking devices that fall outside the organization's control (by getting lost and/or stolen). If you're doing a lot with mobile deployments, you'll want a relationship with Jamf, AirWatch, SimpleMDM, or one of the other MDM/management platforms out there.
- **The Volume Purchase Program (VPP)**: Allows users to purchase apps in bulk and then deploy purchased apps to devices automatically. For more on the Volume Purchase Program, see deployment.apple.com.
- **The Device Enrollment Program (DEP)**: Forces devices into an MDM solution, automatically joining to the solution when a device is activated. For more on DEP, work with your account teams at Apple or the reseller of your Apple devices.

Note For a more comprehensive list of Apple terms and technologies, see Appendix A.

Many apps are only available for a single platform. For example, many of the apps on the App Store for an iPad will not have an equivalent on Android devices, and vice versa. Once upon a time, vendor lock-in was considered a bad thing. But these days, it can help to keep costs down. A consultant or business owner can learn much more about managing devices if they only have to learn one platform. As the business grows, there may be a desire to move to another platform, but by then, the business should be to the point where hiring outside organizations to implement a new solution will be a major expense.

Many of the apps that organizations use communicate with a website to store data. Little, if any, data is stored on mobile devices. Therefore, backup is less of a concern than ever, with Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions also supplying centralized management of app data without the need for physical servers in a startup's office.

As custom and App Store apps cover more and more of the tasks that need to be performed in organizations, increasingly more small businesses are choosing to exclusively leverage mobile devices to complete work previously done with computers. And they should, provided that doing so can be done securely. This drives down the costs to start a business. The place that makes my smoothies started on a shoestring budget, compared to what it cost to start my first company and get to the point where we could accept credit cards. Hopefully, less risk and upfront costs will allow progressively more startups to succeed and will cause increased innovation. Helping people to succeed should be our first and foremost goal at all times.

Apps, cloud services, hardware, and other tools can help your new business help your customers. In the next section, we'll focus on selling and working with cloud services.

Should You Sell Cloud Services?

Is the cloud right for your customers? The answer is probably. Is every cloud solution right for every business? Duh, of course it isn't—or we wouldn't be asking the question (I learned that in some class at some point). But cloud computing is all the rage in business, because buying servers and paying for the support and backup of servers is often more expensive in the long run than paying a cloud provider for all that and just using the utility they provide.

Helping a customer find the right solution given their unique business need and personality is important. There are a lot of different ways to look at cloud-based tools. This might mean deploying something like one of the following (or a hybrid between them):

- CrashPlan lets you backup files to a cloud—and maybe to an onsite server, or a server at your office.
- Dropbox, Google Drive, Office 365, or Box.com allow you to actually move files to a cloud environment.
- Move physical or on-premises servers to a cloud environment so customers get an improved and redundant pipe to the Internet that would not be cost-effective to have at their office.
- Implement various tools such as Salesforce.com, which acts as SaaS and therefore reduces the need for servers, whether physical, virtual, or in the cloud.

The above is by no means a comprehensive list of tools that you might want to get good at or partner with. For a more comprehensive list, see the Techie Bits section of Chapter 5. But what are some ways to choose the right solutions? Let's look at a few questions and some appropriate responses.

- How large are your files? Large image or media files can be too big to work on from a remote location. Anyone that knows designers or video editors knows they're going to be miserable sitting around for half an hour waiting for each of their projects to open each morning. Find out how long it takes to open each type of file a given customer uses before migrating these files to the cloud. You might end up being better off syncing them to an on-premises server or finding an alternative workflow.

- Do you have compliance issues? Many environments have legal, medical, governmental, banking, or other compliance requirements. Each cloud environment will have its own set of standards that it meets. From Safe Harbor (in the EU) to SOC2 to HIPAA, to simply checking a box that a customer has on a security audit document, there are lots of compliance issues that come up. Verify that any solution you find or sell meets with each customer's requirement before you start working with them to integrate it.
- Does your business logic have specific requirements to address? Business requirements often include Customer Relationship Management (CRM), accounting software, Professional Services Automation (PSA), tools for various types of businesses, and other options, all interconnected. Make sure tools do what a customer needs, including small tasks. Often this is best handled by observing them work and making notes about how they interact with legacy tools.
- Does a given tool need to interact with other tools? In an app-based world, very few tools do everything that a customer needs. Instead of spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on a single tool that sucks at doing everything it takes on, customers often prefer tools that are simple to use and quick to learn. But make sure they can connect to other tools when needed, in order to keep from tedious double-entry.

- Do you need to easily move your data to and from the cloud solution? Many cloud solutions only provide the ability to add data to the environment but make it challenging to export data. Before you stick a customer with a solution that might not be great for them (for whatever reason), make sure they can get their data out once it's in a given tool.
- What's the cost? Read the fine print. If a customer needs to programmatically interact with data, they might have to pay for a premium account type. There are usually grids that lay out features and options for things like API access or "pro features." When costing a solution for customers, make sure you understand those levels and costs or they might get stuck paying triple what you quote them and hating you (you'd likely hate yourself too).
- Are there people from outside your company that need to access data? If you have external parties that need to connect, you might have to create (and pay for) additional accounts for each. You don't want any surprises. Work with customers to determine if external parties will connect to cloud tools, figure out if their access can be limited, and determine whether the customer can provide the proper levels of access to vendors, customers, and contractors.

- Do you have the appropriate network for this? If customers rely on the Internet to access files, databases, contacts, and other mission-critical assets, you're going to want to make sure that connection to the outside world simply can't go down, or employees will be sitting idle when (not if) it happens. Redundant, fast connections to the Internet are absolutely necessary and pale in comparison to the cost of humans sitting around not able to work.

Ultimately, a cloud solution probably will actually be right for most every customer. It might require a tad bit of research to get to the correct solution that fits within each unique customer's requirements and budget. But if you have an initiative to move on-premises solutions to the cloud, or move to a given SaaS-based solution, doing so is entirely possible given the expansive landscape of cloud providers. Now that you've been armed with a few questions to ask as you go through service-by-service on such an initiative, enjoy the process—and enjoy hopefully taking this chance to work with customers to reinvent how they go about doing all the wonderful things they do. If successful and you truly capture and improve their workflows, you will have a customer for life!

If You Do Sell Cloud

There are a number of vendors that offer services from which your customers can benefit. Most of these also offer a reseller or referral account type. Google Apps, Microsoft, Box, and Dropbox are file-sharing services that allow you to resell or affiliate accounts. And those can mean a steady extra income and ancillary benefits that make it easier to support customers. You might not even want to capture the added revenue stream but may do so in order to charge your customers less for services while also getting access to exclusive options.

Here are some things to evaluate when looking at new cloud services (or at least new to your portfolio).

- Can the customer contact the provider directly?
- Do you, as an affiliate, get elevated levels of support?
- Do affiliates get additional training?
- Can you manage multiple customers from a single dashboard?
- Can customers create a delegated administrative account for you without incurring additional cost?
- What percentage of what they pay the vendor is your "commission?"
- Can the customer pay for a service annually, if needed?
- If the customer stops working with you, how easy is it for them to transition their service to another vendor?

These are all important questions and you're likely to have many more. The priority of each response will be based on the types of customers and the types of data or services. I recommend creating a spreadsheet that allows you to pick vendors you want to work with, so you aren't blind-sided. Be deliberate in your selection. To assist, I've also put together a number of technologies that customers will need in Appendix E.

Splitting your time working on a lot of different tools can be frustrating. While it might seem enticing to work with as many vendors as possible in order to provide as much coverage as possible to customers, keep in mind that centralizing around a good, better, and best approach, or even a single vendor, allows you to focus. You can get really good at building solutions around that vendor, potentially getting leads from vendors, and having fewer tools to try to access in the event a customer has issues.

The fact that you're selling a solution can change your approach. For example, if you're selling Dropbox then you might not even bring up Box.com or Office 365 in conversations. Just make sure that the experience to each customer is great and that they're not sacrificing a streamlined workflow so you can make an extra buck.

Evaluating the Security of Cloud-Based Solutions

The perspective is everything must go to the cloud, and now! And sometimes finding a tool is about workflow. And the workflow should make sense and be awesome.

But there's an argument that you shouldn't even keep a lot of data, unless it's kept confidential and therefore properly secured. The liability of keeping information about other people and what they do is just too great to outweigh what you might otherwise use the data for.

Security matters. Workflow matters. And with the number of services out there that you can use for any given task, if any aren't secure enough then there are probably 10 others you could use that are. So why might you choose to use a given service?

- Compliance: One of the best ways to verify that your data is secure with an online service is to check how various aspects of solutions are governed. Many cloud solutions list the controls by which they are governed, often using industry standardized controls such as SOC 2 (`https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service_Organization_Controls#SOC_2_overview`), FedRAMP (`https://www.fedramp.gov`), etc. Digging into which parts of these an organization maintains compliance with will give you a pretty good idea of how seriously a potential cloud service you might use takes your privacy, and to whom they allow access to various types of your data stored in their cloud.

- Authentication: Some services give you something more than a password to get logged into the service. For example, they can send you a text that contains a code when you log in. This is known as multi-factor authentication, which uses something you know (your password) and something you have (your phone) to allow access to online services. Rather than forcing end users to re-enter a password in multiple services, a number of vendors have a feature known as Single Sign-On. If you're a small business (let's say less than 10 people), you can actually use most of these tools for free until you grow into a paid tier.
- Encryption at Rest: How is your data stored at the cloud service? Any cloud service you choose should keep all of your data encrypted at all times. You can ask them questions like, "Are your databases stored on an encrypted file system?", "What data from my company do you store in your database that is not encrypted?", "How exactly do you store files that I upload to your database?", and "Who specifically has the keys to decrypt that data, and how are those stored?" The thing to keep in mind with most forms of compliance is that the company can have some pretty insecure practices, provided they are transparent to customers about how insecure their practices are. So ask questions about areas you are concerned about.

- Certificates: When we ask about those keys that can be used to decrypt data, there are also keys that protect your data when in transit. Make sure that all traffic is protected by secure protocols (if you don't know, you can ask each vendor) using strong encryption certificates, and that their private keys for those certificates are kept securely and are not about to expire.
- Privacy Policy: Organizations with compliance should typically have a privacy policy. When you read the policy, it shouldn't read: How do you respond to a request for my data?
- Geography: Cultural norms are different in various parts of the world. Most in the United States aren't concerned about this. However, Europeans don't typically want their data stored on servers outside of the EU (especially those in the U.S.). This is due to systems administrators and customers alike being well educated about laws within the EU (and countries outside the EU) and the desire to force what is perceived in different regions as an acceptable level of privacy and security.
- Service Level Agreement (SLA): If you can't get to your data, what good is it? An SLA is a promise to meet certain service levels. A really good SLA includes a five nines uptime, or 99.999% of the time your stuff will be available. Keep in mind that 99% of the time means your data could be offline for days (3.65 of them in fact) and the vendor still meet their uptime requirements. Also look for what penalties are incurred if the vendor does not meet the SLA; if there are no penalties, then why actually have an SLA?

- Backup: Backup is often the last aspect of security many think of. However, if the data is lost, then you might as well have kept it on paper instead. Backup requires a lot of space and takes time and often very expensive equipment. In fact, not having to back up our own servers is often one of the main reasons many want to move systems from our offices to the cloud. So make sure that you understand how long your cloud provider retains your data, how long it takes to restore that data in the event of a failure, and what process is required for that to happen. Also, see if you can have your own backup of their data.
- A Security Scan: You can run your own scan, for free, and see if you get blocked from accessing the product or if you uncover your own vulnerabilities that the vendor didn't yet know about. A couple of caveats here, don't scan really large vendors (like Dropbox or Google)—this is mostly pertinent if your vendor is giving you a dedicated server in their Cloud infrastructure.

In today's fast-paced business climate, new services seem to come online within large and small companies all the time. This might be a quick list-making app, or it might be a huge new tool that runs the entire organization. You don't need to wear a tin foil hat, but you should take a few basic security precautions that keep you from being negligent. I recommend taking a list like this and turning it into an actual checklist and auditing every app you have to verify that each one meets the requirements you come up with. That's not wearing a tin foil hat; it's just good business.

Referrals vs. Selling

There's an old adage in the IT industry that "no one ever got fired for buying Cisco" or, even earlier, "no one ever got fired for buying IBM." Be careful of selling anything you haven't heard of. There is security in selling a big name like Salesforce and there is risk in recommending a smaller company or specialty service that might go out of business. Never let commission sway your judgment. Start with what the right solutions are for your customers and then work backward into a relationship that helps you manage multiple customers and provide added value to customers by using the same services repeatedly (and honing skills with that service).

This is easiest when there is a clear market leader in each vertical market you work in. Especially when you have a critical mass of customers in those markets to become an expert in the workflows for those markets. These are known as market segments. If you are working with a customer that needs one of these leaders and the solution can't be learned quickly, then consider taking the chance to find another company you can trade referrals for if a customer needs a solution they work with. This will keep you from looking bad and potentially be even more lucrative for you (doing what's best for customers is always more lucrative in the long run).

Providing Hardware and Software

Cloud solutions don't do everything. Customers might still need various software that can only be ordered through a vendor or through a reseller. Additionally, customers need computers and mobile devices. If you're in the Apple consulting world, those are going to come from Apple. Rather than try to sell Apple hardware, especially in the beginning, build a good relationship with a local Apple Retail Store to help customers get their hardware and make sure that when they do that devices are DEP-compatible.

Apple also sells other hardware that works well with the Apple platform. Everything from USB drives to printers to cases, Apple will charge a little more for the products, but you and your customers know that Apple blesses the hardware. So what might you sell to customers? You can sell all those same things! Or you can let the business representatives at the Apple Store take care of that.

Here are some reasons you might choose to sell hardware:

- You can get customers a cheaper price.
- You need to make sure they get the right equipment for large projects.
- You can get better support if you're selling the hardware.
- You can get equipment faster.
- You can get more professional or more highly customized hardware.

But selling hardware can come with some negative aspects as well. These include:

- If anything goes wrong, the customer is angry at you.
- The customer might find a better price and get annoyed at you.
- You have to float the money for the product for whatever period your terms are for a given customer.
- Ordering and sourcing hardware can be time-consuming, especially if you have to register each deal with a vendor in order to get the best price.

Ultimately, I recommend experimenting with selling things to customers if you're going to move to doing consulting full-time. Even if you don't make this a huge part of your business, learning what is involved in reselling and how channels work will enable you to manage other vendors better on behalf of your customers.

Providing Infrastructure Services

Remember when we mentioned phone services earlier in this chapter? If you have customers that actually need help at their offices, here are some things to consider in order to round out your services offering:

- Monitoring Services: A monitoring service can alert you when there's a problem on a computer or network appliance. A solution like Watchman Monitoring will monitor Macs (and common third-party tools loaded on Macs) and let you know when various ailments are either happening or about to happen. For example, if a hard drive is failing, you'll get an alert, hopefully allowing you to fix the problem before a user at a customer site notices a problem. Network appliances can be monitored either through a tool for the type of appliances your customer has or through a centralized tool (of which there are many). This is priceless, both in terms of happy customers and safe customers, and pays for itself, whether you eat the cost or pass it on to customers.
- Internet Services: Earlier, we mentioned selling Internet services. If you do, consider selling two lines to each customer: one that is a primary with a high SLA and a second that is residential-class, but often much faster. Many routers will support sharing the load to two lines. Having two means the customer is up if one fails but also means that the customer gets faster speeds for not a lot of extra money.

- Wireless Access Points (WAPs): Customers need wireless in their offices. The Internet service that you provide them might come with a wireless bundled in, but that often doesn't meet security requirements or unified management. Tools like Meraki allow a reseller to manage multiple customers using a single portal. Other tools like SonicWall or Cisco provide much more scalability while also providing a ton of enterprise-class features.
- Switches: Switches allow you to connect all those Ethernet devices that some people apparently still have. When selling these, consider which can segment networks with Virtual LANs (or VLANs), which work well with Apple devices, and which provide the amount of throughput that customers need.
- Routers: For smaller customers, you really want converged networking, which is to say multi-purpose appliances. For example, a five-person company might be able to use a LinkSys as a WAP, a switch, and a router. As customers get larger, they may outgrow older equipment. I like keeping it around in case of a failure, but it's worth mentioning that with any networking equipment, keep tabs on when a customer might be outgrowing what you can do for them cost-effectively—or where you might want your company to get better at a given technology, and so offer some services at a discount while you do so.

- Peripherals: Yup, some people still print. Some need cameras, webcams, multi-function devices, etc. This is where you need to start drawing the line for what you sell and what you don't. Drives, mass storage devices (RAIDs and Drobo), and other peripherals are easy to justify, but camera filters or iPad cases start to get a little off-mission.
- Phone Services: The last thing I'll mention is phones. Many small businesses have their employees using their personal phones (or company-provided iPhones) as their work phones. At a minimum, most customers with a brick and mortar office need at least one landline. As they grow, they may choose to use a Voice Over IP (VoIP) solution, or phone system. Try to keep this app-driven, in the cloud, and without actual hardware as much as possible if you're going to try to sell it. If those start to become challenging, then consider a referral partner who deals with big, traditional phone systems and/or video conferencing.
- Cabling: All consultants need a good cabling referral partner. But few should run cable themselves.

Ultimately, you don't need to be everything to all customers. If a customer needs something you don't understand how to do, you have an option: find a referral partner or provide it to the customer. If it's too far out of your skillset, this is usually an easy decision. But if it's kinda' within your skillset, then make sure to be cognizant of how far it might take you from your true focus. But above all keep an eye on the bank account, as you'll typically need to veer a little bit off course in order to find lasting success.

Further Reading

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CHAPTER 3

Hiring and Human Resources

You've built a pricing model and business plan. You've made relationships with vendors and other entities that allow you to grow. And now it's time to start building a team. Hiring is one of the most important things you can do as a company. You entrust your customers with your employees. And the hardest is the first.

In this chapter, we'll explore planning how your staff will look, hiring your first employee, some basic management tips, and also some of the logistical stuff that goes into actually being a legitimate (a.k.a. legal) employer.

Decisions, Decisions

Before you hire, you have some important questions to ask yourself that will guide the types of business you take on, how you grow your company, and how difficult it will be to run your company as you grow. Before we get into how to hire throughout this chapter, let's first look at some of the questions you need to ask before you start.

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_3

- Will you be hiring contractors or staff? I have to admit, I've always been partial to having people on staff, and treating them right. This means getting your ducks in order with 401k, health insurance, and staff development. But if your consultancy is a gig rather than a career, you might choose to leverage contractors. Additionally, if there are specialties (e.g., Cisco, Jamf, Exchange, etc.) you're trying to keep in-house, you might choose to bring on contractors to deliver various services. Be deliberate about what you want to be doing, what you want to include in your offer, and who will be delivering each type of service when needed.
- What traits are you looking for in an employee? Think about your mission, vision, and values. Then write a persona of the type of person you want to have around. Do you value automation engineering or customer service? How do you want someone to represent you when they're in the field?
- What will employees be doing? Are you going to sell, do technical work, focus on administration? The skillset you look for might be different based on the personality of the proprietor of a small business. And the type of employee might be different as well. If you need someone to run the company while you're out doing all the cool stuff, you need a much different employee than if you are hiring someone to sell services or deliver services. Again, be deliberate about who does what, and be willing to make a concession when you find those special people who might bring something special to the table that you hadn't previously considered.

- Do you want referrals coming back to you? For most this is a firm "yes," but according to how you want to grow the business it might be an, "It's according to what kind of business it is," or a, "If my subcontractor does good work, they can have the referral business." Don't expect brand loyalty and referrals to stay within the business unless you incentivize your employees based on that (e.g., a finder's bonus, etc.).
- How do you want employees to grow professionally? Don't expect people to learn on their own. As you grow, the depth with a platform required, the ability to learn new technologies, and other factors will determine how you grow, or if not, how you're able to retain team members.
- How much can you pay your employees? An easy rule of thumb I've always used is 2.5x. This means that I want to be billing any given billable employee for two and a half times what I'm paying them. This includes the overhead (e.g., HR and training costs), commissions to any salespeople that are hired, and the salary of employees, but also back-office costs. For non-billable employees, the salary expectations will vary. Visit sites like Glassdoor.com for initial comparisons, or as you grow, ask any outsourced HR for salary numbers.

Note Chances are if you've got a full-time job that isn't running your consultancy, then if you hire, you should be hiring contractors and not full-time staff employees.

What if you can't find the right person? If you can't subcontract or staff a task or line of business, then you might need to outsource some of your work. This can also be an easy way to deliver various services you don't consider part of your core business model. Outsourcing can be tricky. Make sure you are on the same page with outsourcers about how to treat customers, referrals, how they represent you, and billing. And be aware of the legal ramifications to having other businesses (even businesses of one person) as your customers by having solid non-disclosure agreements in place with subcontractors, staff, and outsourcers.

Finally, before you move on to posting a job on the Internet, keep in mind that the posting will potentially be read by customers as well.

Before You Hire

Go to trinet.com, adp.com, insperity.com, and gusto.com and pick one. If you haven't looked at Gusto, look at them. Then look at their investors. They are disrupting HR outsourcing left and right, and they are inexpensive and capable of scaling with your business. I've used Tri-Net, ADP, and Insperity, and they are similar in business model, quality, and cost.

If you don't have an HR consultant, you need one by the time you have seven employees. You need a system that gives you the ability to pay employees, track time and benefits, provide a 401k, and potentially provide profit sharing or stock. That HR consultant can be provided by one of those companies, or you can get one that will help you manage those systems and your team. Look for a consultant who wants to build repeatable systems rather than doing everything manually and/or for you. That's often not a person that works for one of the companies whose services you are using.

Once you get to around 20 employees, if you're going to continue scaling up, you need to hire a full-time HR employee, in a leadership position. This person is meant to help you build excellent onboarding systems, revamp all the stuff that your consultant helped you with, and set the company on a trajectory for rapid growth. In some states, you will be required by law to hire this employee as your 51st hire, but chances are that without a concerted effort to provide repeatable onboarding and HR systems that you won't get there except by luck if you haven't hired this individual far earlier than employee #51.

Where to Post Your Jobs

Now you know what kind of person you want and it's time to find them. Where you post a job description can define you, and the type of staff you'll bring on. There are several good places that you can post job descriptions for free. In the Apple world, this might mean a specialized vendor site, or you might choose to post jobs to more general places if you don't have luck there. Consider these:

- Slack: The MacAdmins.org Slack channel has specific channels for #jobs-board and #jobs-chat that you can use to find potential employees and post jobs. You can also click on someone you're interested in and get a feel for what they're like by reading previous posts. In my opinion, this is the top place to post your technical jobs when recruiting for Apple skills.
- Jamf Nation: I should start this section by saying that I work at Jamf. But even before I came to Jamf, I used to read postings on Jamf Nation, and I hired many people based on how they had contributed there.

- Message Boards: Jamf Nation is one message board, but there are others. Reading articles that people contribute to sites like afp548.com or personal blogs has led to hiring a number of people. This is one of the more legitimate ways to find employees. However, don't post unless you're supposed to or you might be flagged as an evil spammer.
- LinkedIn: LinkedIn allows you to search for people that meet certain criteria. But you will need a Premium account in order to open communication channels with them unless you know their e-mail address. This is one of my favorite ways to recruit, and a Premium account is pretty inexpensive annually. However, people might not be checking their messages, actively looking for a job, or might just think you're a spammer.
- Indeed, CareerBuilder, and Monster: A quick search for macOS netted dozens of job postings in my area and a lot of resumes. The drawback is that you're going to be competing with large companies, which can make recruiting pretty pricey. However, this is the traditional way to hire these days, and at least you know when you talk to job candidates that they are actually looking for work.
- Craigslist (and other classifieds): I saved this one for last, as I've struggled here. You will potentially get a lot of responses, many of which won't be even close to what you're looking for. But I've found many (many) people through these outlets, which made the cost and time worth it.

You also might simply troll lists such as macenterprise or the Apple Consultants Network e-mail list. Or you might use word of mouth to find potential employees among your personal network. Word of mouth is by far the best way to find employees and customers, but over time you'll find that these networks dry up (unless you are a truly amazing employer).

Writing Job Postings

I like to start building job postings based on job descriptions that I'll use to communicate what someone will actually do on the job. The job description is like a contract with staff that lays out the responsibilities and tasks for the job. This acts as a good guide for reviews, salary increases, etc. As companies grow, job descriptions are also integral to staff leveling (e.g., the difference between Technician 1 and Technician 2), performance improvement plans (which are great tools for everyone from new employees to staff that are running into challenges on the job), one-on-ones that help guide employees along their career path, etc.

You can then take that bulleted list of tasks and paste them into your job posting. I don't like too many bullets in my posts, though, so you might find yourself converting them into prose. You need some bullets for sure, but try to focus on text that describes what someone would be doing, and include any potential growth in the position. Don't bury the lede when referencing why your company is a great place to work. Make sure that you point out any perks and the fact that consulting is a great way to cut your teeth in the Apple device management market overall.

Once you've written what someone will be doing and why they want to work there, review what you're writing and think about what competitors can ascertain as to how you do business. Avoid talking salary in job descriptions. This gives competitors insight into how much they might pay your staff to steal them away. Also be mindful that talking about specific technologies may narrow the set of people who can apply to a job. Some are harder to pick up than others. So Kaseya or Jamf experience would be great to have if you are using those, but common cloud solutions or easier technologies such as Meraki should likely be avoided. Instead use terms like "a solid foundation in routing technologies" or "a comprehensive understanding in monitoring technologies."

Reviewing Resumes

Once you've posted a job, it's time to start reviewing resumes. This is one of my favorite parts of the hiring process. At one point, I would get 100 resumes for every posting. Many can be easily overlooked. For example, if you're looking for entry-level desktop Mac support then you're likely not going to be getting a VISA for someone in another country (you'd be surprised how many of those I've gotten), or if you're hiring an experienced macOS and iOS support engineer, you're likely not going to want to interview someone who's only experience is grounds maintenance at a theme park. But I would often have five or six resumes like that.

Over the years, I learned a few tips that kept me from spending countless hours interviewing candidates. Let's examine at some good things to look for in a resume.

- Avoid infected files. If you get a file with a virus, for our industry, that's pretty much a show-stopper.
- Look for technologies they saw once (or maybe you didn't see but maybe saw, or maybe discussed and didn't see). Usually a bulleted list of disparate technologies can be a challenge to comb through. Prepare technical questions for an interview by marking up a resume or writing on printed resumes. Many will give a big list in order to get through search criteria in automated resume review systems.

- Avoid overthinking arcane skills and technology. Yes, someone may have spent 10 years as a COBOL programmer, but the last 2 years was with Swift. Focus on the skills you need and how recently they were applied.
- Good grammar in a resume probably means good grammar in e-mails to customers. If a candidate can't spell-check a resume, they probably won't spell-check their e-mails or pay attention when the grammar gets flagged. I write books (obviously), so I'm a bit funny about spelling errors, especially when they're underlined with lame squiggly marks in a document sent to me, but this is an attention to detail you want to see in resumes.
- Look for succinct descriptions. A 30-page play-by-play of every time a candidate called a support desk to get a problem fixed is a huge red flag. The ability to communicate succinctly (whether in the written form, on a call, or in person) is one of the more underrated job skills to look for when hiring, no matter what the blathering in this book indicates. Keep in mind that you're going to get a lot of e-mail from this person. And if they're all four pages, you're going to waste a lot of time.
- Look for certifications over post-secondary education. While Apple has been slowly killing off their training programs (you can still get certified for sure), there are a number of certifications out there from vendors like Jamf, FileWave, VMware, and Google. Certainly, there's value in a college education, but certifications typically indicate that a prospective employee has more specific skills that might meet your needs.

- Look at the e-mail address. Yes, I am intrigued by the fact that Google would actually give some e-mail addresses I've seen, but the lack of good judgment from a candidate in not creating a sanitized account could be concerning.
- Read the cover sheet. You can often learn more about a candidate from the cover sheet than you can from the resume.

You'll have your own criteria, and they'll be better than mine for your use. And each job is different (e.g., you aren't going to look for skills with python when hiring an accountant). But this should get you started. Be patient, there are a lot of great people looking for work!

I like to go through all resumes in batches. During growth spurts, the rare moments of solitude that were required to review resumes often came only after I got home from work. But I always made sure to keep the ball moving on hiring, as potential employees who are any good will get hired quickly, so you need to act in order to hire. When you need employees, you are usually busy, so it's critical to keep momentum in the hiring process.

Interviewing

The interview is where you go beyond a resume and review each candidate to decide if they fit with the culture you want your company to have and to bring the right level of skill to the position. But the interview is more: the interview sets the tone for your relationship with a candidate throughout their tenure at your company. In this section, we'll look at two aspects of the interview process. We'll start with phone screening job candidates, and then move on to the in-person interview.

Phone Screening

The phone screen is a short call with a candidate to make sure that you want them to come in for an interview. Send an e-mail or reach out through the medium that the resume came in as a first attempt to set up a phone screening. You can also call someone and just ask if they have a few minutes to discuss the position, or if they would prefer to set up a time.

The phone screen should be light. You aren't going to show a candidate a screenshot of a router or a snippet of swift code and ask them to tell you what's wrong. But you do want to maybe confirm a few details from the resume, validate any necessary technical skills, and ascertain the phone demeanor of a candidate. I usually ask a series of questions that include the following during a phone screening (according to the position):

- Reiterate the top three or four bullets from the job description
- Any questions to find the personality traits you're looking for
- Look for a willingness to learn
- Look for core competencies that might not be on each individual job description
- This is the right time to ask what someone is making (unless it's forbidden in your state) and what they are looking to make
- Why are you interested in the company?

Note I often cap phone screenings at 30 minutes, but you might go further.

When you're done with a phone screening, you usually know whether or not you want to bring a candidate in for an interview. If you want to interview them, go ahead and set up the interview at the end of the screening, so as to remove as much latency in the hiring process as possible. There aren't any good rules around scheduling (I've done same-day or in a month), just don't apply pressure for a specific time. Make sure the candidate has plenty of time to get to your office when they're done with day jobs, etc.

In-Person Interviewing

We all have different things we look for in potential employees. But here are a few things I have always looked at when interviewing.

- Appearance: You can't judge a book by its cover. But you can tell if it's going to be late to work every day. When I interview, I notice everything from fingernails to attire to hair. I can get over that first impression for the right employee, but I shouldn't have to.
- Timeliness: Interviewees should be about 5 minutes early. If they're late showing up to your office for an interview, they're likely to be late meeting with customers. I can understand there was a lot of traffic or something like that, but leaving with plenty of time even if there is traffic is important. I immediately give a pass to anyone that calls. Because things happen.
- A copy of a resume: I don't need it, but I like the attention to detail when someone shows up with a copy of their resume. Makes me think I won't find an empty can of soda sitting on top of a server at some point.

- The ability to stay on point: You ask questions and you want an employee to stay professional and succinct. A few minutes of pleasantries up front are fine, but if a candidate can keep things on track in an interview then I assume they can stay on point with a customer and I'm not going to get a call that they're too chatty.
- Nervousness: I very much forgive any nervous chatter. I assume that means they want the job. If a candidate can manage a smile, all the better!
- Lying: At this point, I assume people lie on resumes. But if I figure out someone is lying during an interview, I'll wrap things up and say goodbye and that's that.
- The ability to say they don't know the answer: When hiring for a technical role, ask technical questions. It is fine not to know something, but rather than feed you a line of crap, a good candidate will tell you they don't know the answer to a question but how they might go about finding the answer.
- Turning off the phone: Or at least the ringer. Airplane mode is probably best. If a phone rings during an interview then I get a tad bit irritable. If someone answers a phone during an interview, then I expect a significant other to be in labor.
- Don't talk about religion or politics: This could be included under number 8, but it's not. Remember that we live in a country split almost down the middle on these topics.
- Ask why a candidate wants the job: This always elicits good responses.

- Ask what differentiates a candidate from others.
- Don't discuss sexual orientation, age, race, or anything else that could remotely be considered discriminatory.
- See if the candidate asks questions. If they've done their research and have relevant questions to ask, then they're interested in the role.

Ultimately, you know when you've found the right employees. Certainly, there are hard decisions, but if you do everything right, the hard decisions are between potentially amazing employees!

Making The Offer

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, check with sites like Glassdoor, or work with an outsourced HR provider to determine the amount that is appropriate when hiring. A good rule of thumb for getting started, though, is within 20 percent above or below the average median income for a given job title in the geography you're hiring in. Anything below 50 percent could end up with inadequately prepared employees performing tasks for customers. Anything over 50 percent could end up with bored employees.

Offers should be in writing. Keep in mind that they are contractually binding. When you make an offer, you can be sued for damages in the event that you rescind the offer before someone starts. So be sure that you have found the right people before you offer them a position. The offer should include an overall package, defining what in the financial considerations is guaranteed and what, if any, income is variable (e.g., commissions). I would recommend only ever changing the compensation plan of an employee at the beginning of a fiscal year, and those changes should be communicated well in advance.

Offers can have contingencies, such as passing a background check. All consultancies should probably do background checks. This doesn't mean things like drug testing. It just means that before you send employees to schools, homes, or businesses, make sure you know who you're sending. This has an added benefit of checking off a box for certain customers that require contractors coming onsite to be background-checked. Once you've hired someone, it's very challenging to enforce a background check requirement, so make sure to include that in an offer letter. Also, you may choose to overlook things that come through in background checks; that is your prerogative.

Finally, contracts are important, and I like to make offers contingent upon the acceptance of things like non-disclosure agreements, so you might elect to send these in a hiring packet.

Onboarding New Employees

Every time you hire someone new, you want to get better at doing so. If you go through a growth spurt, this is a must. Therefore, document the process the first time. This way you start keeping track of what you need to do each time, like a checklist. I like to lay out the plan in a way that includes milestones and dates (but I obviously like to write) and put those in a Learning Management System (LMS) like the Software as a Service (SaaS) product Litmos or a list app/site, like Trello or Wunderlist.

Note Keep in mind that it's awesome when one of these integrates with your ticket management system to make it as easy as possible for your teams to keep track of their time).

A typical onboarding plan might include the following:

- **Week 1**
    - Sign contracts, such as non-compete agreements, acceptable use policies, etc. (unless this is handled prior to the first day).
    - Review the mission, vision, and values of the organization. We don't really talk about those in this book, as they're too often given more pages than they're worth, but while you might not have codified these, you should have a conversation about them with new employees so the company DNA continues on as you intend.
    - Write a bio for the company website. This lets your customers know a little bit about this new, untested person that will be showing up at their location. Include a photo when possible.
    - Fill out all required HR paperwork, such as W2 forms, health insurance sign-up, etc. I really don't like it when employees are expected to do this on their own time, as it sets a bad precedent.
    - Perform a number of ride-alongs with more senior engineers (or you, if it's your first hire).
    - Take service desk calls. I firmly believe that everyone in a consulting firm should spend some time on the service desk. It connects staff to the widest possible variety of customers and communicates a subtle message about the division of labor at the organization.

- **30 Days**
    - Define when you want someone taking jobs on their own. This is important, as people understand how they're tracking toward your expectations in regards to customer engagement.
    - Get expense reports in, and on time. Review any issues with expenses, mileage, etc.
    - Close tickets quickly and with good details. Review good ticket entries and those that might be lacking.
    - Potentially achieve various technical certifications.
- **60 Days**
- I like to include quantifiable and qualifiable feedback on employees here, such as:
    - A percentage toward a potential billing quota. Again, make sure that staff understand how they are tracking toward your expectations.
    - A customer satisfaction score. This helps employees understand how customers perceive them. If you don't yet have a means to track customer satisfaction, then I highly recommend you explore one of the bevvy of survey sites out there on the Internet, with a focus on any that might integrate with your incident tracking system.
    - Generating internal assets, such as knowledge bases, blog posts, customer advisories, etc.
    - Mastery of internal systems, such as ticketing, knowledge bases, etc.

After that 60-day milestone, you should be able to sit down with employees and work out a long-term, more customized plan whereby they're able to find their specialty in the industry and work toward more specific goals for what they want out of the job, their career, and how that lines up with life in general.

Each time you hire, iterate that checklist so you can get a little better at getting each new employee up to speed. Some things to look for include the following:

- How are employees tracking toward the time you assumed it would take to achieve various milestones?
- What did each employee find difficult to understand?
- What processes did you need to teach that you hadn't previously documented?
- What can you document rather than talk through, so there's no possible misunderstanding about processes and procedures?

Being disciplined about the onboarding process will help immensely when you have to bring on multiple people at the same time during future growth spurts. Eventually I'd built too much doctrine in a program I once created called Year One (yes, blatantly stolen from Batman) and had to re-evaluate the entire program. That's part of creation and destruction.

Wikis for Onboarding

Many of us use wiki-style solutions, or portals for building out onboarding documentation. Tools like Confluence, Sharepoint sites, Google Docs strung together, or other alternatives increasingly help organizations communicate standard operating procedures, complex thoughts, notes from meetings, and any other information that the organization needs to store.

As sites grow, they get messy. Style, consistency, flow, structure, and guidelines become a bit more important, as do things like grammar. There are a ton of things you can do to make your pages better, without adding fireworks and animations. Let's look at some of the big ones I've found over the years:

- Don't bury the lede. Add an introduction to any page that's over 500 words.
- Use different header levels. I like to start most documents with an outline. That outline becomes headers, and sometimes the introduction of a given paragraph. Doing so also allows you to build those headers before you start typing into your document.
- Use a Table of Contents. Not every page is going to need a Table of Contents. But if you can't see all of the headers on a page, I would recommend making browsing through a given page easier.
- Spelling and grammar counts. Yes, I know, you got your point across to most with that brilliantly built page. But many were lost for a bit trying to overlook that blatant "their vs. there" or the 5-line sentence that had 16 comas in it, or was that commas… Internal documents at your organizations might not need to be perfect, but it helps make you look more intelligent, while not losing any of your readers along the way. Also, use a consistent actor and tense throughout a document; otherwise, most of us get confused after a while.

- Add section breaks. You know those cute little horizontal lines in your text. They help a reader to understand when jumping between two sections. Alternatively, consider different page structures. But I've rarely seen cases where two-columned pages (or more) shouldn't just be separate pages.
- Bold things, but not too many things. I like to use bold for emphasis. After all, that's what it's there for. I don't use all-capped items EVER, unless the article contains an acronym (then I define the acronym and put it in parenthesis afterward the first time it's used) or the item is capped in a screenshot that I'm quoting. When listing acronyms, there's no need for periods between letters.
- When documenting software, quote items on a screen. For example, if the screen says "Click here to start" and you have a sentence that contains the string "click on Click here to start before you," then no matter what else is in that sentence a reader is completely lost. Additionally, if documenting a command line interface, use a separate font to identify inputs and outputs from the text of your article.
- Use bullets and numbered lists. If you're adding a step-by-step to a document, use a numbered list (this makes it easier to refer to steps by a number in the future). If you're working on a paragraph and have more supporting thoughts to an argument than three, then consider moving those into bulleted lists. If you are building a list in a sentence with more than three or four items, also consider moving those items into bullets.

- Annotate images. Oh, and use images. But if you use images, annotating them will make it easier for a reader to find what you're referring to in the text.
- Watch comments. Be prepared for comments the second you click save on a new page, or article. Many will watch feeds of all the documents in a given section of your company intranet or site that contain a given tag. Then the comments will come in. Rather than force people to hunt through comments or assume the whole company bothers to read those comments, update the content of an article when appropriate (e.g., every time someone asks a question). I like to use an FAQ section for doing so.
- Summarize long and complex processes. Any process that requires more than 10 clicks on a screen or more than 10 steps should also include a summary beforehand. The longer the process, the less information you'll want to put into each step. The more information (a.k.a. text) you put into each step, the more you should also consider adding images, mind maps, or flow charts to help readers not get lost.
- Use smaller words. Remember, not everyone will easily follow when you leverage the vast cornucopia of your lexicon to woo them into believing you're a smarty pants. Use small words when available and simple sentence structures when possible.

- Keep it short. A wiki article probably shouldn't be more than 1,500 words, unless it is defining a complex process. And then each sentence should be short enough to not require ending punctuation (think tweets with good grammar!). Remember, you can link to articles and pages from other articles. Use that to your advantage any time possible.
- Tag pages. A number of internal documentation systems allow for watching pages with a certain tag, or inserting a feed of pages with a given tag into other pages. Tagging pages also makes them easier to find when you wonder if you wrote up a topic or process already.
- Save every now and then. Yes, most systems will automatically save every few minutes (or even every time you click). But not all. Especially on brand new pages where you haven't actually clicked that Save button yet.

No one ever wants to delete anything these days! But routinely review and re-organize your organization's or team's site. Priorities shift. Tasks get completed. Responsibilities come and go. Routinely revisiting your content structure helps you stay in front of data sprawl and stale content!

One-on-Ones

Every manager should routinely meet with team members. There is a variety of names for these meetings, such as check-ins and one-on-ones. This allows you to take the temperature of the employee, see if they're enjoying their job, and check-in on what you can do to help them be all they can be.

Everyone has a different take on what should go on in these meetings. I like to run them as follows:

- Ask how things are going. Make sure to be personable, even if you have an agenda. And make sure you understand a little something about their personal lives. But don't be contrived; be authentic.
- Communicate any changes in the organization (staffing, alignment, new customers, etc.).
- Review any areas of exceptional achievement or areas that need addressing (it's best to book-end problem areas with achievements).
- Review steps toward an Individualized Learning Plan (described in the next section of this chapter).

It's often easy to overlook one-on-ones when employees are really busy with customers in the field. Don't. Keep the routine check-ins, even if you have to move them around. It can be tempting to do so, but don't put them after-hours, either. You've made the commitment to hire someone and guide their career, and while you can certainly grab coffee or drinks after hours, show a continued commitment by doing business during business hours.

Training

Building a good training program can be a challenge for busy and growing companies (you know, the type that are hiring and need to create training assets). Creating new materials is time-consuming and can often only be done by certain team members. Keeping training materials up-to-date can take up an insane amount of time as your library grows, especially given an annual release cycle from Apple. Leverage existing materials wherever possible to keep your upkeep at a minimum.

Individualized Learning Plans

I like to codify how staff will be spending training time and budget. This is often done in the form of an Individualized Learning Plan. These plans lay out priorities for training, as well as tactics to achieve those priorities. Some items I like to include in learning plans include the following:

- Three areas you'd like to improve on. This is the most important part of the plan. What does each employee want to learn? The rest of the plan tracks how you get there. The reason I usually prefer three items rather than one is that this provides flexibility and a little variety so when people get tired of one area (or better, finish an area), they can move on to another. It's preferable when the areas are connected in some way.
- Quarterly goals toward mastery in each area. I prefer these to be SMART (or Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely).
    - **S**pecific might mean that someone writes a script that performs a specific task.
    - **M**easurable might mean that you expect a blog post or an external certification on each item.
    - **A**ttainable means that the employee can actually finish it (and that you're not saying "go write a replacement for macOS Server and get your CCIE by Friday").
    - **T**imely means that the goal can be completed in the time allocated.

- Are you keeping a journal of professional development activities? Professional means that this isn't about hobbies but about work. To me, the key word here is development. What is each person doing to make themselves better? Hopefully these activities align with company goals, but they don't have to.
- What position do you see yourself in next? The best employees are honest and say yours. But not everyone really wants that when they understand what the field of jobs are in front of them. Many want to just go deeper and deeper into the technology. Some want to follow the big paychecks in sales. Others will honestly tell you that they want to start their own companies (but most will lie and say they want to "just get better"—especially the ones with MBAs). The point of this question is to track aligning the training and your own goals for people with what the individual team members want.
- How do you feel you're tracking toward the next position? This is a great early warning sign that people are tracking ahead of, or behind, their own schedule. Keep in mind those shift as external motivators shift as well.
- Peer-coach feedback: Once you get big enough, you can use a peer-coaching system to allow team members to help one another. This allows you to spend more time reviewing feedback while also allowing you to see how team members are dealing with limited forms of leadership.

- Active research projects: Projects that are part of SMART goals from earlier in the document. The best engineers often have the most fun in this section.
- What progress has been made since the last meeting? I like to think of this as version control. “What’s changed” is much easier to read than every single line—especially when you have 20 to 30 to sift through.

Over time, the plans grow. This is bad. The more doctrine you introduce, the less people will take away from their one-on-one and other meetings that are meant to be about them. Keep training plans short, and only have enough detail to be able to explain how targets were hit or missed. Keep in mind that if targets are missed, then some small area of the plan you didn’t care about is invariably to be blamed!

Layering Training Assets

Don’t re-invent the wheel every time you need to build something. In fact, search for and purchase assets when you possibly can. Your specific training can layer on top of these third-party materials. So, for example, rather than build your own course on macOS, purchase one of the Apple Training Series books from Peachpit Press for your company library, and then build a document quizzing on specific parts of that if needed.

As you grow and need to document more stuff in a variety of different places, there are some things you can do to make things easier to track and train on. Some of these are just how managing your internal systems and documenting standards allows you to spend more time focusing on actual product training.

- Standardized methodology for adding systems into your asset management and tracking systems: When you can't find all of the assets you need in a single pane of glass, it's important to make sure there's a standardized way to find the things you need.
- Your naming conventions: How do you name computers (e.g., is it clientcode-sitecode-devicecode)? How do you prefer to name servers, firewalls, switches, printers, etc.? Do naming conventions change for each customer?
- Which tools hold which types of information? Many start with a spreadsheet to track that password for the Apple DEP account or that root password to login to a firewall at a customer site, and many start with a spreadsheet or simple database. As needs mature and compliance becomes an issue, look to tools such as IT Glue.
- How do you want your teams interacting with customers? Don't forget to document the areas you value in customer communication. This might come across as soft and mushy and without a lot of value to nerdy engineer types. But it's worth the scorn to be crystal clear about the level of customer service you expect.

- How do you provide as much value to customers as possible? Will staying with a customer an extra 15 minutes make them way more successful? Sometimes. Do you have to charge for that time? Not always. Should you write down some ways that your teams can delight your customers? Heck ya'!

These questions are pretty easy to document and shouldn't change much with new releases of software. The focus on third-party training assets then layers on top of this. We'll explore some of these later in the chapter, but a few third-party assets to look at include the following:

- Official Apple training materials
- WWDC videos and videos from conferences
- Lynda.com
- O'Reilly's Safari Books Online
- Various web sites from popular bloggers
- Github pages from people creating middleware that could help your organization (and that you might just be able to contribute back to)
- YouTube videos about Apple technologies such as macOS Server, mass management, etc.
- Print books in a library at your office
- Brain dumps for third-party certifications

Through the rest of this section, we'll unpack some of these for positioning in your overall training portfolio.

Conferences

Once upon a time there was MacWorld. It was big, it was bold, and Apple was there. This was a time when there was a magazine by the same name that physically showed up at my house. But times have changed. While some delegates attend multiple conferences, many of the attendees have splintered into smaller conferences, which are the result of the Apple ecosystem microeconomy turning into a bit of a macroeconomy. If you will be sending employees to any conferences, here's a quick and dirty guide to each.

- ACES Conference: ACES is a conference for Apple Consultants. Usually held in May and moving from New Orleans to Phoenix, and wherever conference organizers want it to go next, ACES is a good introduction for many on running a Mac consultancy, represented by many of the larger and more well-established Apple consultancies in the U.S. and Canada.
- AirWatch Connect (now called VMworld): The AirWatch Connect conference is actually held in multiple cities, and if your organization heavily leverages AirWatch to manage devices, it's a great conference.
- Filewave Conference: Traditionally held in Zurich and Indianapolis, the Filewave Conference focuses on FileWave products and provides systems administrators with access to developers, deployment information, etc.

- JAMF Software's JNUC (JAMF Nation User Conference) is a conference primarily geared toward the Apple Administrator who uses Jamf Pro to manage Apple devices. There are some sessions on general administrative topics, such as what a plist is and general shell scripting. If you spend a lot of your day in Jamf Pro, then this is a great, free conference held in Minneapolis, Minnesota every year in the fall (in the interest of full disclosure, I manage the panels that select speakers for various tracks).
- JAMF's Roadshow: The JAMF Roadshows are typically free events where Jamf goes around the country hosting day-long mini-conferences for customers and systems administrators.
- Mac Admin and Developer Conference UK, from Amsys: MacADUK is a conference for Apple administrators and developers, with a lot of highly technical sessions and good content, held annually in London.
- MacDevOps YVR: MacDevOps is a conference with sessions ranging from collaboration to Puppet-as-a-Service (the other PaaS) to Docker, Munk, Python, Casper, git, VMware, Chef, Jamf, etc., this one is definitely for the scripty among the Mac community who are heavy into systems automation and, as the name implies, DevOps…
- MacSysAdmin: All things Apple, in Sweden. MacSysAdmin always has a lot of really good content, with a more global perspective than most conferences in the U.S.

- MacTech: Ed Marczak does a great job curating this conference, which really has a focus on systems administration at scale. It's a good look at how environments grow (if you're growing) or to get some really good tips and tricks for your grown up environment.
- Mobile World Congress: I usually find the people at a show like this to be less technical, more business analytical, more interested in the why and results than the how. It's a good group, but different from those who spend all of their time integrating systems.
- Penn State MacAdmins Conference: Penn State Mac Admins emerged during a time of uncertainty with WWDC and systems administration topics. If you're part of the infamous MacEnterprise list that Penn State runs, and you find the conversations there relevant to your job, then this is likely a conference you'll want to attend. It's priced well, too!
- University of Calgary MacDeployment: This is marketed as more of a workshop (and on hold for a year), but it's worth noting as it had a lot of really good content and provided a good centralized place for Canadian Mac Admins to pick up new tips and tricks!
- Usenix: I think this is a great show for the Unixy among us. Many of the topics covered are highly relevant to the Mac admin.

- WWDC: Everyone knows about Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference. But more and more, if you use Munki or a third-party tool to manage your systems and aren't writing code, you can watch the sessions online and save your continuing development/training funds to check out one of the other conferences.
- X World: Part of the AUC in Australia, X World had topics ranging from Munki to Casper. Initially a very education-centric conference, there were Apple administrators from around Australia gathered to share their knowledge and glean information from others on managing large numbers of Apple systems. And the organizers and delegates are pretty awesome people to hang out with. Great networking. I highly recommend that if you are a Mac admin in Australia that you support the AUC by becoming a member!

There are a boatload of development conferences. But this book is more focused on systems administration (while many of the tenants are easily used in both). If you want more, I also recommend grabbing an app like Eventbrite or Meetup and searching your local area. There are user groups, meetups, and more almost every night of the week in larger cities. So there's never a shortage of options for professional development.

Additionally, checking out the MacAdmins Podcast (in full disclosure, I'm a host) will net you a number of interesting topics on the Apple platform and also give you an updated list of conferences and upcoming conferences.

Meetups

Meetups are local meetings held throughout the country. I maintain a page of meetups at krypted.com, as there are always upcoming and new meetings around the world. You can also get information about each on the Community Calendar section of the MacAdmins Podcast.

As of today, see the following for meetings around the world:

- Austin Apple Admins: `http://www.austinappleadmins.org`
- Colorado iOS Admins: `http://coiosadmin.tumblr.com`
- Denver Mac Admins: `http://www.meetup.com/Denver-Mac-Admins/`
- London Apple Admins: `http://www.londonappleadmins.org.uk`
- MacAdmin Monthly: `http://www.macadminmonthly.org`
- [MacSysAdmin] Bier: `http://macsysadmin.ch`
- MacBrained: `http://macbrained.org`
- MacDMV (The DC Metro area Mac Admins group): `http://www.macdmv.com`
- Perth Apple Admins: `http://www.meetup.com/Perth-Apple-Admins/`
- Philly Mac Admins: `http://www.meetup.com/Greater-Philadelphia-Area-Mac-Admins/`
- Northeast Regional Apple Admins (Providence): `https://www.meetup.com/provideneappleadmins/`
- Apple Admins of Seattle and the Great Northwest: `http://www.meetup.com/Seattle-Apple-Admins/`

- Sydney Mac Admins Meetup: http://www.meetup.com/Sydney-Mac-Admins/
- Twin Cities Mac Admins Group: Twin Cities Mac Admins

Sites For MacAdmins

There are a number of web sites that provide content and support for admins. Based on your type of customers, you might find that you want all of your staff reading a certain type of site daily. For example, if you support a lot of graphic designers, then you might want your team reading the Adobe blogs every morning to be in front of new options and maybe errors.

- Adobe blogs: http://blogs.adobe.com/oobe/
- afp548: http://www.afp548.com
- Amsys Blog: http://www.amsys.co.uk/blog/
- EnterpriseiOS: http://www.enterpriseios.com
- MacAdmins on Slack: http://macadmins.org
- MacSysAdmin: http://macsysadmin.se
- MacTech: http://www.mactech.com
- Xsanity: http://www.xsanity.com

The most notable of these is the MacAdmins on Slack. Here, there are channels for everything from MSP infrastructure to Xsan to job boards. Having said that, it can be a complete productivity destroyer (and sometimes being able to ask hundreds of peers for help can be a bit of a crutch, so be careful.)

People to Follow

There are also a number of talented administrators of Apple devices who post articles, code, recipes, facts, gists, and complaints. While this list would be exhaustive to attempt to build fully, here are some of the most well-known.

- Allister Banks: `http://www.aru-b.com` or on github at `https://github.com/arubdesu`
- Adam Codega: `http://www.adamcodega.com`
- Andrina Kelly: On github at `https://github.com/andrina`
- Ben Clayton: Libimobiledevice at `https://github.com/benvium/libimobiledevice-macosx`
- Ben Toms: `https://macmule.com` or on github at `https://github.com/macmule`
- Bill Smith: `http://talkingmoose.net`
- Bryson Tyrrell: `https://bryson3gps.wordpress.com` or on github at `https://github.com/brysontyrrell`
- Calum Hunter: `https://themacwrangler.wordpress.com`
- Charles Edge (yup, that would be me): `http://www.krypted.com` or on github at `https://github.com/krypted`
- Clayton Burlison: `https://clburlison.com` or on github at `https://github.com/clburlison`
- Ed Marczak: `http://www.radiotope.com` or on github at `https://github.com/marczak`

- Eldon Ahrold: On github at https://github.com/eahrold
- Emmanuel Lauhan: http://www.nausicamedia.fr/blog/
- Emily: http://www.modtitan.com/search/label/mac%20admin?m=1
- Eric Holtam: https://osxbytes.wordpress.com
- Erik Gomez: https://onemoreadmin.wordpress.com or on github at https://github.com/erikng
- Gary Larizza: http://garylarizza.com or on github at https://github.com/glarizza
- Graham Gilbert: http://grahamgilbert.com or on github at https://github.com/grahamgilbert
- Graham Pugh: https://grpugh.wordpress.com or on github at https://github.com/grahampugh
- Greg Neagle: http://managingosx.wordpress.com or on github at https://github.com/gregneagle
- Hannes Juutilainen: https://github.com/hjuutilainen
- James Barclay: http://everythingisgray.com or on github at https://github.com/futureimperfect
- Jeremy Reichman: On github at https://github.com/Jaharmi
- John Kitzmiller: http://www.johnkitzmiller.com/blog/
- Joseph Chilcote: On github at https://github.com/chilcote

- Justin Rummel: https://www.justinrummel.com
- Karl Kuehn: http://wranglingmacs.blogspot.com or on github at https://github.com/larkost
- Marcus Jaensson Wahlstam: http://deploywiz.blogspot.com
- Michael Lopp: http://randsinrepose.com
- Michael Lynn: On github at https://github.com/pudquick
- Michael Page:On github at https://github.com/Error-freeIT
- Mike Solin: http://mikesolin.com
- Miles Leacy: http://themacadmin.com
- Nick McSpadden: https://osxdominion.wordpress.com or on github at https://github.com/nmcspadden
- Patrick Fergus: https://foigus.wordpress.com or on github at https://github.com/foigus
- Pepijn Bruienne: http://enterprisemac.bruienne.com or on github at https://github.com/bruienne
- Per Olofsson: https://github.com/MagerValp
- Randy Saeks: http://www.rsaeks.com
- Rich Trouton: https://derflounder.wordpress.com or on github at https://github.com/rtrouton
- Richard Purves: http://www.richard-purves.com or on github at https://github.com/franton
- Tim Sutton: http://macops.ca or on github at https://github.com/timsutton

- Sal: `https://configautomation.com`
- Sam Marshall: `http://pewpewthespells.com` or on github at `https://github.com/samdmarshall`
- Sean Kaiser: `http://seankaiser.com` or on github at `https://github.com/seankaiser`
- Shea Craig: On github at `https://github.com/sheagcraig`
- Stéphane Sudre: `http://s.sudre.free.fr`
- Steve Yuroff: `https://swytechnotes.wordpress.com` or on github at `https://github.com/swy`
- Vanessa White: `http://www.zamzummim.com`
- Victor Vranchan: `http://groob.io` or on github at `https://github.com/groob`
- Yoann Gini: On github at `https://github.com/ygini`
- Zach Smith: On github at `https://github.com/acidprime`

There is a practically infinite amount of information available to your teams as you prepare to provide them with the training necessary to do their jobs and make you competitive in the future. While you can teach teams, you cannot force them to learn nor be inspired to continue learning when they're not immediately in front of you having content shoved down their throat. In this next section, we'll take a stab at inspiration.

Inspiring Employees to Learn

There's a conversation I've had many times. It starts off with people telling me they want more training. As education is one of the things I value most, my response, when possible, is an emphatic yes. But then something funny almost invariably happens: nothing. Giving staff approval to do training doesn't usually mean that they'll do it unless you follow up routinely and sometimes micromanage the process.

The alternative is often to allow team members to become increasingly dissatisfied with their jobs. Why, and how do we fix it? There's not a single answer. There are a few different reasons that should have their own reactions to keep people happy and motivated. Let's explore some.

- The employee doesn't know what kind of training they want. This is usually just the first step. But the answer can be as simple as saying, "Give me three or four ideas of what you want to do this year," or creating an individual learning plan (or an official program around learning plans). Here, the most important aspect is what goal are you training toward. For someone new in the position they are currently in, you usually want to provide training that makes them well-rounded at the current position and therefore much more confident in their position. For those who are more tenured in a position, explore what the next position they want is and look to close any gaps in skills to get there.
- The employee's goals don't match team goals. We frequently lay out a training program without considering what people actually want out of a program. Ask people where they want their training, don't just assume where they want to be. Use surveys and manager feedback from one-on-ones to figure out exactly what your teams want out of a program instead of being prescriptive without first doing due diligence.

- The employee knows that they want to learn but doesn't have time to get there. This is perhaps my favorite issue to solve. You can earmark a specific amount of time per week for training. The hard part is that you have to firewall that time off so that employees can't be pulled off of their training regimen in order to do other tasks the organization needs, or if they are, you need to guard that time.
- There's no budget for training. Not all training costs $5,000 per week, per employee. You can usually get custom courses (even with vendor-led certification courses) that can cost a fraction of that if you have enough people. There's also podcasts, books, the Internet, and pretty much an unlimited amount of training that can be had freely. One technique I've used is to cover all certification books and tests and allow employees to study on their own time. If you have official curriculum, make sure people feel comfortable signing up and taking it. This is often material created by an organization and so comes at no cost to your teams and helps your team stay abreast of the organizational position/philosophy on given topics.
- Employees don't learn using the techniques we are using to teach. Some people can't learn in a classroom, others can't do self-paced, others still need exercise- or goal-oriented training (such as writing a program that does a specific task). Make sure you're on top of how people are responding and that you're flexible to allow people to learn in the ways they need to learn, not just in the ways you think they want to learn.

Finally, a reason people don't do training is that they honestly don't think they need any training. Maybe they have a new family or a sick parent or just want to ride their bike every night after work. Not everyone is going to drive to the top of the organization or to the next job. Many want the security of settling into a position they're in. As leaders, it's our job to keep our employees from having skills that are out of date, though, so we need to stay on top of getting employees all of the resources they need to be the best at their position, this year, next year, and so on.

Sometimes, 100 percent is enough though. We can overemphasize the need to drive people into their next position. Push, just don't push too hard. It takes more of a manager's time to get to the bottom of how to help each person on the team, but it's totally worth it.

Learning to Lead

I've worked with and trained a lot of new managers in my career, and there are a number of traps I see them fall into. This stuff takes time, and provided a new manager is actively trying to learn to manage and lead teams, anyone can excel at doing so. In that spirit, here are some things to focus on, or have your new managers focus on.

- Not micromanaging: This is likely the most classic mistake managers make. Employees need to be provided with guidance and then allowed to own their successes and failures. Free up valuable cycles by handing out the responsibility of processes rather than tasks. In a word: delegate.
- Spend less time as an individual contributor: New managers are often promoted because they were exceptional individual contributors. However, when moving into management it's important to spend time amplifying the abilities of others instead.

- Recognize the contributions of others: New managers that came up as individual contributors often struggle with judging the performance of others based on their own past performance. If a team performed at the same level, they likely would have been promoted as well. Recognize contributions publicly, even if you think it's "just part of the job."
- Promote ideas: Given the opportunity, your team is likely to come up with far better ideas than yours. It's important for new managers to work with employees closely and let their ideas flourish. When employees feel they contribute, their engagement will go up!
- Positively react to criticism: New managers are… new. No one expects anyone to be perfect. However, we are all expected to react to criticism in a proactive and thoughtful manner. I like to send an e-mail thanking people for contributing to my career by helping make me better. Even when they go a little negative, kill 'em with kindness!
- Gain equitably: If your team or department is getting more budget, exposure, or headcount at the expense of other teams, you'll have a long-term challenge ahead of you politically. Always make sure to share gains and to do so in a way that benefits all teams. Conflicts arise but can be defused by sharing improvements.

- Don't manipulate others: You can manipulate almost anyone into doing things for you, especially when recently promoted into the ranks of management. But it's better if you can win hearts and minds. Doing so is more legitimate and doesn't leave the negative feelings that people can have when they feel they've been manipulated into doing something they didn't believe in.
- Don't manage laterally or up: New managers often come up from the ranks of individual contributors and often have blinders on, seeing what they would like to address in their old team, at the front lines. However, it's equally as important to "manage up" and thereby prove that the organization is receiving a solid return on investment (ROI). This also helps you confirm that your priorities haven't shifted when done at regular intervals.
- Skimp on the feedback: Your goal is to make your team as good as they can possibly be. This means working with them to get better at what they do, determining who can replace you someday, and grooming your replacement. Anyone can extol virtues; the hard part is using that feedback to give your team some polish.
- Take the time for the team: You know those one-on-one meetings you have to cancel sometimes? Stop canceling them. If you have a conflict, push one of the two. Show your team that they are important to you. And if they push your meetings, push back. Your #1 priority is to develop the careers of your team and they need to know that.

- Define goals: When you meet with your team regularly (you do that, right?), you should be reviewing how they're tracking toward their goals. When/if staff hit goals, set a new stretch goal on top. Don't put too much pressure out there where it isn't necessary, but if you aren't pushing just a little then your team might start feeling stagnate.
- Learn what the team does: Sometimes, a new manager doesn't actually know how to do what their team does. In these cases, spend the time to learn. You don't have to know how to debug each library of code someone writes or be an expert at machining a part out of sheet metal, but I find it helps to understand what people do in order to empathize with them.

These tips aren't all about pure management. Many revolve around leading a team as well. New managers can struggle with these things, and experienced managers can always be doing better. In short, pay attention to and inspire your staff and don't forget to manage up when needed!

Soft Skills

Soft skills are the skills that include communication, social graces, language, habits, managing people, leadership, how you react to situations, and all the other non-position-centric parts of a job that characterize relationships with other people. I've heard soft skills referred to as how well you work with others, how you conduct yourself, and how you extrovert (yup, I'm using that as a verb—but I could have said "fit in").

I often hear people say that they hire based on soft skills, because you can train job-specific skills but not soft skills. I've been hiring and guiding people for 20 years, and at this point, I think I vehemently disagree. In some cases, people don't want the social graces. In others, people (especially really smart people) rarely have the patience. But, provided you have a willing recipient, you can train people on how to work well with others. Just ask Zig Ziglar, one of the best salespeople and a famous motivational speaker for sales. He made a career out of doing so.

How do you help people develop these soft skills? Be aware. Put people in situations where they can collaborate with other people in increasingly meaningful ways. Engage with Emotional Intelligence training. Find out where people are at. Care. Try. That's a lot, and pretty much sums up the overarching strategy that many take. I like the idea of breaking the strategy down into some tactical steps that you can take. So let's take a look at some of the skills that can be developed, and how you might go about doing so.

- Public speaking: There are organizations like Toastmasters that are dedicated to helping people improve their public speaking skills. But in my experience, it's all about getting out there and doing it. With most skills in general, it's all about repetition. With public speaking, it's also valuable to have people record and watch their own presentations. Doing so helps reduce all the things that you do while speaking that detract from the message you're trying to communicate (like gesticulation, putting your hands in and out of your pockets, rocking back and forth, timing, and of course not using the word "um").
- Being engaging: It's important to be able to work a room for a lot of fields. Inflection in your voice, being authentic, bringing a unique perspective, actually listening, keeping a conversation on point, being positive (while staying authentic), and so much more. The best way to work on this is to just pay attention when in social situations. Paying special attention to watching for eyes glazing over during a discussion,

reading other neuro-linguistic queues, choosing where to emphasize, and genuinely being interesting in hearing someone else speak rather than just waiting for your turn to talk are all other great ways to be engaging. The key is to be with people, talking, learning, and paying attention. Discussing what worked and what didn't is also a huge help.

- Writing: Most of these skills need to be practiced in person. When training writing skills, though, it can be equally as educational to just use track changes and comments. I've learned so much from the editors of books I've written. Strategic things like being more succinct, tactical things like ending all items in a bulleted list with the same punctuation, and fine-tuning items such as using less gerunds. Writing is a great skill that will be with employees forever. As is the patience you learn from taking constructive criticism.
- Collaboration with peers: This is similar to being engaging but operating in a group dynamic. When overly engaging, we're not accepting enough input. When we're not engaging enough, we aren't contributing to the group. A structured approach to collaboration can help but, especially with engineers, can just be a crutch that takes up a bunch of time. One challenge is to not let dogma drag you down. Another is to inspire the quiet people in the room. I've recorded meetings and then played them back. You usually don't even need to point out better ways to handle situations, as people can see them for themselves, so if you're trying to train on collaboration in this manner (or just discussing a meeting after the fact without a recording),

just ask questions about situations and let the person you're mentoring find the answer themselves.

- Problem solving: As with most other soft skills, training people to be better at problem solving involves having people solve various problems and then providing constructive guidance on other creative ways to think about a problem. For example, one technique I've had a lot of success with in this regard is to point out the type of strategy (e.g., abstraction, reduction, lateral thinking, root cause analysis, analogy, trial and error) being employed when someone is going through a problem and how other strategies might have led to a result quicker or with more accuracy.
- Troubleshooting: I put this back-to-back with problem solving because troubleshooting is often just problem solving specific to your industry. Depending on your industry, there are also lots of problem-solving methodologies (such as GROW, OODA, PDCA, RPR Problem Diagnosis, and A3) that might lend themselves well to keep employees on the same page in their approaches. Add the technical or logistical elements of problem solving specific to your organization or product to a methodology and you have a solid approach to teaching solid troubleshooting skills. But keep in mind that proficiency in your business or product is key to getting solid troubleshooting skills. Knowing the nitty-gritty details about a topic helps in refining your search for a problem.

- Root cause analysis: I split this apart from problem solving because you can solve a problem without understanding the cause. Root cause analysis is a method of problem solving but can also be looked at as not just solving a problem but solving the cause of a problem. My favorite strategy for teaching root cause analysis skills is to go through a 5 Whys exercise. If you ask why a problem has occurred, then ask why that happened, then why, until you get to the 5^{th} why, then you have gotten to the point where you can fix not only a given incident of a problem but the root cause of that problem. There are other tools, but for a number of situations, the 5 Whys exercise will get people onto a structured problem-solving approach that also resolves the root cause of that problem.
- Job-based leadership: Management is not leadership. Leadership involves listening, synthesizing, and developing a strategy, or vision. Leadership involves understanding what motivates someone and leveraging those motivations to build support. To develop a strategy, a leader needs to understand the product or the organization. And then the leader needs to show the ability to listen to others and bring their ideas to the table. Teaching leadership involves other soft skills that help people exert influence, but it also involves understanding that you aren't just building support, you're hopefully making things better. When someone displays natural leadership skills, it's also helpful to steer them away from manipulation. Otherwise employees will witness their leadership eroding over time.

- People management: Management is different from leadership in that it's typically more tactical. Management also involves making the employee better. There are a lot of different strategies when it comes to how an organization wants managers to comport themselves and effect change. Therefore, it's always helpful to pick a management style and have managers or potential managers learn that style. This will invariably change as organizations change. And it's important to take into account a manager's natural management style and use a more structured methodology to help fill gaps. This allows managers to be more authentic.
- Handling pressure: I once had an employee that had to be hospitalized because he was so worried about a project I assigned to him. After that, I took handling pressure as a much more serious skill to teach. Much of this has to do with making someone more confident. If you know that you can get yourself out of any situation then you're more likely to handle situations with little stress. Also, think about making sure the employee knows they have a good tree of resources behind them and how to use that tree. I've also had specific role-playing sessions, where we identify a problem under pressure. The more you go through high-pressure situations, the better you become at handling them. Finally, coaching with specific lines that someone can use can also be helpful. For example, a programmer is trying to fix a line of code and someone keeps asking questions. This is going to make a situation worse, so having an easy line to use that is polite but allows

you to get them to stop can be a great way to make a situation better. And when done with grace (which for some might require repetition), can lead to a better relationship with the person creating pressure. I also like to point out that when conflict or pressure is escalating, at each subsequent interaction, an employee has the ability to de-escalate that conflict.

- Thinking creatively: Creative thinking is an important soft skill for any employee. Fostering employees to think creatively starts with empowering employees to do so. I like providing parameters for when it's appropriate as well. For example, if you're following a Statement of Work (SoW) don't step outside the bounds of the SoW without a change order. To teach your staff to think creatively, there are a number of critical and creative thinking tools. I like games. Games are fun and levity helps to make professional training more enjoyable. I also find when people are having fun, they retain just as much, if not more, and are happier. And thinking of creative strategies to win games is a great way to teach employees to think creatively. Additionally, I've had great luck with providing situational examples to employees and having them look for creative ways to solve those, both with individuals and groups.
- Attention to detail: One of the best ways to learn to pay attention to details is to fail from having not done so. It's best not to do that in front of customers, coworkers, and on projects where failure might lead to a project getting behind schedule. Therefore, providing exercises that are dependent on following a lot of directions is a

great way to help keep staff paying attention, especially when the instructions or details are real-world tasks that might be performed as part of their jobs.

- Time management: Time management can help employees be more efficient. When people feel like they've accomplished a lot, they often end up happier as well. There are hundreds of books and courses on time management. I recommend finding one of the courses that matches your organization's values and sending one or two staff through it. They can then report back on the strategy and value. I don't want to endorse a single product or program for most of the items on this list, so choose the one to start with, ask people you respect who manage their time well if they have a course they would recommend, hit your favorite search engine, and do some research. Most of the programs revolve around priorities, so in the meantime think of how best to organize tasks based on the type of task and priority for that task. This alone will have an immediate impact while you look for a program to help teach the staff.
- Optimism: Optimism is an interesting thing to teach. Better equipping people with the other soft skills often leads to a more optimistic approach in and of itself. Optimism is often a direct response to self-esteem. But there are a few different specific strategies that might or might not work, given an employee's disposition. One of the most important is to be optimistic in your own approach. Don't allow yourself to get down in the weeds, talking smack about the organization. Do talk about the details of a given situation in a way that

better equips someone to handle the situation in the future. Talk about emotions. This can be hard with some employees and the depth of a relationship you have with them. Finally, communicating trust in an employee or team can also have a pretty substantial impact, especially when done so over time.

- Traveling well: I used to have a lot of people on my staff that did a lot of traveling. I'd have all of them try and choose a specific airline, get in mileage programs, center around a specific car rental service, get into that loyalty program, choose a preferred hotel, get in that loyalty program, send them templates for calls to have with customers before they got on a plane (to make sure the customer and my employees were ready for whatever they were traveling to do), provide the easiest expense reporting solution, have a concierge available to help when needed, and much more. Being a road warrior can be hard. Anything you can do to support your front line is helpful.
- Be succinct: Conveying your message clearly but quickly helps keep the attention of others. Doing so requires staying on point. To help employees with this, I've engaged in conversations and pointed out when we stray from the central topic. Obviously, you want employees to speak naturally. However, you can also help to refine the approach by providing guidance. The same extends to the written word. Simply pointing out where writing begins to stray will help to build a habit of staying on point. Finally, you can provide Douglas Adams books to employees with a message of "do the exact opposite."

What skill should each employee work on? Given these, create a professional development plan. Start with a template. I like a 360 approach, where you have employees rate themselves in each category. Then have coworkers rate each other (anonymously works best). Provide your own input and then communicate with each employee where additional time should be spent working on their skills. And make a plan to do so. I like accompanying such a plan with a communication plan, or when you'll check in on the status of each area being worked on. Of course, these soft skills are likely being worked on while educating employees about your business or product. But blending various areas for people to work on helps identify that you care about their professional development and are not just trying to leverage them to get as much revenue as possible.

Want to know more? I laid out each bullet in such a way that you can copy the first few words, paste them into a search engine, and get more information about that topic than you could ever want. Additionally, there's a book with lots of research and case studies that outlines the impact such change can provide for an organization. ***The Management Shift*** is a book that provides practical approaches to identify leadership problems that plague many organizations as well as how to shift mindset and organizational culture. There are more of these types of books than can be counted, but it's a great one to start with!

Good luck, and on behalf of your employees and potential future employers of those employees, thank you! Now that you've got employees with the skills you want them to have, let's move on to keeping them on the payroll.

Signs It's Going to Get Hard to Retain Someone

There are a number of board games and video games like Dungeons and Dragons, where you play a character who collects experience points. Once the character has enough experience points, you get to raise the level of the character, picking up new skills and better attributes. Our careers work in much the same way: you work your butt off and then you plateau, you get a new job or position, work your butt off again, and then plateau again. Provided you continue to level up when you're ready, your career is likely to be full of learning and new adventures, just the way it should be. Here are a few ways you can tell that some have gotten to the point they've earned enough experience and it's time to move up to the next level.

- They're bored: This one is a no-brainer. Once someone has learned everything they can learn in a position, they are likely to get bored (cyclically), no matter how much work comes through their desk on any given day. This is as it should be. Do be cognizant that there are a variety of motivators and that someone might simply want to sit in the position they are in for awhile. And provided they're good at it, let them know that whenever they're ready, they should let you know and you'll help them get to the next step.
- Everyone comes to an employee for advice: Once an employee gets good at a position, and they know how to fix all of the tech problems, they know who to call to get that one critical thing expedited, or where to kick the juke box in order to get a song to play (with ample time for a Happy Days thumbs up)—then it's time to look for more. You can feel it in your bones and

hopefully they feel good about their accomplishments. This is when it's time. If you haven't yet done so, start thinking about what's next for them. Of course, they should spend as much time as necessary on the job to fully prepare for what's next on their horizon and take a cue from others that they're getting good at what you do, so their ego doesn't fool them into thinking they're doing better than they are! But if you don't recognize where they've made it, someone will!

- They start to get frustrated: After a while, people constantly coming at an employee with questions will get old. They'll get annoyed that they've gotten complacent and start to resent the organization, the team, and everyone but themselves. This means they stayed too long in a given position, and it's time to move on (and hopefully up). Don't let them start hating the job; that will do no one any good. Instead, look for ways to challenge staff and keep hiring from within to keep the momentum going.
- People tell them: Sometimes a manager elsewhere starts trying to recruit an employee, or they get asked to work with customers directly. Or team members start to point out other positions for someone. Either way, if their humility hasn't allowed them to apply for that next job yet, it's probably time to push them into it yourself. If you help your staff find positions, you get to help shape where they end up, and if it's not in your organization, then at least they will remain friends to your cause.

- Money: Capitalism means taking a new job that pays more money when you can. Your staff may love your team, the people, you, and the freedom often provided to high performers. But after they start to realize that there's much, much more for them in other positions, if nothing else has caused them to move on, cold hard cash is likely to start being thrown their way. One of the hard parts of time-based consulting is that there's definitely a financial plateau, as there's a margin that needs to be maintained. But keep in mind that exceptional talent might be able to motivate others. By amplifying what teammates can bring in for a company, those who are otherwise topped out in compensation might just be able to justify much larger salaries. In a Managed Service Provider (MSP), when people are crossing that threshold, they can typically move into management of teams or accounts—or provide an escalation path for the next generation of engineers.

Finally, there are going to be times in anyone's career when they're not collecting experience to level up at work anymore. New parents, those caring for sick loved ones, team members who have side projects, those spending all of their free time out on a lake at a cabin, and so many others are in a state of coasting. And that's fine.

There is nothing wrong with pressing pause on a career provided that the output at work is what's needed for the employer, that both the organization and the employee are aware, and that everyone is communicating about where you're at. Communication is key. If you see an employee who needs to level up, dedicate time to review that—and where to go next. If you are in need of a level up, start looking for what your next step is, so you can prepare in whatever way you need to. In consulting, this often means growing the company into areas that can challenge you more, or scaling out the organization.

Diversity

As consultants, we can end up visiting a lot of different customers. The people who visit those customers should be as diverse as the customers, if not more diverse. A more diverse workforce provides more ideas and more perspectives and makes for a healthier company culture.

Diversity means gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, religion, and background and should be actively recruited for. If you're based in a place like Los Angeles, it might be easy to find employees that represent pretty much any background you could think of. If you're based in more rural areas, it might take more time to find diverse talent. But it will be worth it.

As you grow, you end up having a more diverse pool of talent naturally. If you don't, then you need to check your hiring practices and perhaps your own outlook and how that outlook might have shaped the hiring managers you have at your organization. If you trend in any direction too much, then it is hard to shift hiring practices. Ultimately when you see what a more diverse team unlocks, in terms of innovation, community contribution, and ultimately unlocking a wider pool of customers (so increasing your total addressable market) you will be a stronger company and one that more people want to work at.

Most people want to be more diverse because it's a buzzword. And whatever the reason, it's a good thing. But you can also be selfish here. The innovative ideas that come from having a more diverse pool of talent is probably the single biggest reason to spend a little extra time when hiring to see what the whole market looks like, rather than just your circle and the circle beyond that.

Hiring good people is one of the hardest things we have to do when starting new businesses. Rather than be preachy, here are a few logistical takeaways from those books:

- Consider the Platinum Rule: Treat people how they want to be treated. This replaces the Golden Rule (treat people how you would want to be treated), because we all come from different backgrounds and we should be considerate and sensitive to the boundaries of everyone. Some things you ask of team members could end up putting you in conflict with their values. This includes how different cultures perceive eye contact, handshakes, or personal space boundaries. When in doubt, ask.
- Interviewing someone who sees a bunch of people around that don't look like them: There might be a slight cultural shift with existing staff. If you're starting out with mostly male staff, there are likely to be certain jokes that are inappropriate. You likely want female or LGBT staff, but why would they want to be in a place where that's tolerated? Make sure to have a supportive culture for all races, genders, and backgrounds.
- Consider blind interviews: I've rarely looked at the name on a resume anyway, but this is a great way to not let yourself be impacted by unintentional bias.
- Join diversity groups on professional sites like LinkedIn or through meetups in your area: You're likely to open up a whole new talent pool that way, as well as meet potential customers and find causes you can contribute to.

- Ethnic and cross-cultural training: This not only helps you become a more welcome place for team members, but it also helps your staff be more appropriate in front of a customer. This includes cultural sensitivity and recognizing unconscious bias. There's a legal necessity for some training, but if you go above and beyond what's required, and really mean it, then others will see your commitment. Make sure to be there and participating yourself; leadership is important. You can even brand an internal cultural competency in addition to technical or business competencies.
- Have a zero-tolerance policy against harassment, racism, and bias: I've let things go at times and regretted doing so, but I can promise you that if you see something, so will others.
- Work with suppliers and other vendors who are committed to diversity and inclusion in their organizations as well.
- Take a zero-tolerance policy against harassment, racism, and bias with your customers as well: I have always vehemently defended my team against any form of abusive behavior. Working with customers that engage in this kind of behavior is just toxic and will poison not only those exposed to that behavior but those who interact with them as well. This should be addressed every time with leadership at your customers.
- Extend diversity recruitment to your board of directors.

- Nearly every organization I've worked at has promoted their culture as a core reason people want to work there. And they should. But when it comes to recruiting, it's best to stop talking about cultural fit and focus on ability.
- Acknowledge all the cultural holidays, without engaging in cultural appropriation: This doesn't always mean you need to take time off; there are other ways to celebrate special events for each culture.
- When in meetings, seek input from everyone in the room. Many employees will shy from contributing. Ask for their contributions and defer to them when they do speak up.
- Actively seek out and destroy "imposter syndrome": Employees should be propped up, no matter their background. Keep in mind that different backgrounds have different approaches to resume writing, different ways of interviewing, and different norms when it comes to following up after an interview or during training. Make everyone feels safe to ask questions, to contribute, and to feel like their contributions are important.
- Read a book or articles when they show up in your feeds: A lot of the world is waking up to the realization that things are both worse and better than we may think. Reading content from a more diverse base will provide you with a more diverse outlook and understanding.

This was a hard section for me to write. As a white male, I have a certain privilege that is sometimes hard for me to acknowledge, and I know that there will be people offended no matter what I say. But while I don't feel it's appropriate for me to run around telling people what to do, I did feel that despite offending people, it was important for me to write. At the end of this chapter you'll find some books from people who I think are entirely right in exploring this topic more and who do it more justice.

This is one of those places where starting and growing a business is not about you. You don't have to hire anyone that doesn't meet your requirements. But as you grow, having a diverse team will help you make more well-rounded decisions and better understand what more and more clients need from you. If you surround yourself with people just like you, you aren't likely to grow in certain ways as a person.

Outsourcing HR

For the purposes of this book, we looked at Human Resources, or HR, as a person or team that oversees the employment at your organization, including compliance with labor laws, employment standards, the administration of benefits, and ultimately recruitment. In most of this chapter, we focused on leadership and management because we could have spent hundreds of pages just looking at the science of organizational structures and the logistics behind it.

In this chapter, we reviewed a lot of resources. We mentioned to start with trinet.com, adp.com, insperity.com, and gusto.com to get a system and to bring on a consultant once you pass half a dozen employees.

We didn't talk about the specific technologies you need to train and maintain skills for. This is because there are literally hundreds. Some of those can be found in Appendix C. Each firm will be different based on the tools you choose to use to design your services offering and the toolkit your teams will use. That list will help when designing that offering.

Organizations with less than 20 people should probably outsource HR, unless they're planning on growing at a rate of one or more employees per week. There are a number of different outsourcers that will provide you with benefits that far outweigh any package you can put together on your own. They will also provide an ear when you need it; help to keep you within the laws of the cities, states, counties, provinces, etc that you do work in; and take over payroll. Specific things to look for in outsourced HR for small to mid-range companies:

- Provide a service desk for employees to call. This can help you not end up spending hours researching employment law or the specifics of insurance claims.
- Provide insurance for employees. Your staff needs to be taken care of, and one of the easiest ways to do so is to provide an excellent insurance plan.
- Take care of workers comp issues.
- Provide stock options and/or 401k plans.
- Resolve employee disputes.
- Provide stock, profit sharing, and dividends if needed.

When looking to outsource HR, make sure to ask outsourcers how they handle each of these situations. Find out what they bill separately for. And make sure you're comfortable with having a local consulting resource to help you out and that they're comfortable with your outsourcer. Keep in mind that HR also includes leadership and onboarding. And those two things are frequently what sets the ability for a company to deliver quality products to customers on a consistent basis.

Conclusion

Human resources isn't just about making sure everyone gets paid and has insurance. Human resources is about that but is also about leadership training, diversity, employee retention, systems for managing humans, recruitment, and most anything else you choose to put there.

In this chapter, we looked at some of the common thresholds for when to outsource HR and when to hire or grow an HR department. There is some flexibility in these, according to how you choose to run your company, but keep in mind that when you are growing toward a dozen people, you'll want to put solid onboarding and training programs in place. Doing so doesn't happen on its own, and most business owners should be guiding these programs, but if you micromanage them you will end up focusing less on strategy and sales, which are the growth drivers for most organizations.

Now that we've covered human resources, it's time to take a look at how we pay for all of this. In the next chapter, we'll dive straight into what is probably the favorite topic for most nerds who start companies: accounting!

Further Reading

- HR for Small Business, Charles Fleischer, `https://www.amazon.com/Small-Business-Essential-Resources-Professionals/dp/1572486902`
- The Essential HR Handbook, Sharon Armstrong, Barbara Mitchell, `https://www.amazon.com/Essential-HR-Handbook-Resource-Professional/dp/1564149900`

- HRM and Performance, David E Guest, Jaap Paauwe, Patrick Wright, https://www.amazon.com/HRM-Performance-Achievements-David-Guest/dp/1405168331
- The Management Shift, V Hlupic https://www.amazon.com/Management-Shift-Transform-Organization-Sustainable/dp/1137352949
- Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead, Sheryl Sandberg, https://www.amazon.com/Lean-Women-Work-Will-Lead/dp/0385349947
- The Inclusion Revolution Is Now: An Innovative Framework for Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace, Maura Robinson, https://www.amazon.com/Inclusion-Revolution-Now-Innovative-Framework/dp/1491710578
- Driven by Difference: How Great Companies Fuel Innovation Through Diversity, David Livermore, https://www.amazon.com/Driven-Difference-Companies-Innovation-Diversity/dp/0814436536
- Notes to a Software Team Leader, Roy Osherove https://www.amazon.com/Notes-Software-Team-Leader-Organizing/dp/829993320X
- Managing Humans, Michael Lopp https://www.amazon.com/Managing-Humans-Humorous-Software-Engineering/dp/1484221575
- Rookie Smarts:, by Liz Wiseman https://www.amazon.com/Rookie-Smarts-Learning-Beats-Knowing/dp/006232263X

- Emotional Intelligence 2.0, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, https://www.amazon.com/Emotional-Intelligence-2-0-Travis-Bradberry/dp/0974320625
- The History of Black Business in America, Juliet E.K. Walker https://www.amazon.com/History-Black-Business-America-Entrepreneurship/dp/0807859109
- Race Ethnicity, Gender, and Class: The Sociology of Group Conflict and Change, Joseph F, Healey, https://www.amazon.com/Race-Ethnicity-Gender-Class-Sociology/dp/1452216517
- Inclusion: Diversity, The New Workplace & The Will To Change, Jennifer Brown, https://www.amazon.com/Inclusion-Diversity-Workplace-Will-Change/dp/1946384100
- Making Diversity Work: 7 Steps for Defeating Bias in the Workplace, Sondra Thiederman, https://www.amazon.com/Making-Diversity-Work-Defeating-Workplace/dp/1427797137
- Managers as Mentors, Chip R Bell, https://www.amazon.com/Managers-As-Mentors-Building-Partnerships/dp/160994710X

CHAPTER 4

Accounting 101

I have never seen anyone with a degree in accounting start a Managed Services Provider. I'm sure it happens, but most providers I've met had to (or will have to) learn some basics about accounting along the way.

That's going to be true for a lot of different things when you start a business on a shoestring budget. And it's good, because when you hire full-time staff to do various roles, you'll better know how to manage them! But you likely can't afford to hire a full-time accountant in the beginning. So at first, you can use a tool like Mint or Quicken to do basic, simple accounting. When you grow into MYOB, QuickBooks, or one of the more mature tools, you'll need some help. And keep in mind that you have the same types of options when hiring accounting help that your customers have when hiring consultants, so treat hiring help as a great learning experience! And wait as long as you can to hire a full-time accountant.

The Concepts

To be a successful small business owner, you don't need to be an accounting expert; you outsource that. But you do need a solid grasp of basic accounting concepts. As a small business owner, you need more than an intuitive feel for the performance of your business. And understanding

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_4

a few basic Accounting 101 concepts goes a long way toward keeping the goals for your company in alignment with your performance. Here are a few concepts to get you started:

- **The balance sheet**: A great place to start when evaluating the performance of an organization is learning how to decipher a balance sheet. At a minimum, you should understand assets and liabilities and how they relate to one another.
    - **Assets** are what you own, which includes contracts you haven't taken payment on.
    - **Liabilities** are debts, as well as goods and services that you have taken payment for that you must contractually deliver.
    - A basic equation to calculate the worth of your company is to take your assets and subtract your liabilities, with what's left being your equity. Putting this on paper results in a balance sheet. This provides you a quick overview of your organization. Lots of cash on hand and little debt means a strong balance sheet. High debt and low cash means a weak balance sheet. The balance sheet drives long-term decisions on where to invest your resources.
- **The P&L**: The Profit and Loss statement provides a good idea of how you're doing at any given point in time. The P&L indicates the cost of sales, margins on each product, and costs that impact margins. Those costs include inventory, shipping, manufacturing, etc. The more granular these become, the more data-driven

you can get with establishing the cost of products. Every P&L includes net income. The net income is a statement about the profit you made; you know, the reward for your investment!

- **The cash flow statement**: For small business owners, cash is king. Cash is a cushion for when, not if, your business suffers a setback. Cash should cover the operational costs of running a business for a period of time (each organization has a different outlook on how long that might be). The key to understanding cash flow is the statement of cash flows. Consider the statement of cash flows as the connection between a balance sheet and income statement. The statement of cash flows explains how your net income transformed into net cash over a given amount of time. The statement of cash flows divides activities into three categories: operations, investment, and financing. Initially organizations have cash from ongoing operations, but as you grow, you'll also manage cash from investment and operations. And usually pay taxes on at least some of that cash and take deductions from those investments and operations.
- **Taxes**: As a small business owner, you need to understand taxes. If your business is making money, you have to pay the taxman. Most organizations need to minimize their tax burden as much as possible. And that's where your knowledge of accounting can really pay off—you'll understand the tax advantages of different legal structures (e.g., a corporation vs. a sole proprietorship) and the potential tax savings that are available to small business owners.

- **Pro forma projections**: Accounting is a story of the past and the present. The pro forma is a projection of future performance based on past performance. Pro forma projections enable you to project how your business will do in the future. Projections are critical, as they allow you to make informed decisions about staffing, delivery, and the value of lines of business.
- **CAGR**: Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) measures growth over different periods. For example, you know you want to start a company with an initial investment and then grow it to a specific value to sell, assuming the investment compounds over time.
- **COGS**: Costs of Goods Sold (COGS) represents the direct costs attributable to the production of what you sell, including the cost of the materials and labor used in creating goods, costs of distributing goods, and sales costs.
- **EBITDA**: Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation and Amortization (EBITDA) is one indicator of a financial performance that indicates the earning potential of a business. EBITDA doesn't include the cost of capital and the tax impact. If you've taken on funding, this is a common metric to look at.
- **Revenue**: Usually listed as sales on an income statement, revenue is the money you receive during a given period, including discounts and returns (or, in services, disputed hours or managed services Service Level Agreement, or SLA violation discounts). Revenue is gross income.

- **Recurring revenue**: Recurring revenue is the revenue that is highly likely to continue, and thus predictable, and something you can actually plan and build a business around.
- **Net Income**: Top line revenue minus costs.
- **Revenue Recognition**: This is when you can actually spend the money you made. You recognize service dollars when you deliver those services. Managed Services revenue is usually recognized at the end of each monthly term, and hourly or daily services are usually recognized when you receive approval (e.g., a signature on a work order) that the services were delivered.
- **Gross Margin**: Gross margin is sales revenue minus COGS, divided by total sales revenue, or the percentage you get to keep after covering all of the direct costs attributable to the goods and services work product you provide to your customers.

At the end of the day, most small businesses will outsource accounting. So don't get hung up on all the accounting jargon or the finer points of different depreciation methods. But do come at it with a rudimentary handle on the three basic financial statements and have a good idea of what they tell you about future performance. You're on your way to becoming a successful small business owner!

Buying Accounting Software

I usually recommend two factors when deciding what kind of accounting software (or Software as a Service [SaaS]) you should use. The first is your accountant. If they like working with a specific software package, such as QuickBooks, then you should probably use that. You don't want to be exporting your chart of accounts into some weird file and then banging your head against the wall trying to help them import that file every time you go and see them. Instead, either find an accountant that uses the software you want to use natively, or use the software the accountant you find likes to use.

Wait, did I say find an accountant that uses your software? Why would I say that? Because the second major factor in selecting a software package is integration with your Professional Services Automation (PSA) solution. If the PSA can communicate directly with the accounting software then as you grow, you will have a very easy, very slick way of invoicing customers based on ticket entry. We'll get into selecting PSA solutions later in this book. But for now, keep in mind that the accounting software solution that you select will later need to be integrated with some automation software.

For example, if you use a PSA that integrates with ZenDesk, and it happens to not be QuickBooks, but your accountant wants QuickBooks and will only work with QuickBooks, then you'll have a little bit of a challenge. Hopefully you can export from one solution to another if absolutely necessary. If not, you will have to choose between various forms of automation or accountants. Keep in mind, that if you are left with manually keying invoice information in, that's not the worst thing (especially not early on), as manually keying in information provides you checks and balances before sending a customer an invoice. Of course when manually keying in information, you can make a mistake, so double-check your entry. Nothing runs the risk of causing trust issues more than billing someone incorrectly.

Accepting Payments

Being profitable is the difference between a business and a hobby. And a key aspect of being profitable is: the initial ways you accept money can easily limit the type of business you're able to take on, and so accepting a payment in any way that customers can pay (that can then go toward your rent or mortgage) is a great idea.

I would use three primary factors when selecting a tool.

- Does the service integrate properly (and automatically) with your accounting platform of choice? An easy way to find a good tool is to start with your accounting platform and look at those that integrate with it.
- Does the service give you the most favorable rates? If you can choose between multiple services, you might want to make sure you're using the one that keeps the least amount of your hard-earned money.
- Does the service change your tax nexus? Believe it or not, different sites and services (and even customers) can impact your taxes. Consult with your tax preparer (and yes, you need a tax preparer) to verify any nexus rules you might be governed by (especially if you do business between states or work in a border city).

The main solutions used to accept payments include Square, Quickbooks, and Stripe. There are tons of others, and I have no opinion about which is better than the others. I've used them all, and they all act as a game-changer over traditional big landline-driven machines.

Now that you can accept payments, it's time to talk about when you can spend the money you were just paid.

Accrual-Based Accounting

If you take anything away from this chapter, it's this. If you have customers that prepay you for services in a contract, then you MUST use accrual-based accounting. Most businesses begin leveraging cash-based accounting, which is to say, that money they are paid is the money they have sitting in their general ledger and they treat that money as cash.

Later, organizations end up with multiple charts of accounts and only accrue or recognize revenue once the services are delivered. Why? Because you'll eventually bankrupt a growing company if you don't. Basically, you can't spend the money until you deliver the services. The earlier you start doing that, the better off you'll be. I find many organizations don't start doing this until they get a big scare or hire an accountant.

That big scare is often in scenarios where all of the revenue derived from a contract is spent and you have to recapitalize the company in order to just complete projects you've sold. When this happens, you can easily end up with the value of the company going negative even though you just did some of the best work of your life. This is when a little extra cash flow helps, but the only way to actually solve this problem is to avoid recognizing income when you haven't actually earned it.

Hiring an Accountant

You don't have to deal with too much of this stuff. You can and probably should immediately hire someone to help you get your books in order. I find that a good accountant will not only get what you've done in the past in order but set up a better system for the future. And your first accountant is likely to also act as a financial advisor of sorts. Later, those roles will be different.

When you hire an accountant, look for someone that doesn't let you just do what you want. This means you need to listen. Yes, you are your own boss. But they're your boss too, as are your employees and your customers.

The bookkeeping functions of a small business are not the same as an accountant, financial advisor, or tax preparer. You need someone (and at first it is likely to be you) to enter receipts, enter receivables, write the checks for payables, reconcile bank statements, reconcile credit card statements, and maybe deposit checks. As you grow, the accounts receivable and accounts payable often split into two people.

A few things to remember here:

- From the second you hang your shingle out and start accepting a Stripe payment, have a tax preparer you trust.
- Identify the tool that is key to automating your business. This is important because it needs to integrate into your accounting apparatus. If your accounting system is Quickbooks and your bookkeeper and tax preparer both use Quickbooks, then you might not be able to move to a new Managed Services Automation (MSA) package if that package doesn't integrate with Quickbooks. Unless you need that MSA so bad you replace your tax preparation service or find a way to migrate data at every quarter, check in with them.
- Build a good check and balance. You need someone to keep you honest, with spending, forecasting, and taxes. You need to keep others honest with your money. And you need to have them check things you don't even know need to get checked, like a forecast of available funds at each payroll run. And you need to practice a little "trust but verify."

- Categorize receipts immediately. And bring in everything at tax time. Your tax preparer will sort out what you can and can't actually claim. This includes services, travel, subscriptions, and the cost of your office (which at first might be a part of your home office).
- If you get financial advice about a business arrangement, think long and hard before proceeding against that advice. I'm not sure how many times I've screwed this up. Nor am I sure how many times I will in the future.
- Don't ever, ever, ever write your own accounting software.
- Keep all of your records forever.

Overall, I can't tell you how to structure your business' finances. But maybe some of this chapter helps frame things the way you need them framed. You should hire someone you can trust—probably someone you aren't related to. And you should get additional services from other vendors every now and then.

Doing Taxes

You will be paying your taxes quarterly; otherwise, you will incur penalties from the IRS. Don't let yourself end up with thousands or tens of thousands of dollars in penalties just because you thought you still worked for a company. Once you exceed a certain amount (your mileage may vary here, so check with a tax professional), then you'll need to file quarterly taxes and pay your government a little at regular intervals.

I would never put anything about politics in writing—Conservative, Liberal, Libertarian, Communist, etc. And none of that matters anyway. If there's a law that you have to pay taxes, you have to. You use their roads, send your kids to their schools, benefit from the crime they keep out of your office, so you need to pay your share. Actually, that doesn't matter either. If you don't pay your taxes, and do so properly, you can go to jail in pretty much any country in the world. So do them early and often.

I can't tell you how to actually do your taxes; that's different for every business, city, state, and country. But I can tell you that you should probably create a pass-through entity if you're just getting started. Hire a professional tax accountant immediately so you can start making your quarterly tax payments to the IRS (if you're based in the United States), so you don't have to pay steep penalties for not having done so.

Insurance

While not strictly accounting, insurance is part of the financial equation for any organization. Your accountant should be able to point you to a good organization that can sell you corporate insurance. Don't go out there and do work without insurance. It's critical to help protect you as a person as well as the company you have created. One accidental erasing of a hard drive, dropping of a laptop with critical information on it, or incorrectly securing a computer can leave you liable for who-knows-what.

Picking a policy at first doesn't have to be all that difficult. Find a good agent, then review what packages they have and pick one that fits your business model. Referrals are best when looking for an agent, but searching for "errors and omissions insurance coverage" (E&O) or "professional liability insurance" is likely to net a ton of potential sources for a policy.

In the beginning, your policy can be modest. Growth usually means that your policy will have to get bigger. Each new customer brings with them the risk of potentially requiring more insurance than you already have. As new customers come with additional E&O coverage, you can look at the cost to acquire an upgraded policy.

Here's the most important thing about E&O. You will want a "Terms of Service" or some agreement with customers that governs how you work with them. In that agreement you will want to cap any damages they can pursue you for to be equal to the amount of money you have in your E&O policy. This protects you from the potential gap that you would have to pay in the event that you were sued and didn't have enough coverage to pay out the amount in a suit, which would then come out of your or your business' pocket.

Cash Flow

Finally, let's talk about cash flow. You should always have enough cash to pay your staff and other expenses for 6 months. Otherwise don't hire staff. In some countries, not having enough cash flow to run the organization for a period of time is a criminal offense. Don't forget to consider rent, HR, taxes, legal, etc. in this equation.

Now, what happens when you have more than 6 months of operating capital? If you have enough to run the place for 10 years, then you aren't properly deploying your capital. If you want to stay a small company then you should be investing that money. This isn't investment advice, but if you are living (or running the company) in way that provides positive cash flow for a while then you should find financial advice. And that advice might be to grow the company or according to the cost of cash at the time, to leverage debt to grow the company. Or if according to what you want out of life and the company and everything, then your investment advisor might tell you to do something different with it. But don't keep it in a checking account!

Conclusion

Knowing the basics of accounting is an important skill. One of the most important hires you'll make is an accountant. And there's a strong likelihood that you'll need at least two. As you grow maybe an accounts receivable and/or accounts payable person on staff. But you need to know enough to properly manage them all.

Whatever you do, don't go your own way. Listen to their advice. Maybe seek a second opinion at times, but never think you know more than Generally Acceptable Account Practices (GAAPs) and try to make up your own accounting rules. You can also outsource a Chief Financial Officer to help you best understand how to manage your tax professional and your day-to-day accounting team. Make sure to stay on top of quarterly tax payments (obviously your mileage may vary here, according to your country).

Finally, learning about accounting and finance is learning about business. Managing costs, managing receivables, managing cash flow, managing revenue recognition, etc., these are what makes for a savvy business owner. You may get to the point where you don't want to do much of it any more. And that may indicate that you've outgrown your comfort zone. But once you have enough income to hire a second person, it's time to start learning a lot about business, even if you only have time to listen to some of the books in the Further Reading section of this chapter, or others that are similar.

Further Reading

- Accounting for Small Business Owners, Tycho Press: https://www.amazon.com/Accounting-Small-Business-Owners-Tycho/dp/1623155363
- Accounting for Small Businesses Quick Start Guide: Clydebank Business: https://www.amazon.com/Accounting-Businesses-QuickStart-Understanding-Proprietorship/dp/1945051000
- Accounting For Small Business: The Ultimate Business Accounting Made Simple for Startup, Sole Proprietorship, LLC, Ryan Connor: https://www.amazon.com/Accounting-Small-Business-Ultimate-Proprietorship/dp/154817582X
- The Tax and Legal Playbook, Mark Kohler: https://www.amazon.com/Tax-Legal-Playbook-Game-Changing-Small-Business/dp/159918561X
- Open for Business: The Insider's Guide to Commercial Real Estate, Tyler Cauble: https://www.amazon.com/Open-Business-Insiders-Leasing-Commercial/dp/1619617234
- 50 Real Estate Investing Calculations: Cash Flow, IRR, Value, Profit, Equity, Income, ROI, Depreciation, More, Michael Lantrip: https://www.amazon.com/Real-Estate-Investing-Calculations-Depreciation/dp/1945627026
- GET IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME: The Owner-Manager's Guide to Hiring a CFO, Lance Osborne, https://www.amazon.com/GET-RIGHT-FIRST-TIME-Owner-Managers-ebook/dp/B01HIX2UGI

- Legal Guide to Starting and Running a Small Business, Fred S Steingold: https://www.amazon.com/Legal-Guide-Starting-Running-Business/dp/141332407X
- How to Hire Lawyers, Jose Bautista, Isaac Keppler, Jeffrey Wagoner, https://www.amazon.com/How-Hire-Lawyers-Hiring-Attorney/dp/1978454082
- Accounting / Bookkeeping Freedom for Women: How to Quickly & Easily Find, Hire & Work Effectively With a Low-Cost Virtual Accountant / Bookkeeper for Your … Practice, or Entrepreneurial Business, Clint Arthur, https://www.amazon.com/Accounting-Bookkeeping-Freedom-Women-Entrepreneurial-ebook/dp/B00BMWE4J8
- Opportunities and Challenges of Workplace Diversity, Kathryn Canas, Harris Sondak, https://www.amazon.com/Opportunities-Challenges-Workplace-Diversity-3rd/dp/013295351X/

CHAPTER 5

Buy Software to Automate the Business

We've all probably said "there's an app for that." And nowhere is this truer than the various aspects of starting a business. One of the things that the app-based economy has done for small businesses is let them run on par with large enterprises. Gone are the days of wishing you had a tool that could do just about anything. You do. Gone are the days of paying massive amounts of money for monolithic tools that force you into doing business a specific way. Here are the days of stringing together small tools and workflows to automate pretty much anything, from managing trouble tickets, to repairing systems, to messaging you about problems on devices, to taking payment.

So here's what you need to do with this chapter: string together a toolset that helps automate the business so you don't have to do all of the things manually. Start with the tech. Always begin by building the best solution for your customers; in this chapter I call that the Techie Bits. From there, snap in parts around that solution that automate the services side of your business; these are the PSAs and MSAs. And then glue them all together using common off-the-shelf products from the app-based economy. But like I said, it starts with The Techie Bits.

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_5

Choose Your Tools

The "Techie Bits" section later in the chapter provides a nice long list of technical solutions. Why do I list so many rather than give you an easy-to-follow, comprehensive roadmap of tools? Because they're all equal in their own right. Maybe you want an open source-based toolchain. Maybe you want to keep things simple and do MDM-only device management of Macs. Maybe you have enough devices to warrant hiring a devops team or platform engineering team that can automate a lot of maintenance and device management tasks. Or maybe you want to build a ton of zero-tier assets that allow your customers to service their own needs and hook them into a machine learning based chat-bot. Maybe you prefer a 100% personalized touch and just want to get alerted when there's a problem.

Whatever you choose to do, the most important thing is to know what's out there and be deliberate about what you choose to do and not to do. First, let'll look at device management solutions, or those that allow you to remotely and centrally manage the state of devices, keeping you from having to perform routine tasks.

Device Management

Of the tools listed later in the chapter, the device management tools are going to be one of the most important that you select. When I wrote my first book on Managing Macs in the Enterprise, there were four device management tools. Today device management is a multi-billion dollar business and there are dozens, each with their own niche of sorts. Mostly because Apple developed an API for managing devices, known as Mobile Device Management (MDM). Back then, you had to image devices before you put them into the hands of users. With the Device Enrollment Program, (DEP), Apple has mostly removed the need for imaging by having devices join an MDM solution when first turned on, thus allowing for the automated configuration of devices in lieu of imaging. Apple also introduced the Volume Purchase Program (VPP), which allows MDM solutions to deploy apps onto devices from the App Store. Most of the management many organizations needs is then able to be done through a GUI that sits on top of a bunch of API calls to normalize Apple services.

That's an MDM in a nutshell. But then there are tools with agents of varying maturity. Jamf Pro, Munki, and FileWave are probably amongst the most important of these. Those tools may or may not also have an MDM component. Jamf Pro and FileWave are the most fully featured of these. An emergent combination of AirWatch and Munki is another, although the future of this unlikely partnership has yet to be seen.

Which is the best management tool? I won't go into those in this book because they're always changing, and because the authors and vendors of these tools have very thin skins (of which I am one). But each of these tools has an API and can be configured to work with common service desks and/or Professional Services Automation tools. For example, I wrote a tool that integrates Jamf Pro with Salesforce Cases and another that integrates Jamf Pro with ZenDesk. Jamf has an integration available on the ServiceNow marketplace. Another example would be a tool that integrates ConnectWise, a popular PSA, with Jamf. I work for Jamf so these are the most familiar to me, but there are likely going to be integrations of varying degrees of maturity with any management tool you select.

Additionally, there are management tools that are made by organizations that also do things like PSA. LabTech, ConnectWise, and Kaseya are all tools that are Windows-first, and they work great for platforms that aren't Apple (e.g. all have Mac agents). And all of those agents are glorified script runners with very little logic built in. Therefore, if you use a tool like this, you'll also likely need another tool, capable of actually helping you manage devices and get information about them effectively. This isn't to say you can't use them. You should, in order to save the effort and cost, until you outgrow them. Just to temper your expectations as to how long that will take.

One exception is the Solarwinds MSP tool. The maintainers of the toolset used are working hard to build a comprehensive solution that allows an MSP to sell not only device management, which for a managed services provider will likely be more of a cost reduction tool, but also to provide backup and antivirus solutions, which are add-ons with costs that are simple to pass back to your customers. That will increase sales, increase MRR, and decrease the costs you incur in supporting devices (for example, restoring from a backup is often a quick fix compared to troubleshooting corrupt devices). This toolchain might not work for you for whatever reason. If that's the case, it's still a good idea to look at the products they offer as ways to boost revenue and have happy customers.

PSA, MSA, RMM, and BDR (Oh My!)

Choosing the right Professional Services Automation (PSA) and/or MSA (Managed Services Automation) is one of the most important things that many a Managed Services Provider will do. This is expensive software that is meant to save you time. And there is no clear-cut answer as to what is the right automation software you should be using. Why? Because each has strengths and weaknesses. And I won't go into those in this book because they're always changing, and because the vendors who make these tools have very thin skins.

But I can provide guidance. First, look for tools that focus on the platform you primarily support. If you are primarily a Mac shop, look at the Mac support in software; if you are more a Windows shop and adding Mac as a snap-on, look for good, deep integration with Windows installers. Even better, there are actually tools out there that focus on the vertical markets you might be supporting and those are often the best as they have logic built in that will save you time and money when working with customers in that market.

The main goal of a PSA or MSA solution is to save you on labor costs, while providing additional value to your hard-earned customers. If you can proactively fix a problem before the person using a device-experiences some kind of work stoppage, then you've earned that support contract. A little follow through goes a long way; without making a big deal of things, communicate that to customers, so they understand the value of the services you provide.

Remote Management and Monitoring (RMM) is a tool that allows you to remotely manage devices. A good RMM tool will, as with many things, allow you to do multiple things. One of my favorite is just reaching in and taking control of a desktop to troubleshoot. While you want face time with customers, you also want to control costs and deliver faster outcomes for your customers; therefore, RMM is critical to efficiency by keeping butts in chairs and out of cars.

BDR Software

BDR stands for Backup and Disaster Recovery. This type of software is considered by many to be an add-on to base offerings. But it's important to consider that nothing will get you fired faster than losing data. Explaining why data was lost and isolating whether it was internal IT, end user, or your organization that caused data loss is irrelevant.

The perception when it comes to lost data is that your consulting firm should have kept that from happening. Beyond data loss, BDR software provides you with a number of additional options when it comes to streamlining your troubleshooting and device upgrade/replacement programs. You can bundle BDR into your offering; however, that causes your base price to seem higher. Either way, even if you run a BDR offering at a very slim margin, the more you can assume that devices are backed up (which means you need most recent completed backup as part of your device management software), the more flexible you can be. Beyond the need for comprehensive BDR, there are other points when it comes to RMM, PSA, and MSA software as well, which we will cover in the next section.

Some RMM, PSA, and MSA Solutions to Consider

At this point (or at some point if you haven't started), you're probably telling most of your customers to run their business based on software. Accounting, CRM, Point of Sale, ERP, and other solutions help to keep labor costs down and allow businesses to be nimble. Your business is no different. In the beginning, if it's just you, you might be able to get by with a spreadsheet and a Quicken account. As you grow that will no longer be the case.

As such, there are a number of tools that you should look at, including the following solutions that can at least be used to manage Apple devices, even if they don't provide a ton of value out of the box:

- Continuum
- Autotask
- Kaseya
- Solarwinds MSP
- Connectwise
- N-Central
- Pulseway
- NinjaRMM
- LogicMonitor
- ManageEngine
- Cloud Management Suite
- Atera
- CENTREL

- Loom Systems
- Auvik Networks
- Trend Micro
- mspStack
- Acronis
- HelpSystems
- ECi Software Solutions
- Opsview
- OptiTune
- Spiceworks MSP
- Avast Managed Workplace RMM
- Unigma
- Zenith Infotech
- packetTrap
- BeAnywhere
- LogMeIn Central
- AVG Cloudcare
- Comodo One RMM
- Panorama9
- Auvik MSP Edition
- gfiMax
- HarmonyPSA

Be diligent about your selection. Keep in mind that when you're small, switching tools will be a pain, but doable. As you grow, it becomes more and more challenging given the number of devices you might have to touch, and you lose a lot of historical data when you do so. So be diligent about your tool selection. While some may appear expensive in the beginning, you'll likely notice the real value chain that they bring as you grow.

Consider the following attributes when you're building a toolchain:

- What is the cost of the tool vs the value derived from the tool?
- Are all of your billing types supported?
- Does the tool integrate with other device management solutions?
- Does the tool provide a clear and easily explainable path from ticket creation to ticket completion to accounts receivable to timecard keeping for your staff?
- Does the tool allow for a skills matrix, so that as you grow you aren't reliant on a dispatcher who knows each skillset in your organization to route tickets?
- Does the tool automate communications with customers?
- Can you custom script the tool in case there are necessary workflows not otherwise supported?
- Can you buy one tool instead of three?
- If you outgrow the tool, what are your other options and how portable is the data to those other options?
- Will the tool require professional services to get started?

- How is the support organization of the company that makes the tool?
- Do you actually like using the tool?

There are so many other questions, but these should get you started on the right path. Customers should be able to create a ticket online, see the status of that ticket online, see the status of their fleet online, get a message that the ticket was closed, rate your performance on the ticket, see their bill for the work, and pay their bill or change their billing information. And chances are, especially when it comes to Apple, that one tool isn't going to allow you to do all that. But with some good work, you can string together a fully automatable solution.

Tip Once you select a tool, also consider what the future will be for that tool!

You should have a goal to outgrow any MSP solution you purchase. These tools are great for growing and smaller businesses, but once you get to a certain point, none will be able to keep up with your growing needs. In the beginning, if you have too much scripting and other custom workflows that don't make sense using any of these tools, your business logic is probably broken. But as you grow, if you stick to their specific workflows, you'll likely end up either being a commodity, or your labor costs will start to skyrocket. At this point, it's worth bringing in a business advisor, or seeking the counsel of someone who's gone through similar growing pains.

Note All of the PSA and MSA tools out there are going to suck, unless you bend your business logic to conform to theirs. And even then they may suck. I am sorry to tell you that the selection process should assume a little bit of sucktitude. But building your own from scratch should be a business model where you sell your tool, if you indeed think you can do things better than everyone else (and want the chance to prove yourself right).

The App-Based Economy

Rarely will a single software title automate an entire organization; you might have to string together multiple software packages in order to realize the full benefits of any given tool. And once you do, you're bound to find that you want to automate more and more. The quote I used to use is "getting replaced with a small shell script means a promotion!"

So what tools should you look at here (and maybe even come up with a service you can sell to your customers). A couple of solutions stand out above the rest:

- IFTTT (short for If This Then That) is a consumer-focused tool that was built to allow for simple, human-readable automations. IFTTT can easily be used to link services like Nest, Google Apps, and other common cloud services. The great thing about IFTTT is that I see a lot of value in the ability for people to build their own automations. The problem with that is it can take you awhile to sort through overlapping and poorly built automations to find the ones that actually do what you want reliably. But it's free, so there's that.

- Workato is a tool that can be used to link a number of more professional-level cloud services together. I strongly recommend you look at all of the supported workflows in Workato for all tools you use. You might see something that looks innocuous at first but turns out to spark an innovative if not revolutionary workflow that saves you time or ends up delighting your customers in ways you might not have ever thought of otherwise.
- Workflow is so awesome that it was recently purchased by Apple. Similar in that it links various tools that have APIs, the only reason Workflow isn't my go-to is that I have concerns about the longevity of their technology, given that Apple is famously not API-friendly in their approach to allowing access to their online services.

And new tools are coming out every day. In a micro-services and API-first oriented world, the real value of many solutions is their interoperability. Most vendors want to be a framework and not focus on that interoperability, so the market of tools that glue other tools together is exploding. Some other solutions to consider include Zapier, AutomationFuel, Conexio, Automate.ioo, Integromat, Flow XO Integrations, Microsoft Flow, OneSaas, Flashnode, and Built.io.

Note The automation available in the above tools is just a start. New things pop up in those tools every day. I recommend checking out the list routinely (maybe over your morning coffee once a month).

In the previous chapter, we discussed Accounting software. Don't forget about that. In the beginning, most organizations will use an App or a web app to bill customers manually. But don't forget that while you can have an app to bill customers manually, the more billing you do, the more time-consuming doing so will become. That's why there are a number of ways to integrate your billing with your task management, ticket management, and other workflows. Tools like Freshbooks and Freshdesk have then gone the extra mile to build Freshservice, so you can roll many of your tools into one really good tool.

If you can simplify your business logic to match one of these more integrated solutions, you're likely to pull your hair out less when trying to troubleshoot why all these house-of-cards style workflows don't always work properly.

Automation Services

Be careful. All of this automation that we've discussed up to now in this chapter can get really complicated if you aren't careful. If you can't explain how your business works quickly, then there's something wrong. Unless of course, you're doing billions of dollars in contracts.

And don't forget about the human element. In the Further Reading portion of this chapter, I include a book called Enchantment, by Guy Kawasaki. The reason is because when you're cutting your costs by implementing automation, it's important to consider that you are reducing the number of touch points at customers. They may not have any idea that you're doing great things to keep their systems in check. Communication then can be automated in such a way that they see trouble tickets for each issue that you fix, but you'll also want to have routine meetings with customers anyway.

Once you've automated as much as you can, expend time on those customers, just to remind them of how much you love them. This not only helps you retain customers, but also helps you understand their needs more. And most importantly, you might make a few friends along the way.

What to Expect When Building Software

Earlier in this chapter, we looked at out of the box solutions to help you manage devices, manage tickets, manage employees, etc. But you might know more about how you think a business should run than thousands of other organizations. No really, you actually might. Once you've asked yourself if you're sure about that, then you can start to look at building software.

If you've never built software or had software built, it's helpful to note that there are some common truths when it comes to software development (and the people that generally build software). If you decide to go down this road, here are some tips on software projects:

- A project will never have enough people to build all the features you want. Period.
- As a software project nears completion, the amount of work remaining to do rises in proportion to how messy your code is. The more hacks and shortcuts you took, the longer that last 1% will take.
- Sometimes it's easier to make a new version than it is to try to improve and perfect a previous version. Never be so in love with you code that you can't erase it all and rebuild it again.

- Every year you get better at writing code, so end up getting embarrassed by how crappy your code was and how you just want to rewrite all of your projects. Assuming you're actually getting better.
- Less features means fewer defects.
- More developers mean more merge conflicts. Moving to larger teams doesn't necessarily mean a comparable increase in productivity.
- As projects grow, you can't QA or unit test every regression possible. But you have to try!
- The code is never really finished. There are always going to be reasons to withhold this or that. But you have to keep shipping!
- Who cares what methodology you're using, just be deliberate! Kanban, Scrum, Extreme Programming, etc. They're all basically the same. What matters is that the team is on the same page.
- Not nearly enough project managers plan for holidays, vacations, and sick time in their project plans.
- Good developers are hard to find. But wait it out or you might get stuck with someone that just makes the team less cohesive.
- The more high-performing a team the more annoyed team members get about people that aren't amazing.
- Most developers don't start with domain knowledge (or knowledge of the subject they're writing software for). Once developers get domain knowledge, they write better software. And need less specific customer stories!

- Beyond a few minutes a day, meetings have a decidedly negative return on investment.
- There is always tech debt. Always.

You might actually build software for customers. This is a great way to cross-sell additional services into customers and provide more value. The software you build also makes you more and more sticky with customers. And especially when covering a gap to address software not available to the Apple platform, software development can easily end up providing roughly one third of your annual revenue; therefore, if you don't yet have this discipline, think about it long and hard. And read books on that as well!

The Customer Scorecard

Key Performance Indicators (or KPIs) are metrics that make it easier for you to evaluate the health of something at a customer. That something might be the customer's deployment of network equipment, management of Apple devices, use of social media to reach customers, etc. We don't want to hand customers complicated charts. So I've seen companies use precious metals, rockets, comic book characters, and other mechanisms to easily report the health of a customer's environment.

Many a company also calls the way they display KPIs as a health-check. I've seen a number of organizations use the Net Promotor Score, or NPS, as the basis for gauging their health of a company.

Let's look at an example. Let's say you do a survey and you get 1,000 responses. If 100 responses were Detractors, in the 0–6 range and 300 responses were Passives, in the 7-8 range, then that would leave 600 in the Promoters category, or having scores from 9 to 10. We'll go ahead and subtract the Detractors (10%) from the Promoters (60%) for a total of 50.

I'd say you have some work to do, but then I'd probably say that if the score was 10 as well. Anything above a 0 is considered a good score and anything over 70 is world class. I'd give the 50 range an excellent score. If you're only going to look at one thing after you look at the balance in your bank account, look at that. But if you want to go further, I'd recommend taking a bunch of KPIs and putting them into a Balanced Scorecard.

The Balanced Scorecard

The Balanced Scorecard, or BSC for short, is often called a 4x4. The reason for this is that it is four categories that at a glance show how your business is doing, with four supporting attributes for each category. This allows you way more insight than the NPS, and is often easily drilled down into. I first started using these in college and have used them throughout my career. I always start with a financial column.

Financial

Ultimately, every business, or business unit, is judged on a financial outcome. Not including a column with financial metrics is a mistake, no matter what employees or teams may think. Whether the financial column shows good or bad news, the more transparent you can be with the staff, the more they will understand how their performance will impact the performance of the company. I have heard arguments that staff will leave in the lean times. But that's fine; keep in mind that while good employees are one of the hardest things in business to find, loyalty is certainly a big part of being a "good employee".

Let's look at some metrics I like for the financial section of a BSC:

- Contract renewals: Earlier, we mentioned Net Promoter Scores, which is where customers tell you how willing they would be to recommend your company to others. But the thing I like about contract renewals is that this is where customers vote with their pocket book. Having said that, if you have a high renewal and a low NPS, customers likely feel trapped with your company, which is a problem. You can only do crappy work for so long.
- Growth in existing customers: The business needs to grow. Bringing in new customers is important. Keeping customers is also important. Growing business within existing customers is a key metric that shows you how you're doing to nurture the trust in existing customers.
- New customers: The thing about net-new customers is that this tells you how attractive or easy to find you are to your market. This is where you spend on sales and marketing, as well as how you've done building your service product are displayed in your BSC.
- Gross margin: The nice thing about looking at margins is that they cover operational expenses. If you aren't careful, you can easily spend more than customers are worth to obtain and maintain them.

Other metrics I've seen included, which usually address a problem that is time bound at organizations, include accounts receivable and accounts payable. Both of these can be put into a single attribute like cash flow, but this is where I usually draw the line around what I want to share with employees, as it's often too much information. Yes, transparency is good, but there are certainly places that you have to draw the line (I also include salaries in this category – even though salary transparency is an increasingly important topic and not consistent amongst international organizations).

Note I like the concept of salary transparency because it has such a great impact on diversity, leveling, etc. If it were up to me, overnight, every company in the world might just publish every salary on the interwebs. But it's not. And unless everyone does this, then it's hard to say what might happen. But whatever the impact to your staff, I'm behind ya', if you choose to do it, provided of course that your salary is one of them!

Customer

Financial is the easiest big-picture item on a scorecard. But in my experience the item likely to drive future movements of that entire category of the scorecard is customer happiness. What is happiness? Usually it's your organization doing good work, providing value, communicating well, and being consistent in the delivery of your services. Let's look at some of the components I like to include in the customer section of balanced scorecards.

- Net Promoter Score (NPS): The NPS is described in the previous section, but surmise it to say that this is an industry standard and one of the most critical metrics that I believe all organizations should track.
- CSAT: Customer satisfaction, like NPS, is a simple score. Here, you ask customers to rate your performance. My preference is when users close a ticket. This type of feature is built into most service desk solutions at this point and provides customers with the ability to rate your performance on the fly.

- Median Time to Close (MTTC) tickets: How long, on average, does it take you to close tickets. Make sure to break that down categorically, given that each might have a different Service Level Agreement (SLA). Given that times change, and that specific customers can basically buy better SLAs, one way I like to do this is to simply look at how frequently you meet the SLA. For example, if you opened 390 tickets in June, what percentage were assigned and then closed on time?
- End User Ratings: This is tricky. Most companies either survey end users or they survey their contact at a customer (this tends to align with the size of the fleet of devices being supported). Have the end users and your customer contacts rate your performance.

Customers should be happy. But you need to run an efficient organization. In support of this, we'll look at internal processes in the next section of the Balanced Scorecard.

Internal Processes

Internal processes are there to provide that consistency factor to customers, control costs, and give you the ability to keep taking on new customers with a wider and wider profit margin as you grow, while maintaining a consistent high-quality service. Some process attributes I like to look at include the following:

- Time to Patch: How long between the time a piece of *supported* software is released until the time it shows up on a computer. This can be tough. I mean, what happens if the software is buggy and you decide not to deploy it across the fleet of computers you manage?

- Calls Due to Patches: I've never seen anyone else track this, so I might just be crazy, but to me, the only way to properly reduce the amount of time to patch systems is to automate that process. And if you're automating it, you need to reduce the impact of said automation on your customers. Tracking the impact of that automation is then critical to tracking the effectiveness of your efforts

- Tickets closed from automation (not included in MTTC): I started including this a few years ago. The old t-shirt that says "I will replace you with a very small shell script" isn't exactly the point. The point is to be able to free intelligent and driven staff from having to perform menial tasks. For every one of those tasks that can be completed automatically, there is time for your team to take on other tickets, or better, to innovate the business.

- Percentage of Tickets Closed Remotely: Similar to closing tickets with automation, you want to keep butts in chairs. Travel time is expensive and stressful. Tools like LogMeIn, TeamViewer, PCAnywhere, and Bomgar help you access systems remotely. Customers and staff might push back on how much you want to use these tools. Handle those objections, as the higher this number gets, the more profitable your organization can be, long-term.

I then always save something about the long-term performance of the company for the end. Additionally, I've seen people include things that are purely operational like the number of tickets closed within a given amount of time, the amount of labor spent to close tickets, the number of total tickets opened (usually for managed services customers), how quickly mileage or expense reports are turned in, and other very short-term issues that good systems will help you resolve instead of constantly sweating the small things.

Learning & Growth

Don't just be concerned about the short-term and financial performance of your company. Think about the long-term potential of the company and the employees as well. This will make you a great place to work.

- Roadmap Completion: In a software development company, the roadmap lays out the features you want to ship at your company. But I like to use the term roadmap at a services company. Basically, the roadmap is where you want your company to be going. This is likely the best long-term indicator that you are being deliberate and not just following where the business is taking you (for better or worse). I like to build a roadmap that includes developing new services (e.g. BDR, antivirus, CRM) and tracking the readiness, sales effectiveness, and time it takes to be able to deliver those services. I also like to put automation efforts and the implementation of centralized ticketing and device management systems on my roadmaps.
- Resource Allocation: A lot of employees are most happy when they're busy. But you should limit your expectations and make sure teams feel comfortable having time to learn. I like to set a target resource allocation. And when you're going above that, it's time to hire. When you're going below that, it's time to get creative with new client acquisition.

- Employee Satisfaction: Do your employees like where they work? What do they like about it? Culture is one of the most important aspects of why people stay at a given organization, but also shows you how engaged and therefore effective your staff is. As you might have guessed by now, I love surveys. So do the good people at Culture Amp (`http://www.cultureamp.com`). The thing I like about using a tool like Culture Amp instead of trying to make up my own metrics is that, well, they're the experts in quantifying Employee Engagement, Employee Experience, and Employee Effectiveness.
- Learning Plan Completion: This is all about the staff. Never forget that a consultancy is a services business, and the most valuable part of a services business is usually the people who deliver those services. Usually, employees who are learning are happy employees. The reason we track resource allocation is to make sure we're well staffed. Building learning plans help to steer your team in the right direction. Tracking their progress on a learning plan tracks the effectiveness of that time, while providing flexibility for each team member to learn the way they need to learn, rather than how you think they should be learning.

Everything is possible. So if you want all of these in a webpage that you can display on the AppleTV in the office, then you can make that happen. It might take a lot of work to pull off, and so if you have a little bit of manual data entry or automation around putting metrics into a database then so be it. It will be worth it.

One final point on Scorecards. Customers should be able to see the BSC, or at least the elements of the BSC that are customer-facing, when possible. Categories that have made sense to share with customers in the past include Learning & Growth, Customer, and Internal Processes (or at least parts of those categories). In my attempts to build a link between various systems, I've frequently had to switch to use an API pull from disparate systems (e.g. Autotask, QuickBooks, and Jamf) into a centralized database. Despite lofty promises from people in sales, I have had vendors claim they can get me pretty dashboards automagically, but I've yet to see something that touches every system I use without plenty of customization.

Testing

Don't ever believe anyone in sales. Especially if I'm on the sales call. Despite the best possible intentions, you may be lied to. OK, not lied to, but the answer might not be as informed about the exact thing you're asking about as it could be. Or you might hear what you want to hear. Point is, you need to see things with your own eyes to avoid any potential miscommunication. Don't take the word of a systems engineer, seller, or even the actual developer of a tool. Before you commit to a purchase, you need to see things work the way you want them to work. Otherwise the tool is just vaporware. This is compounded when you're using a hodgepodge of tools to build a comprehensive solution, with defined workflows.

So how should you go about testing these complicated workflows? Once you've come up with a scenario you can deal with, think about taking it through the entire end-to-end process. Build a list of must-have features, a list of features you can build, and a list of those you cannot live without. Then build a testing matrix that includes each step in a series of tasks. Then try to configure all the parts of your deployment.

Once your deployment is working, you're not going to want to mess with it all that much. But you'll have to. Software updates will come, new features will force new automations, and every time you do something, you'll want to repeat all your tests. Therefore, I recommend having a full testing environment that is as identical as possible to your production environment.

Techie Bits

The next few pages of this book include a survey of tools that are going to make using Apple devices easier, more automatable, and more cost effective. These are the tools technicians, devops, and help desks are going to use, as well as a few lines of business tools that might provide good opportunities to sell additional services into customers.

In order to remain vendor agnostic I am trying to list solutions in alphabetical order by category. A brief explanation of each category, with categories of tools listed, follows:

- **Antivirus**: Solutions for scanning Macs for viruses and other malware.
- **Automation Tools**: Scripty tools used to automate management on the Mac
- **Backup**: I highly recommend bundling or reselling some form of backup service to your customers, whether home, small business, or large enterprises. The flexibility to restore a device from a backup when needed is one of the most important things to keep costs at a manageable level and put devices back into the hands of customers in an appropriate time frame.
- **CRM**: Mac-friendly tools used to track contacts and communications with those contacts.

- **Collaboration Suites**: Once upon a time, a Mac server was great for shared calendars, contacts, and email. But most businesses aren't going to want anything to do with the repercussions of potential downtime that can happen on a mail server. Nothing will get your hard-earned customers to fire you faster than an email outage. So while the Mac server is listed, consider cloud options, for optimal customer retention.
- **DEP Splash Screens and Help Menus**: Tools that make the DEP and service desk process more user friendly by providing more information to users.
- **Development Tools, IDEs and Text Editors**: Tools used when building scripts, writing and debugging software, and manipulating text.
- **Digital Signage and Kiosks**: I put these in here because I know a lot of organizations that have made a great little additional revenue stream by reselling or deploying these tools on behalf of their customers. I have friends that have also created managed service offerings just around these tools. Overall, it's a possible new revenue stream and as an added bonus, you'll likely have an NFR (or Not For Resale copy of the software) so you can have pretty cool signage in your office (if you're into that kind of thing).
- **Directory Services**: Tools that provide primarily on-premises access to a shared directory of services and allow for single-sign on to those services.
- **File Sharing**: Mac-centric cloud and on premises tools to share and synchronize files.

- **Identity Management**: Providers of predominantly SAML based Single-Sign On solutions that federate security for Apple devices to access web-based services.
- **Imaging and Configuration Tools**: Tools used to place devices into a given state or create that state. This includes traditional Macs, including tools, as well as those built for iOS.
- **Line of Business**: Traditionally Mac-focused solutions that automate various business functions.
- **Log Collection and Analysis**: Centralized logging has been a necessity for large, growing fleets of devices. Modern tools can store large amounts of logs from client computers and allow fast and complex searching so you can triangulate issues quickly and effectively. As an added benefit, you can also centralize logs for network appliances, allowing you to isolate the source of issues across an entire ecosystem of devices.
- **Management Suites**: Tools used to manage settings on Apple Devices. Each is marked as MDM, Agent-based, or both.
- **Print Servers**: Servers that either provide access to printers or allow for more granular printing features, such as cost accounting.
- **Remote Control and Management**: These tools allow you to take control of the screen, keyboard, and mouse of devices. I can't tell you which are the best. But I can tell you that I want my remote control solutions to be cross-platform, to be cloud-based, to prompt users for

acceptance of the remote control session, and to audit connections so I know who is taking over what devices.

- **Print Servers**: I've always hated printers. Whether the old Fiery print services, a common LPR-based printer, or one of the shared printing services, I still can't stand managing printers. Printers jam, they break, the drivers seem to be rife with problems for every other operating system update, printers are often connected to via ad-hoc networks (like Bonjour), and you often need special software to access the cool features. All-in-all, printers suck, but these tools might make them just a tad bit easier to use, or if not, help to account for who is using them so your customers can bill their departments back as much as possible.
- **Point of Sale (PoS)**: Similar to digital signage, but you might also operate a storefront or track customer data in one of these solutions.
- **Remote Management**: Tools used to take control of the screen of an Apple device.
- **Security Tools**: Tools used to manage firewalls, filevault, and perform other tasks required to secure Macs, based on the security posture of a given organization.
- **Service Desk Tools**: These tools are for ticketing and ticket management. It's always great if you can pick one that actually integrates with both your billing solution and the various other techie bits you choose to use.

- **Software Packaging and Package Management**: Tools for normalizing software for mass distribution on Apple platforms.
- **Storage**: Apple-focused solutions for sharing files.
- **Troubleshooting, Repair, and Service Tools**: Tools used to fix logical problems with hard drives, check hardware for issues, repair various system problems, or just clean up a Mac.
- **Virtualization and Emulation**: Not all software runs on a Mac. Customers will have certain tasks that may require a Windows machine. You can use Citrix or a Microsoft Terminal Server to provide for that potential requirement. Or, especially if users need data from their Windows apps when offline, you can use a local virtualization tool.

Antivirus

- **AVG**: Basic antivirus and spyware detection and remediation.
- **Avast**: Centralized antivirus with a cloud console for tracking incidents and device status.
- **Avira**: Antivirus and a browser extension. Avira Connect allows you to view device status online.
- **BitDefender**: Antivirus and malware managed from a central console.
- **CarbonBlack**: Antivirus and Application Control.

- **Cylance**: Ransomware, advanced threats, fileless malware and malicious documents in addition to standard antivirus.
- **Kaspersky**: Antivirus with a centralized cloud dashboard to track device status.
- **Malware Bytes**: Antivirus and malware managed from a central console.
- **McAfee Endpoint Security**: Antivirus and advanced threat management with a centralized server to track devices.
- **Sophos**: Antivirus and malware managed from a central console.
- **Symantec Mobile Device Management**: Antivirus and malware managed from a central console.
- **Trend Micro Endpoint Security**: Application whitelisting, antivirus, ransomware protection in a centralized console.
- **Wandera**: Malicious hot-spot monitoring, jailbreak detection, web gateway for mobile threat detection that integrates with common MDM solutions.

Automation Tools

- **AutoCasperNBI**: Automates the creation of NetBoot Images (read: NBI's) for use with Casper Imaging.
- **AutoDMG**: Takes a macOS installer (10.10 or newer) and builds a system image suitable for deployment with Imagr, DeployStudio, LANrev, Jamf Pro, and other asr, or Apple Systems Restore-based imaging tools.

- **AutoNBI**: Automates the build and customization of Apple NetInstall Images.
- **Dockutil**: Command line tool for managing dock items.
- **Homebrew**: Package manager for macOS.
- **Cakebrew**: provides a pretty GUI for Homebrew.
- **Jamjar**: Synergises jamf, autopkg & munki into an aggregated convergence that cherry-picks functionality from each product's core competency to create an innovative, scalable, & modular update framework.
- **MacPorts**: An open-source community initiative to design an easy-to-use system for compiling, installing, and upgrading either command-line, X11, or Aqua based open-source software on Macs.
- **Precache**: Programmatically caches Mac and iOS updates rather than waiting for a device to initiate caching on a local caching server.
- **Outset**: Automatically processes packages, profiles, and scripts during the boot sequence, user logins, or on demand.

Backup

- **Acronis**: Centrally managed backups with image-based restores.
- **Archiware**: Centrally managed backups to disk and tape with a variety of agents for backing up common Apple requirements, such as Xsan.
- **Arq**: One-time fee cloud-based backups and unlimited storage.

- **Backblaze**: Unlimited continuous backup with a 30 day rollback feature.
- **Carbon Copy Cloner**: File or disk-based cloning of files for macOS.
- **Carbonite**: SaaS or local-server based backups of Mac clients.
- **Crashplan**: Backup to cloud and local storage with a great deduplication engine.
- **Datto**: Local and cloud backup and restore, as well as cloud failover for various services.
- **Druva**: Backup for local computers as well as some backup for cloud services.
- **Quest Backup (formerly Netvault)**: Can backup Mac clients and Xsan volumes to a centralized tape or disk-based backup server.
- **SuperDuper!**: Duplicates the contents of volumes to other disks.
- **Time Machine**: Built-in backup tool for macOS.

Collaboration Suites and File Sharing

- **Atlassian**: Development oriented suite including wiki (Confluence), issue tracking (Jira), messaging (HipChat), and other tools.
- **Box**: File sharing in the cloud.
- **Dropbox**: File sharing in the cloud.

- **Egnyte**: Caches assets from popular cloud-based services so they're accessible faster on networks where they're frequently accessed.
- **G Suite**: Shared Mail, Contacts, Calendars. Groupware, accessible from the built-in Apple tools, Microsoft Outlook, and through the web.
- **Kerio Connect**: Shared Mail, Contacts, Calendars. Groupware, accessible from the built-in Apple tools, Microsoft Outlook, and through the web.
- **Office 365**: Shared Mail, Contacts, Calendars. Groupware, accessible from the built-in Apple tools, Microsoft Outlook, and through the web.

CRM

- **Daylite**: Mac tool for managing contacts and communications with those contacts.
- **Hike**: Mac tool for managing contacts and communications with those contacts.
- **GroCRM**: iOS tool for managing contacts and communications with those contacts.

DEP Splash Screens and Help Menus

- **ADEPT**: Adds a splash screen for DEP enrollments so users can see what is happening on their devices.
- **DEPNotify**: Adds a splash screen for DEP enrollments so users can see what is happening on their devices.

- **HelloIT**: Customizable help menu so users can get information about their systems or IT support.
- **MacDNA**: Customizable help menu so users can get information about their systems or IT support.
- **SplashBuddy**: Adds a splash screen for DEP enrollments so users can see what is happening on their devices.

Development Tools, IDEs, and Text Manipulators

- **aText**: Replaces abbreviations with frequently used phrases you define.
- **Atom**: A modern text editor with bells and whistles that make it work like an IDE for common scripting languages.
- **BBEdit**: A modern text editor with bells and whistles that make it work like an IDE for common scripting languages.
- **Charles Proxy**: A proxy tool that can be used to inspect traffic so you can programmatically reproduce the traffic or reverse engineer what is happening when trying to solve issues or build tools.
- **CocoaDialog**: Create better dialog boxes than with traditional tools like AppleScript.
- **Coda**: An IDE and a modern text editor with bells and whistles that make it work like an IDE for common scripting languages.
- **Dash**: Offline access to 150+ API documentation sets.

- **Docker**: Containerization tool.
- **FileMaker**: Rapid application development software from Apple.
- **git**: Code versioning, merging, and tracking - and with github, a repository to put code into and share code.
- **Hopper Disassembler**: Disassemble binaries as part of reverse engineering and security testing.
- **Microsoft Visual Studio**: An IDE for a variety of languages.
- **MySQL Workbench**: Create and edit MySQL databases and use to build complex queries.
- **Navicat Essentials**: Create and edit MySQL databases and use to build complex queries.
- **Pashua**: Creating native Aqua dialogs from programming languages that have none or only limited support for graphic user interfaces on Mac OS X, such as AppleScript, Bash scripts, Perl, PHP, Python, and Ruby.
- **Platypus**: creates native Mac OS X applications from interpreted scripts such as shell scripts or Perl, Ruby and Python programs.
- **Script Debugger**: Tools like a dictionary explorer and more IDE-esque features for building AppleScript applications.
- **SequelPro**: Create and edit MySQL databases and use to build complex queries.
- **Snippets Manager**: Collect and organize code snippets

- **SourceTree**: GUI tool for Git and Github.
- **SublimeText**: A modern text editor with bells and whistles that make it work like an IDE for common scripting languages.
- **TextExpander**: Replaces abbreviations with frequently used phrases you define.
- **TextWrangler**: A modern text editor with bells and whistles that make it work like an IDE for common scripting languages.
- **Tower**: A modern text editor with bells and whistles that make it work like an IDE for common scripting languages.
- **VisualJSON**: Simple JSON pretty-viewer for the Mac.
- **Xcode**: Apple tool for writing apps and scripts in common languages.

Digital Signage and Kiosks

- **Carousel Digital Signage**: Run Digital Signage from an AppleTV.
- **Kiosk Pro**: Turn any iPad into a single-user kiosk tool, manageable via an API (e.g. with a Jamf Pro integration).
- **Risevision**: Run Digital Signage from a Mac.

Directory Services and Authentication Tools

- **Apple Enterprise Connect**: Tool sold through Apple that connects to Active Directory environments without binding to Active Directory.
- **AdmitMac**: Adds support for fringe Active Directory requirements.
- **JumpCloud**: Run your directory service in the cloud.
- **LDAP**: Open source directory service.
- **macOS Server Open Directory**: Directory service installed in macOS Server that is based on OpenLDAP.
- **Microsoft Active Directory**: Centralized directory service from Microsoft.
- **Nomad**: Connects clients to Active Directory environments without binding to Active Directory. And has some other nifty features.

Identity Management

- **Centrify**: Provide federated login across common web services and other SAML-capable solutions, as well as resolve common issues with Active Directory. Also has an integrated profile management tool for compliance.
- **Duo Mobile**: Additional options in the realm of secure identity, with lots of great research going on in the Apple space.
- **LastPass Enterprise**: Provide federated login across common web services and other SAML-capable solutions

- **Microsoft Azure Active Directory**: Active Directory with Azure in the cloud.
- **Okta**: Provide federated login across common web services and other SAML-capable solutions
- **OneLogin**: Provide federated login across common web services and other SAML-capable solutions
- **Ping Identity**: Provide federated login across common web services and other SAML-capable solutions

Imaging and Configuration Tools

- **Apple Configurator**: Configure iOS and tvOS devices en-masse, automate MDM enrollment, and distribute data.
- **Blast Image Config**: Will no longer be developed, given the state of device imaging, but allows admins to quickly restore and configure a Macintosh back to a known state (10.12.2 and below)
- **createOSXInstallPackage**: create an installer package from an "Install OS X.app" or an InstallESD.dmg. (10.12.4 and below)
- **Deep Freeze**: Freeze the state of a Mac.
- **DeployStudio**: Free imaging server for Macs.
- **Google Restor**: Image macOS computers from a single source. It is an application intended to be run interactively on a machine.
- **Ground Control**: Mass deploy (and enroll) iOS devices.

- **Imagr**: Replaces tools such as DeployStudio for many organisations without the requirement of needing to be run on OS X servers.
- **libimobiledevice**: Suite of tools to configure, inspect, wipe, etc for iOS devices.
- **WinClone**: Create windows images for deployment onto Macs.

Log Collection and Analysis

- **Elastic Search**: Open Source, very fast log analysis.
- **RobotCloud Dashboard**: Provides more granular and intuitive visibility into devices managed by Jamf Pro.
- **Splunk**: Big data log analysis.
- **Tableau**: Big data analysis.
- **Watchman Monitoring**: Mac focused monitoring agents that inspects common third party tools.
- **Zentral**: Open source, built on ElasticSearch, but with hooks into lots of other tools and custom recipes for Mac logs.

Management Suites

- **Addigy**: Agent and MDM-based
- **AirWatch**: MDM and Agent-based
- **Altiris**: Agent-based
- **Apple Profile Manager**: MDM

- **BigFix**: Agent-based
- **Chef**: Agent-based
- **ConnectWise**: Limited agent-based Mac management focused on MSPs
- **FileWave**: MDM and Agent-based
- **Fleetsmith**: Agent and MDM-based
- **IBM MaaS360**: MDM
- **Ivanti**: MDM and Agent-based
- **Jamf Now**: Small business focused MDM
- **Jamf Pro (formerly Casper Suite)**: MDM and Agent-based
- **KACE**: Agent-based
- **Kaseya**: Agent-based Mac management for Managed Service Providers
- **Labtech**: Agent-based
- **LanRev**: MDM and Agent-based (currently being retired)
- **Lightspeed Mobile Manager**: MDM
- **Meraki Systems Manager**: MDM
- **microMDM**: Open source MDM
- **Microsoft Intune**: (MDM) & **SCCM**: (Agent-based)
- **Manage Engine**: Agent-based
- **Mobile Guardian**: MDM
- **MobileIron**: MDM

- **Mosyle**: MDM
- **Munki**: Agent-based
- **Parallels Mac Management for SCCM**: Agent-based SCCM plug-in for Macs
- **Profile Manager (macOS Server)**: MDM
- **Puppet**: Agent-based
- **Sal**: Agent-based SaaS version of Munki, Puppet, Django & SB Admin 2.
- **SAP MobileSecure**: MDM with integrations to other SAP products.
- **SimpleMDM**: MDM
- **Solarwinds MSP**: Agent-based with integrated backup and ticketing for Managed Service Providers.
- **Sophos**: MDM
- **Tabpilot**: MDM
- **Zuludesk**: MDM with a parent app

Misc

- **Jamf NetSUS**: Reposado packaged up for Jamf servers.
- **InfineaIQ**: Peripheral management software.
- **ITGlue**: Store credentials and information about common IT tools in a SaaS-based database.
- **Reposado**: An open source interpretation of the Apple Software Update Server.

- **Sassafras Keyserver**: Centralized software license management server.
- **ipaSign**: Programmatically resign ipa files with a new key.

Point of Sale

- **Checkout**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.
- **Lightspeed**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.
- **Paygo**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.
- **Posim**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.
- **Shopkeep**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.
- **SquareUp**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.
- **Vend**: Point of sale solution that can run on Apple devices.

Print Servers

- **Papercut**: Printer cost accounting for the Mac.
- **Printopia**: Allows for better printing from iOS devices.

Remote Management

- **Apple Remote Desktop**: Apple tool for remotely controlling other Macs, sending packages to Macs, and running scripts on Macs over a LAN or directly to an IP address.
- **Bomgar**: Appliance that allows for cross-platform remote control of devices.
- **CoRD**: RDP client.
- **LogMeIn**: Cross-platform remote control utility.
- **GoToMyPC**: Cross-platform remote control utility.
- **Remote Desktop**: The official RDP client for the Mac.
- **Remotix**: RDP and VNC server with lots of bells and whistles.
- **TeamViewer**: Cross-platform remote control utility.

Security Tools

- **Cauliflower Vest**: Store FileVault keys on a centralized server.
- **Crypt**: FileVault 2 Escrow solution.
- **Digital Guardian**: Data Loss Prevention.
- **Google Santa**: Binary blacklisting and whitelisting for the Mac.
- **iOS Location Scraper**: Dump the contents of the location database files on iOS and macOS.

- **iOS Frequent Location Scraper**: Dump the contents of the StateModel#.archive files located in /private/var/mobile/Library/Caches/com.apple.routined/
- **Little Snitch**: Provides information about what is accessing network resources and where those resources are.
- **Objective-See**: 's KnockKnock, Task Explorer, BlockBlock, RansomWhere?, Oversight, and KextViewr, tools for finding more information about ports and services running on machines.
- **Osquery**: Query for information on Macs in a live, granular search.
- **Portecle**: Create and manage keystores, keys, certificates, certificate requests, and certificate revocation lists.
- **PowerBroker**: Enable standard users on a Mac to perform administrative tasks without entering elevated credentials.
- **Prey**: Track Mac and iOS devices if they're stolen.

Service Desk Tools

- **Freshdesk**: Case/ticket management that allows for automatic billing via Freshbooks.
- **Salesforce Cases**: Case/ticket management that automatically integrates with SalesforceCRM.
- **ServiceNow**: Case/ticket management with an expansive marketplace for integrations.

- **Webhelpdesk**: Case/ticket management.
- **Zendesk**: Case/ticket management with an expansive marketplace for integrations.

Software Packaging and Package Management

- **Autopkg**: Automate the creation of Mac software distribution packages using recipes.
- **CreateUserPkg**: Creates packages that create local user accounts when installed. (10.12 and below).
- **JSSImporter**: Connects Autopkg to Jamf Pro.
- **Iceberg**: Create Mac software distribution packages.
- **InstallApplication**: Dynamically download packages for use with MDM's `InstallApplication`.
- **Jamf Composer**: Create Mac software distribution packages.
- **Luggage**: Open Source project to create a wrapper that makes pkgs for Macs so you can have peer review of a package by examining the diffs between versions of a Makefile.
- **Munkipkg**: A simple tool for building packages in a consistent, repeatable manner from source files and scripts in a project directory.
- **Pacifist**: A shareware application that opens macOS .pkg package files, .dmg disk images, and .zip, .tar, .tar.gz, .tar.bz2, and .xar archives and allows you to extract individual files and folders out of them.

- **Payload Free Package Creator**: An Automator application that uses AppleScript, shell scripting and pkgbuild behind the scenes to create payload-free packages.
- **QuickPkg**: Create Mac software distribution packages.
- **Simple Package Creator**: Create Mac software distribution packages.
- **Suspicious Package**: View the contents of Mac software distribution packages.
- **Whitebox Packages**: Create Mac software distribution packages.

Storage

- **Netatalk**: Better AFP connectivity to Windows and other storage platforms from a Mac.
- **Promise**: Apple-vetted direct attached storage (DAS), storage area networking (SAN), etc.
- **Synology**: Storage appliances tailored to working with the Mac.
- **Xsan**: The built-in Apple SAN filesystem.

Troubleshooting, Repair, and Service Tools

- **AppCleaner**: Clean up unneeded files on a Mac.
- **AppleJack**: Repair disks/permissions and cleans cache/swap files from single user mode when a Mac can't fully boot.

- **Bartender**: Manage items in the menu bar on a Mac.
- **CleanMyDrive**: Drag-and-drop files directly to any drive, check disk stats, and automatically clean hidden junk from external drives.
- **Data Rescue**: Data recovery tool for Mac.
- **Disk Doctor**: Repairs logical drives and cleans up unneeded files.
- **DiskWarrior**: Repair logical volume corruption on Macs.
- **Drive Genius**: Automates monitoring for hard drive errors, finds duplicate files, allows for repartition of volumes, clones volumes, performs secure erase and defragmentation.
- **Disk Inventory X**: Visual representation of what's on a logical volume in macOS.
- **EasyFind**: Find files, folders, or contents in any file without indexing through Spotlight.
- **iStumbler**: Wireless discovery tool for Mac that can locate Wi-Fi networks, Bluetooth devices, Bonjour services, and perform spectrum analysis.
- **GeekTool**: Put script output and logs directly on the desktop of a Mac.
- **Google PlanB**: Remediate Macs that fall out of a given state by performing a secure download of disk images and then putting the device into a management platform.
- **GrandPerspective**: Visual representation of what's on a logical volume in macOS.

- **Hardware Monitor**: Read hardware sensor information on a Mac.
- **Lingon**: Create, manage, and delete LaunchAgents and LaunchDaemons on macOS.
- **Memtest OS X**: Test each RAM module in a Mac.
- **nMap**: Advanced port scanning, network mapping, and network troubleshooting.
- **Peak Hour**: Network performance, quality and usage monitoring.
- **Omni DiskSweeper**: Find and remove unused files in macOS to conserve and reclaim disk space.
- **OnyX**: Verify the startup disk and structure of system files, run maintenance and cleaning tasks, configure settings(e.g. for the Finder, Dock, Safari), delete caches, and rebuild various databases and indexes.
- **Push Diagnostics**: Test port and host access for APNs Traffic.
- **Stellar Phoenix**: Mac data recovery tool.
- **TechTool Pro**: Drive repair, RAM testing, and data protection.
- **TinkerTool**: Graphical interface for changing preferences on a Mac that would otherwise need to be managed with the defaults command.
- **Xirrus Wi-Fi Inspector**: Search for Wi-Fi network, site surveys, troubleshoot Wi-Fi connectivity issues, locate Wi-Fi devices, and detect rogue Apps.

Virtualization and Emulation

- **Anka veertu**: Run Virtual Machines on a Mac.
- **Citrix**: Publish Windows application sessions that end users connect to from a Mac using standard RDP clients.
- **Parallels**: Run Virtual Machines on a Mac.
- **Microsoft Windows Terminal Server**: Publish Windows sessions that end users connect to from a Mac using standard RDP clients.
- **vFuse**: Script to create a VMware Fusion VM from a DMG that hasn't been booted.
- **VirtualBox**: Run Virtual Machines on a Mac.
- **VMware Fusion**: Run Virtual Machines on a Mac.

Honorable Mention

- **The MacAdmins Slack**: Join a community of 15,000 other Admins charged with managing large fleets of Apple devices.
- **Apple Developer Program**: Sign up for a developer account in order to get access to beta resources and documentation not otherwise available.
- **Your Apple SE or local retail store**: A great resource for finding information!
- Coffee… lots and lots of coffee

Conclusion

While I haven't gone into a ton of detail concerning individual solutions or how they get integrated together, it's worth mentioning that this should act like an assembly line. The more you automate, the more you can get done, the more time you will have to dedicate to providing personalized attention to individual customers, and the more highly scalable your organization can be. This toolchain you create will change over time and require some care and feeding as new updates come along. And the components should become more interchangeable as well.

There are a lot of tools out there. And wading through them to find just the right fit isn't easy. But you can ask around and others will certainly be happy to help you. Test everything, then test it again, then again. And once you feel comfortable, put a limited test in place with customers. And then do that with every new tool or update.

Finally, the hardest thing is future-proofing your deployment. You don't want to do work over and over and over again every single time the technology stack changes. Instead, if you build your stack with the future in mind you'll save yourself a lot of work. Apple has made it clear that the future of Apple management is MDM, so whatever you do, make sure there is a story (even if it's on the roadmap) about MDM management.

Further Reading

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- The Small Business Time Saver: Tools to Automate Your Business Processes, Promote Yourself and Delight Your Customers Online, Andrew McCauley, Heather Porter, Katie Joll, `https://www.amazon.com/Small-Business-Time-Saver-Processes/dp/1514801124`
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CHAPTER 6

Make Friends: Develop Partnerships

You can't get by in this world without friends. Friends in your industry and adjacent industries give you different perspectives and different skillsets and can put you in touch with a lot of different customers. But telling someone to buy something or use a specific service isn't always worth the risk, even if you aren't making commission for the referral to your "friend."

Chapter 2 covered building a portfolio of offerings, including things like products to sell and services to deliver. But in this chapter, we'll look at leveraging partnerships with other organizations to get your company to the next level, starting with the often-forgotten partner, your customers.

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Engaging Customers for Referral Business

Your customers are your most cost-effective way to find new customers. It turns out that doing good work pays off. But every industry is different. You can't always just be vulnerable and ask a customer to refer you to other organizations that might be able to get value from your services. Here are a few delicate strategies you can use to get referrals:

- **Ask**: If you have a good relationship with a customer, then you could, at the end of an engagement or through an e-mail, just ask them to refer you to other customers. It's tough to do so without seeming desperate or really cheesy. But it's possible.
- **Leave behinds**: I've had customers pass on the marketing materials, but they can't do that if you don't leave them with something. Asking if you can leave a few one-sheets with a customer that they could then pass on to someone is another way to increase business from leaves.
- **Compensate for referrals**: If there will be some kind of compensation, the most ethical thing is to compensate the company at which your contacts of customers work. This is a slippery slope and, in some industries, will immediately create distrust (or even be illegal due to various regulations). Proceed with caution.
- **Put a link in the customer's web interface**: If you give your customer a way to look at services online, also give them a little button to refer customers. This is one of the easiest and most passive ways to get referrals.

Next, it's time to turn your attention to the kind of external partners you'd like to engage with. In the next section, we'll look at finding the right kind of partner, which includes finding people to provide complimentary services, subcontract, and potentially just refer business (unilaterally or bilaterally).

Finding the Right Partner

I've gotten e-mails from hundreds, if not thousands, of companies that wanted to partner with organizations I've been a part of. Some represent great deals for me, or the organization I was representing at the time. Others were a bit of a stretch. And the ones that seemed like the best deal at first, turned out to be terrible when we dug into their business.

Keep your specific customers at the front of your mind when selecting a good partner. Ask yourself questions like the following:

- Will my customers get along well with this person or company?
- What goods and services do my customers need?
- When (not if) they have problems with this other vendor, how will I end up getting involved?
- Can the vendor actually deliver the services they say they can?
- Are the costs aligned?
- Will the vendor or I end up accidentally assuming the other's role in the customer's company?
- Should this be a subcontracting arrangement, a bilateral formal business referral, or just someone that I point to?

The most common type of business arrangement for many Apple consultancies is to help a customer find someone to help with their Windows devices. I see this specific one a lot. Maybe just for the two accounting computers, or maybe for the majority of systems that are Windows-based. Let's face it, traditionally, the people that manage Windows systems are just a little different from the typical customer who uses Macs. Find someone you can trust (or three) with your type of customers.

Structuring a Partnership

In most cases, if there's no compensation, I would recommend having three partners for each product or service you need to connect customers to. You can then point to that (e.g., on a web page of your site) and say something like, "I recommend that you contact these three and see who you like dealing with and think matches your business the most."

You don't want to compete with a partner. For example, a router manufacturer might sell directly but deliver no services. If you want to deliver services but not sell their equipment then you might have found a perfect partner if they need someone to bring in that can perform labor, especially for complicated products. But if you want to sell the routers as well, make sure you find out whether or not they sell directly to customers so that you can best understand what might happen if they compete with you on a given deal.

The management at most vendors will want to have a healthy relationship with you. But account teams that cover your geography might want to make commission on selling products. When evaluating partners, also find out whether or not each partner will sell directly once you've registered a deal and, if so, whether or not you can lock in better pricing than their account teams can offer provided you register the deal before their internal staff does.

Who makes a good partner? Obviously, one of the most important aspects of finding a good partner is that your customers don't fire you for making the recommendation, either because the partner stole the customer from you or because they did work that was bad enough for the customer to associate you with that work.

If you pick a bad partner, you risk losing a customer. Trust from a customer is built over time. If your customers have bad experiences with a partner, there is a good chance they may lose trust in you. One way to limit the liability this creates is to not accept money. Instead, you can engage in a bilateral referral agreement. This doesn't always work but is usually referred to as quid pro quo.

Quid Pro Quo

When you find a new partner, they're going to be motivated to send leads to you more if you sell a lot of their product. This relationship can take a few months to mature, so if you are going to build a good relationship then each party should have something to gain: quid pro quo. For example, I once inked a partnership with a new company to resell their routers. It just so happens that within the first month, I sent about a dozen customers to them. Their response was to send a bunch back my way. These were net-new customers with a bunch of Apple devices that weren't being managed.

The quid pro quo can take on different manifestations based on the type of relationship. I once had a company that was referring a lot of business to me, and I just didn't have any business to refer back. Set up a commission plan to compensate them for the referrals. Another asked for a commission structure that I just couldn't give them, effectively ending the relationship (although leads kept trickling in from them from account teams that knew I was a trusted vendor).

Given that all relationships are different, be realistic with your expectations of how much product you might sell and set expectations early. And ask for the same from them. This will allow you to build some goals for the relationship and make plans. Converting partnerships into customers is important when growing your business. However, make sure not to expect anything and to increase your risk in a relationship along with the incremental rewards that drive you to do so.

It benefits all software, hardware, and services companies to engage in partners that then rely on the success of their business for their own success. So look for ways to make all of these relationships beneficial for everyone involved. Being partners allows you to stay nimble; but sometimes, you'll see too much potential for a simple partnership and want to move into a subcontracting arrangement instead.

Subcontracting vs. Partnering

Partnering is great and, if done right, will help you provide the best services to customers for the best prices. But there are times when you will decide to keep work on your paper. There are a lot of companies that have contracts. And they want to keep all of their expenses on one Purchase Order (PO) in order to streamline accounting operations. You might also decide to subcontract types of work to provide a more comprehensive offering to customers.

Before you subcontract, make sure to have a contract and have all subcontractors sign that contract. Work out rates that are fair and reasonably priced. You should make a 50% or greater margin in order to sustain commissions, taxes, finance handling fees, etc. If you can't and you still choose to subcontract, then you'll likely end up with the ancillary services being provided as a loss leader or gaining market share by providing one throat to choke to customers. If you're making that kind of margin, couldn't the subcontractor do that work directly with customers? Yes. But then they would have to go find customers, process payments, pay taxes, not take payment for 60 to 90 days, and all that other fun stuff. You take on plenty of liability.

If you decide to subcontract work, make sure you have at least two vendors who can subcontract a given project. Maybe you are asked to do a project and you have a network of vendors who you can hire to do the work. Make sure to have at least two in a subcontracting agreement. Otherwise if one goes out of business or decides not to subcontract any longer, you'll be left with a potentially negative-margin business.

Once you have a network of subcontractors, then it's time to figure out the logistics. Sites like Expensify, Ebay, Stripe, etc. can be used to automate paying subcontractors. If you can work into your PSA or accounting system an automated routing to keep track of project expenses, all the better! Additionally, you'll want project and ticket notes entered into your systems, so decide up front how you want contractors to enter their time into your time tracking systems (and an option for low volumes of work is to e-mail you those tickets and you can paste them in).

Other, smaller aspects of subcontracting arrangements to cover:

- Decide up front if you want to provide access to an e-mail address from your organization, if you want subcontractors to wear branded attire, and if you want them to acknowledge that they don't work for you directly.
- How will you handle billing disputes when (not if) they happen? Don't stiff your subcontractors just because your client doesn't like the service, but know that prolonged exposure can backfire, especially if the subcontractor isn't using the same systems you use.

- How will you handle requests to engage with the subcontractor directly? Are subcontractors allowed to work with customers after your project is over or does that need to flow through your company forever? Is there a time after the last project done as a subcontractor that the subcontractor should wait before directly engaging with customers?

All of these attributes to the relationship should be discussed up front with a written follow-up (e.g., via e-mail). The more formal an arrangement, the harder it might be to get through paperwork but setting good expectations from the beginning will lead you to a more successful long-term relationship.

If you're the subcontractor, then make sure you understand all of these attributes to the relationship as well.

Dealing with Problems with Partners

Once you've done all this great work on developing partners, you want to protect that relationship and grow the business. You can't do that if you lose trust with the customer. Which means you need to make sure that you're doing your best work when you're working on a referral.

No matter how hard you work, sometimes things go weird with customers. When it does, I usually default to doing whatever is right. Do what's right so customers aren't complaining to a partner about your business. Nothing will sour a relationship faster than angry customers. And you don't know some seemingly simple issue will cause a customer to reach out to a partner no matter how good you are. A great way to get in front of this is to build out an escalation path with customers before the leads start flowing to you.

Another easy way to ruin a relationship with a partner is by taking business away. Partners often occupy adjacencies. If you do, then make sure you know exactly which services overlap with those provided by partners who refer business to you, and make sure that you don't actually take business from your partners; especially those who refer business to you. Instead, say great things about them and promote them to customers.

Don't say anything negative about the referral partner nor their product. If that organization makes software and or hardware that's problematic, offer to get in touch with a vendor rather than simply saying they have issues that are causing additional services. If a customer does not trust the products you help fix, then they aren't likely to continue using those products, which will be an issue ultimately resolved by them not using either.

Conclusion

The best kind of referral comes from a customer. Your customers provide a legitimate rating of your services. No amount of advertising, marketing, public relations, or money spent on referrals from other companies will ever provide you with a more valuable lead generation engine in terms of close rate, quality of customer once closed, etc. But you can't rely on referrals forever.

Once you get to a certain point, you need to find partners. If a partner seems too good to be true, they won't seem that way for long. But when a good partner comes along, and there's bilateral value for each organization, you've struck gold. So make sure to take care of your partners and that you're always open and honest about the relationship you have with them. Not only because a consistent theme in this book is transparency and honesty (key components of character), but because if you aren't then they will eventually come to hate you, and you don't want other companies souring potential customers in the market.

Further Reading

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- Work by Referral: Live the Good Life! Proven Strategies for Success and Happiness in the Real Estate Business (note that the principals apply to other businesses as well https://www.amazon.com/Work-Referral-Strategies-Happiness-Business/dp/0982026005

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CHAPTER 7

Engage in Free and Guerrilla Marketing

What is guerrilla marketing? Guerrilla marketing is a strategy to advertise unconventionally. Guerrilla marketing is a tactic usually used by smaller organizations with limited budgets. Why guerrilla marketing? Well, not everyone has $1 million per month to spend on marketing, do they? But beyond that, most guerrilla marketing tactics that work will be legitimate—more legitimate than buying advertising.

Guerrilla tactics will get your name out there and start building brand recognition. Some will totally miss the mark; others will net you attention in ways you could not have previously imagined. The easiest and most legitimate way to get customers is through word of mouth. Tell everyone you know that you're hanging your shingle out as a consultant. Tell former coworkers, people at the Apple Store, family, people from church, people at the pick-up basketball game, etc. Hand out cards. Always provide two.

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Examples of Guerrilla Marketing

Once you've exhausted your word-of-mouth network, it's time to start spreading the word to strangers. This is the part where you can easily overthink things. But put some effort into a bunch of different things and see what works. What works is going to be different for every geography and target customer, so some techniques will work for some and not others, but it's important to try them all. You never know what's going to net you that key account!

Some great things to try include the following:

- Drop off some flyers: You know those pieces of paper at coffee shops with little tear-off strips so you can take a phone number home? Not all flyers are like that, but according to your market, they can work. Especially if there's a place where people in that industry congregate. And speaking of congregations, don't forget to see if your church will let you drop some off, or buy a cheap advertisement in their newsletter.

- Post to job boards: When we were looking at researching pricing in Chapter 1, we went to Craigslist (or the local equivalent). Now let's go back. Even if you're more expensive, you can post your business. This might not be for you, but chances are that there are sites specifically for the type of industry you want to appeal to, and chances are that those have sites that you can post to. If you're doing residential work, check out Nextdoor.com.

- Answer questions on message boards: A step beyond the job board is to simply answer questions people ask. This should never be self-serving. If someone asks how to do a task, simply answer how. Your name will get out there and hopefully there's a link in your profile as you do so. Unless you've written an article answering a question, never put a link back to your site in a message board – don't be a spammer!
- Write articles: Write information about how to use technology in a given industry or geography. Write about using an IT department to do more. Don't write about how great you are. That should come through in the article. This could be your own site or one that serves your local potential customer base.
- Write software: These days, the smallest script can get a lot of attention on a site like GitHub. This is mostly if your target market includes people in Information Technology (IT), but if it's industry-specific, such as a little app to do something people in a given industry need to do, then you might be able to charge for it, or it might just be a great digital business card.
- Write a book: Anyone can write a book these days. I mean, if they let me… But an e-book on using technology in a given horizontal or vertical market can be a great way to legitimize your consulting efforts and put you in a place where people are calling you.

- E-mail bloggers: You want to get them to write about your services or products. Make sure to provide free access to your products, if they're software, or explain why your story is interesting to readers of various blogs. Don't send a form e-mail to a thousand bloggers, expecting them all to write about how awesome you are. Tell a story, and weave it back into their specific readers.
- Send mailers: Yes, people do still read postcards they get from businesses. This is a numbers game, and the mailers need to be sent to the name of the person. If you're looking to do work on Apple environments, then you'll want to source a list of all of the companies in the area and who manages their computers (Director of IT, etc.) and then send a mailer to those individuals. This is a pure numbers game, so you need to send a lot to make any money back on what you're spending.
- Make swag: People love swag. Pens, calendars, sticky notes, shirts, stickers, etc. Include contact information and then give them away. Every time you fix a computer, leave behind a present. Do be careful not to violate any laws. So if you're doing work in a school or for the government make sure you're allowed before doing so. To some, it seems like this stuff doesn't really work, but think about it this way, why would the local baseball franchise leave a calendar of games at every gas store if it didn't?

- Give free demos: The local Apple store, local Chamber of Commerce, or even a national stage can provide a great venue to meet potential customers. As with many of the ideas here, don't be overly self-serving, but do represent something that might brand you as an industry expert and let potential customers see and potentially hire you.
- Attend or organize Meetups: When it comes to Meetups, they don't have to be specific to technology. If you're looking for architecture firms, a Meetup for architects is a great way to meet people who might want to hire you. Since you aren't an architect, make sure to mention that you have other firms in your portfolio of customers and try to learn more than you say. Don't be pushy.
- Sponsor events: This could be meetups, user groups, etc. Sometimes for the cost of a few pizzas and some beer, you can meet a great potential group of customers and hopefully some of them will want to hear about your services.
- Make content: Blog posts are great, but there are lots of other types of content. If you're trying to get your site listed on rankings for a given city, maybe list some places to visit—breweries, hiking trails, etc. If you're marketing to specific industries, maybe look at having a comparison of software for those industries. Good content is always appreciated.

- Partner with other consultants: No person, nor company, can do everything. Maybe you don't do Google Apps integrations. Maybe you don't do servers. Maybe you don't feel comfortable doing forensics. Whatever gaps you have, there's likely to be another local services provider who does them. If a customer asks you to do something, sometimes the best thing is to find someone else who does it really well, and then try to set up a quid pro quo relationship for customers.
- Get involved in the local community: Now that you're a consultant, you have tons of free time, right?!?! No. But you should make time for community involvement. Don't advertise heavily at charity events, but do show up, help out, and look for ways to support causes. It's karma.
- Throw a party for your customers: Some simple times to celebrate your customers are during anniversaries of the company, various holidays, and maybe just because it's Tuesday.
- Do work for free: You're trying to start a business, so doing some work for free might seem counterintuitive, but you can treat the soft cost of free work as a marketing cost, and you might be able to do something good for the world in the process.
- Press releases: These are some of the most passive of marketing, but there's a chance that someone that watches Newswire (`www.newswire.com`) might see it and find it interesting. These aren't free, so be

diligent about how you post them and seek help from experienced professionals, if only for your first one or two to get the hang of it.

- Sign up for work exchanges: Odesk and other similar sites might take a cut, and you might be competing with some pretty low-cost outsourcers, but there's a lot of work that go through sites like that, and you might take on some low-cost jobs if only to learn how to do the required tasks (so, guided learning).
- Always ask if they need you to do anything else: Especially when you start to get a little bit busy, you'll end up rushing around. Don't. If you're billing hourly, this is a great way to extend jobs. If you're billing fixed-fee, you might end up picking up another contract. If you're an MSP, that one little thing might be what makes the customer sign up for another year. Don't forget that the easiest customers to market to are the ones you already have!

When starting a services firm, marketing isn't just about selling your solutions to the highest bidder. It's often about establishing yourself as an expert in the industry you serve. But what industry is that? Will you find a ton of clients by responding to posts from other consultants? Maybe, but doubtful. Will you find customers in the film industry by writing about how to fix a hard drive? Maybe, but again doubtful. When you're first starting out, think about the customers you are servicing in the area you're doing so. For example, if you are trying to recruit customers in visual effects, then press in that industry will help brand you as an expert in doing IT for visual effects customers.

Search Engine Optimization

The old saying when it comes to Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is that "content is king." Unique content, and lots of it, will certainly drive traffic to your site. Whether it will drive the type of traffic you want or not, is of course another story. There are dozens of books on this topic, so I'll barely be scratching the surface here, but it's worth saying that you can spend as much time on SEO as you want.

But here are some tips for SEO, to get you started.

- Find a plugin that does a lot of the work for you. I use Wordpress for my personal website. There are a lot of great plugins for Wordpress that analyze posts for all the various attributes that make them easily crawlable called Yoast. I couldn't recommend it more.
- Most SEO engines like articles with small words. Yes, we all know you're smart, but the SEO engines might think the opposite (to anthropomorphize them) if you use big words. A good test is to write at the level of a fifth grader.
- Limit the length of articles and posts. When I started writing for a magazine awhile back I was aghast at the fact that they limited articles to 800 words. If a page is about a service you are providing, then you likely want less than a quarter of that. If it's a blog post with a Call to Action to click on your service, then 800 words is about as much as a crawler will care about. If you find that you want longer articles then consider serializing them into smaller posts.

- If you use images, provide a description: Not only is this helpful for those who cannot see the image, but since crawlers wouldn't otherwise know what an image is of, it helps to include the metadata about what the image is in what is crawled.
- Try to include a Keyword on pages: Most modern blogging or site administration tools will allow you to include a keyword on pages. Usually this is one or two words that are used in the article and that search engines use to learn what the article is about.
- Don't include keywords too much: The keyword should repeat a few times but not more than is appropriate. Otherwise it's considered "keyword stuffing." A good rule of thumb is to avoid lists of phone numbers or other data that don't add value to an article, avoid listing all of the various cities, area codes, and states a webpage is trying to rank for and repeating the same words or phrases in an unnatural way. I haven't seen a solid opinion on the density a keyword can be in an article, but I try to limit to 1 per 200 words.
- Post articles to Twitter and Facebook: Also, don't forget about Google Plus—the reason being that Google crawls their own content a little more than on other sites and you can often see additional lift there.
- Post a site map: Modern blogging engines will produce a number of dynamic posts for content, often with different names. These have duplicative content. Whether inside a domain or across domains, duplicative content pisses off web crawlers and search

algorithms. If I include duplicative content, I typically put it in quotes and indicate where it came from. This also helps me should I ever want to remove all content from a source I later decide to be illegitimate.

- Include the title of the post in the URL: In Wordpress these are called Permalinks. The actual title to an article might be `http://krypted.com/wp-admin/post.php?post=49178`, but the URL that you use to post to websites might be `http://krypted.com/mac-os-x-server/migrating-mail-service-macos-server/`. I learned this trick many years ago by a principal from Band of Techs out of Los Angeles, Thomas Orona. It took 5 minutes and my traffic almost doubled within 90 days, by doing almost nothing else differently other than configuring permalinks.
- Categorize your posts: Categories tell crawlers how to, um, categorize a page. I have about 15 categories on my personal blog that span around 3,600 posts. These also help me to quickly find my own articles should I need to.
- Tag your posts: Most modern blogging engines allow for tagging. This is simply another piece of metadata that algorithms use to give each article or page a better Page Ranking (PR).
- Use headers on longer posts: A header tag can be used to indicate the starting of a new section of a site. These not only can make your pages easier to read, they can also often be used to direct traffic to parts of a page, and the web crawlers seem to like them a good bit.

- Link to other posts: It's natural to link to other websites. Doing so helps the web be more web-like, helps readers find more content, and helps crawlers index and associate your site with those that you link to.
- Get links to your posts: Backlinks are one of the most important aspects of SEO. The more links to your site, the higher the PR—well, assuming they're legit links. If you purchase a backlink, or get one through a comment you post, those are supposed to be marked as "no follow" and so not count toward PRs. So the best advice around backlinks is to write good content that people want to link to.
- Enable internal linking: I like to use a plugin that shows people relevant posts. This creates an additional index of my site and then shows articles with similar keyword densities.
- Enable comments: I have a post on Fitbit badges. This post has been commented on hundreds and hundreds of times. Not only do I find the comments amusing to read (I mean, hundreds of people are having lively debates on my personal website) but the dynamic content keeps the page fresh to crawlers, provides new content, increases the amount of time people spend on the page, and also adds perspectives and keywords I might not have thought to add.
- Delete dead links: Crawlers hate dead links and will ding you for them. You can easily find dead links with plugins for your engine, or you can submit your site to various services that will track down dead links and inform you about them.

- Make sure your site loads fast: Crawlers don't like to crawl slow sites. Therefore, make sure your site loads fast. Get rid of any extraneous plugins or automations and keep those pages loading super-fast. This also makes people who are reading your pages happy.
- In the beginning, shoot for longtail search terms: You're likely never going to get noticed with search terms like "Apple" or even probably "Apple Consultant," but you might get some high PRs for "Apple Consultant in Boise." The nice part about longtail searches is that they can also provide you quick wins to help you stay engaged. I can still remember the first time that someone called me and said, "I found you on the Internet," and the extra motivation that gave me to keep working on getting found by others.
- Avoid robots.txt: A robots.txt file is an old way of telling crawlers not to index your site. Some automated services install these by default. Crawlers will never pick up content if there's a robots.txt on the site.

Given all these rules, it's also worth noting that whatever is natural is right. If you start trying to tailor your content to web crawlers, then it will be boring to read, formulaic, and the PR will change when web crawlers pick up on new tricks. I personally just write what I want people to see. For example, some of the best posts I personally like to read are in-depth analyses of new Apple technology. These are often thousands of words. And these are also the most common for me to link to. But I keep the earlier items in the back of my head while writing anyways.

SEO isn't for the impatient. Crawling sites can happen as little as every 30 days. You can request that your site be crawled immediately, but it can still take time. I recommend just being a good steward of the Internet.

If you write good articles that people want to link to, then you also have to wait for those other sites to be indexed. It all takes time. Again, be cognizant of the points that we've covered, but write what works for you and get some good backlinks, and you should be fine.

Additionally, there are tons of firms out there that specialize in SEO. If you want, you can hire one to help you formulate a strategy, get links, and get you traffic. It's hard to stay at the top of natural search listings, but if you're deliberate about the words you want to be associated with and do some work, it's not uncommon to get some pretty high PRs with longtail searches.

Now let's turn our attention to ways to get people to visit your site. We'll start with e-mail automation, as it's one of the most common ways to drive traffic to sites.

E-mail Automation

We discussed automating the delivery of your services. But what about your marketing messages? Once upon a time, we did newsletters. Then we placed each desired recipient on an e-mail into the BCC field of an e-mail program and sent as many e-mails as we could. These days, we do e-mail marketing campaigns.

Note With the advent of the European data privacy regulations, GDRP, e-mail marketing is likely going to go through substantial changes over the next few years. Consult with your legal teams to see what impact GDRP, but a tool to manage your campaigns in the future is likely to be a necessity so people included in your campaigns can easily opt out.

The most important thing about e-mail automation is that you have a good message that potential customers will want to read. And pretty pictures. Those are important too. Once you have pictures of cats in hats, cats in cups, or cats snuggling with other cats, you'll want to find a good e-mail automation tool.

It seems like every time I turn on National Public Radio, there's a new e-mail marketing company sponsoring Marketplace. Let's review a few that I've seen consultants have a bit of luck with (obviously a small list in a very large field of competitors).

- **Constant Contact**: A free 30-day trial with Constant Contact is one of the easiest ways to get started with e-mail marketing campaigns. You can use Constant Contact as a reference. Find the things you like, the things you don't, and then test out other tools. https://www.constantcontact.com
- **Mailchimp**: Mailchimp was the first real e-mail marketing solution to go down-market in a mass market kind of way. With a cute chimp as a mascot, there's so much to learn about marketing from Mailchimp—not just when it comes to large-scale messaging campaigns but also when it comes to modern, fun, and effective marketing. It's also easy to use and if you can't easily find how to do something in Mailchimp, I've found that there's a pretty substantial chance that you shouldn't be doing it in the first place. https://mailchimp.com
- **iContact**: This is an easy tool that you can get set up in just a few minutes. It's basic, without a lot of bells and whistles, and so inexpensive. https://www.icontact.com

- **Emma**: Another popular Software as a Service-based e-mail marketing tool that has a lot of nice integrations, including Zendesk, which many an Apple consultancy uses. `https://myemma.com`
- **Marketo**: Marketo is one of the gold standards in e-mail marketing. You should take a class if you decide to use Marketo, but the integration with Salesforce and other Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions is as good as they get. This is by far the most powerful tool I've ever had the pleasure (and frustration) to work with. `https://www.marketo.com`
- **Salesforce**: The largest CRM in the world, capable of doing rudimentary e-mail campaigns. `http://salesforce.com`

As with any other tool you bring into your company, choose your messaging tools to the scale of your operations. Most Apple consultants can also master a tool like Mailchimp or iContact. But it takes someone on staff to master the integration between Marketo and Salesforce. Don't underestimate the maturity of some of these solutions simply because they're built for messaging with customers and leads.

Note Once you've mastered one of these tools for your own campaigns, then you've probably found yourself yet another tool that you can help customers with, if they need such a thing—especially if you can help them do so in a pretty sane fashion.

Also, while the ads you hear on the radio for some of these tools make it sound like these campaigns write themselves, they don't. In the next section, we'll cover some of the dos and don'ts of e-mail marketing. If you don't plan on doing something with messaging for customers, then I'd recommend looking for someone to help you get started, much as you'd expect a whiz with marketing to look for someone to help them with their Macs when they get in over their heads.

What to Do and What Not to Do

E-mail marketing is a delicate business. On the one hand, you don't want to be an evil spammer. On the other hand, you want to grow your business, and a great way to stay in touch with potential customers without picking up the phone and bugging them is by tickling them every now. You can also use e-mail marketing to reach existing customers, automating parts of managing your relationship with them.

I've been involved in writing campaigns since what feels like the beginning. And as someone who hates spam, I've tried to be careful to never become an evil spammer. And because I like you, I've decided to share my laws that govern how I like to handle e-mail automation.

- Choose an e-mail automation tool that fits the size of your marketing team. Many of the larger products really need a staff person at the reins. If you can't afford someone in that position, then don't self-identify yourself into a more weighty tool than you can handle and turn your attention toward some of the downmarket solutions instead.
- Use a third-party tool instead of Outlook. You want to use third-party software rather than just send e-mails because you really, really need an unsubscribe button. In some countries you might otherwise be breaking the law. And by breaking the law, I mean jailtime.

- Protect Personally Identifiable Information (speaking of jailtime). Use good passwords with the service you use and never sell that information unless your privacy policy explicitly states you can (and even then it's still probably a bad idea).
- Don't take yourself too seriously. Boring, dry e-mails suck after a while, and people will almost invariably unsubscribe (except your competitors). Be yourself, be conversational, and feel free to poke fun at yourself every now and then. This makes your organization a little more human. And it makes your job a little more fun.
- Automate syncing contacts with your CRM. Loading or syncing your contacts from your CRM tool can be labor-intensive and can cause technical misfires that end up adding people who have unsubscribed, or sending people duplicate e-mails. Instead, whenever possible, choose a tool that has a plugin or integration with existing tools you use at your organization.
- You can use e-mail automation to cross-sell goods and services. If you've already converted a lead to a customer, then you will have the ability to potentially sell them other items in your portfolio. Don't be too salesy but do have multiple campaigns: those for prospects at each stage of the sales funnel, and those for organizations who are already customers at various maturity levels–so the content is fresh and pertinent to them.

- Build a calendar that follows a logical cadence. It is important to have a little sale in there every now and then, such as CRM for Beginners. At other times you might choose to have something that is genuinely helpful for a person's productivity. And finally, some e-mails in the cadence should be specifically geared for thought leadership.
- Use e-mail automation to communicate more than just a sales pitch. You can send customer updates, such as how many open tickets, the response time for tickets, and even surveys (e.g., for customer satisfaction). Just don't send too many e-mails to customers or prospects. Make sure to offer daily or weekly digests if you hook mail into support systems.
- Be timely. If it's tax season, tell customers and leads how your product can help them during tax season. If it's spring, talk about spring cleaning. If they've been a customer for 3 months, check in to see how you're they liking your services.
- Have a Call to Action (CTA). If you send an e-mail about preparing taxes during tax season, have a button with a CTA. A great way to achieve this is to coordinate a blog post and have a "read more" button—and then a CTA within that post. The longer you can keep a prospect's attention, the more likely they are to convert into a customer. The longer you can keep a customer's attention, the longer they are likely to stay with you.
- Pay attention to when people unsubscribe. This is simple: stop doing whatever it is you're doing that made them unsubscribe.

You have very little mindshare with customers. Don't squander it. Help them and don't be too salesy. Feel free to throw in a cute picture every now and then and keep on those metrics. If people are clicking, you're doing something right. If they're not clicking, you're not!

The Cadence

I can't really go into the contents of each e-mail you should send in this book. There simply isn't time. And if I did, there would be way too many companies using the same stale content. It should rotate from time to time. But, I can help potentially spark some ideas.

These might not work for your specific situation, but they should help you think of some ideas.

- Month 1: 10 Tips for Backing Up Your Computers
- Month 2: Working Securely
- Month 3: CRM for beginners
- Month 4: The new MacBook (there's always one in the works)
- Month 5: Cool new home automation tools
- Month 6: The benefits of always-on VPN
- Month 7: Takeaways from this year's WWDC (Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference)
- Month 8: Choosing the best router for your organization
- Month 9: Using a proxy server to make your network faster
- Month 10: Tips for creating better presentations

- Month 11: 5 Ways to be more productive on a Mac
- Month 12: IT assets and preparing your taxes with end of year purchases

In this cadence, we were careful not to get boring. It's important to have a little sales in there every now and then, such as CRM for Beginners. But other times, it's all about pure productivity, like 5 Ways to Be More Productive On a Mac. Some e-mails are timely, such as the end of year e-mail on taxes. And finally, some e-mails in the cadence should be specifically geared for thought leadership.

Your e-mails, blog content, and social media content can all be coordinated to flow together. Wordpress as a blog engine can automatically post to Twitter. And that same content can be summarized in e-mails. In the next section, we'll delve into social media, so keep in mind how you might use these tools together.

Social Media

The whole social media thing isn't just for millennials. You can build, own, and run your presence without the help of your nephew or a snotty hipster consultant. For over a decade, you've heard you need a "Social Strategy" or had people asking what you're doing with "Social." Can social media really increase sales? Yes. What are the best social media outlets for various goals your company has? That's according to what the goals are, which should initially be to add something to the top of your funnel.

Let's look at some examples of ways that real organizations can use social media to bolster sales.

1. Get all the social properties for the name of your organization. Try to use the same name across social networks like Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Google+.

2. Run a photo submission contest on Instagram. Provide a hashtag that people are supposed to use to get evaluated and then post the winner when the contest is over. This type of outreach helps to expand your funnel and get your brand in front of more eyeballs.

3. Create a group on LinkedIn. LinkedIn groups are for professionals who share a common interest to communicate about them. This is a great way to find leads, just don't be too spammy.

4. Use geography to bring business to you. Post a temporary location to get a free prize or entry in a drawing on Twitter, Swarm, and Facebook. Additionally, consider running a special giving the mayor of your location on Swarm a special deal, as an added little bonus for repeat business.

5. Use smaller networks to get your message to micromarkets. If you're a beer company, have a special badge made on Untappd. OK, not many people reading this will be from beer companies, but the point is to think of the specific industry you are in. Is there a social network for your industry, and can you do something cool and interesting to promote your brand there, and if there isn't a network, should there be?

6. Drive business to your website. Tweet your blog posts, add hashtags, and keep track of which of the hashtags actually drive people to your site. Yes, that means you need a blog. No, don't post any tweets on the company account about upcoming elections.

7. Stay on top of trends. Vines are gone. But there's a newer trend, such as Cinemagraphs, and being on that trend can bring in a little extra boost to get your organization in front of companies who might be looking to purchase services similar to yours. At the very least, they'll give your staff pride when done right.

8. Claim your address with Google. If you have a retail front, or people might find your business based on your physical location, then make sure it's correct across all the networks, including Yahoo, Google, etc.

9. Solicit feedback on networks like Yelp. We all want to think our businesses are perfect. So make sure you have a thick skin since you can't please all the people all the time. But for most, it's pretty helpful to have some good feedback for people to read. More important, those stars. Give people a good experience and they'll give you great reviews.

10. Analyze the results. Get software that allows you to aggregate and possibly analyze the responses you get from your efforts on these networks. If you don't, then you're left with guessing about what's working and what isn't, which is likely to lead you to an analysis aligned with what you want to think rather than reality.

You can also buy advertising on these networks, which can be a great way to bolster other activities. But even more impactful, once you start to get followers on these networks, is to provide a clear and concise CTA for each thing you do, as well as a larger, overarching social strategy that fits with your customer base. Just make sure to be your authentic self, and again, be OK with any negative feedback that comes back through the social channels, as negative responses will be unavoidable.

Public Service Announcement I have a pet peeve about brands who automatically publish content from sites like ow.ly. I immediately stop following them and will often also simply stop consuming what they sell.

Conferences

The first way to do conferences is to speak at them. If you have a company that provides support, services, or software, then you might be a great technical mind or thought leader in the industry. Speaking at conference gives you a way to build a personal brand, which contributes to the company brand, to make new contacts, to potentially meet new customers, and most importantly to give something back to the community.

I have recently seen a couple of companies who attend conferences but don't pay to be sponsors of the conference. One in particular tweets and posts on Slack channels to find them in their hot pink hoodies. I overheard a few traditional marketing professionals looking down on this, but I think it's a great use of limited funds. Obviously, conferences need sponsors to keep the cost of tickets down, so not everyone can do this. But when you're first starting out, I think it's a great way to see what direction you can take your product or what kind of new customer leads you can dig up!

It can cost thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars to sponsor a conference. Additionally, you need to have banners, things to give away, or maybe even large booths built out. This is definitely not for the newest of businesses without a good plan for how to close potential leads (and what a good lead looks like for your business).

Officially sponsoring conferences comes with a number of benefits, including:

- Most conferences include a badge scanner, so you can get an export of all the people you speak to.
- A full contact list is made available at some conferences. This is becoming rarer and rarer but, when made available, includes personally identifiable information about attendees.
- Most conferences will come with a table that needs to have someone from your organization working it. Make sure to plan for bathroom breaks and the like, so you may potentially want to send two people. I like sending a product manager, someone from marketing, and/or someone from support, according to which conference and the type of customers you're looking to work with.
- Your logo in bright lights: OK, bright lights are obnoxious. You should be treated equally with other sponsors of the conference. But you will want a roll-up banner, a screen on a tripod, or some kind of way for people to find you. To attract people to your table or booth, at a minimum, bring a tablecloth for your table and some signage, with a consistent brand.
- Potential sessions about your product or service: You'll need to develop a presentation that conference-goers want to watch. This shouldn't be a blatant sales pitch; instead, it should be about a topic that is timely and relevant to conference goers. You want to educate attendees. That has by far been the best strategy, as with blogs and other forms of marketing materials.

- Swag: No, the benefit isn't that you get to bring home swag. The benefit is that you get to give swag away. Check into the ability to put swag into bags. Build one-page sheets with a clear CTA. While your presentations shouldn't be a blatant sales pitch, your leave-behinds should be.
- Potentially sponsoring additional events at the conference: Think of unique ideas. A hackathon, capture the flag, puzzles, scavenger hunts, and other innovative ideas can make the conference more fun for some and get conference-goers mingling with vendors.
- After-parties: Yes, there ain't no party like the after-party. Most conferences are happy to let a sponsor take on a party after the event. This allows sponsors to get some additional branding, have a larger number of people mingle with conference-goers, and, of course, join in libations. Do be careful to keep things pretty calm and always do these events in public places so as not to take on too much liability.
- Learning from others: I already said that taking a product manager to a conference is a good idea. But one of the things you want to do at conferences is continue evaluating the offers that you built in the beginning of the book, iterate those offers if needed, build new offers if appropriate, and learn how the offers resonate with potential customers. A stream of people coming up to your booth are likely to be very happy to provide plenty of feedback.

Before you sign up, make sure you know who will be working the booth, who will be speaking, what kind of presentation will keep people in the room (because food is usually way better than a vendor talk), etc. Think about all of the benefits of supporting the conference, and plan on lots of fun both during the day and in the evening!

While you're working a booth, make sure to ask people for cards or scan their badges. Then, once you get home, the real work begins. Converting leads from conferences into sales is critical in order to justify the cost of going. This includes e-mailing the contacts you made, calling them, and maybe even going out to visit them, once you've made contact. Keep conversations going. Even if they don't need your services, they might have other contacts in the industry who do (or will). Make sure to then touch base every now and then, even if they don't need anyone now (I love using "flag for follow-up" types of features for such things).

Finally, don't take on more than you can chew. Only do what you know you can be successful at. This way, you won't have a mediocre moment where you end up getting bad press or social feedback because something wasn't taken care of holistically.

Conclusion

There are more ways to market than just taking ads out on the radio and newspapers. These days there is probably an endless number of ways that you can work the system to get a message out to people. And passive marketing is where your message gets battle-hardened and made more scalable.

I don't personally think you should ever outgrow guerrilla marketing. If you look at Mailchimp and what they do with their extra Twitter accounts, you will likely agree. But some tactics will be frowned upon at a larger size. And so you will likely change tactics here and there as you get more mature, or just bigger (given that the two aren't mutually exclusive).

Some ways you might know that you've outgrown a given tactic include:

- You become an industry leader. Industry leaders should help organize and run conferences, not attend for free and hand out business cards.
- You can't use your budget fast enough on guerrilla events. If you're spending too much time and not getting enough lift for that time, then it's time to re-evaluate the strategy. An easy sign of this is that you have money left over from that budget every quarter. At this point, it's time to look at larger spends, like PR, traditional advertising, etc.
- The return on investment (ROI) isn't there. How much does it cost to hire your sales and marketing team? What's the ROI from each event? Is the ROI greater than what it cost you to run the event?

Ultimately, guerrilla marketing is primarily considered a bootstrapper's paradise. As you grow, your expectations change and the impact of smaller events lessens. But you should always make sure to have your personality in events and run smaller events to appeal to smaller organizations or just to inexpensively remind existing customers you still love them!

Finally, don't give up. Just because a technique doesn't work doesn't mean it can't work. Instead, you are likely to find success in a different venue, at a different time, with different resources, or with a different audience. Don't throw good money after bad, but do find out why an initiative didn't work and don't just write off a whole area of marketing because it didn't work out "that one time." Start with small spends and grow into it. That way you can iterate into a situation that isn't a monumental waste of time, money, and resources.

Further Reading

- Social Media: Strategies To Mastering Your Brand – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat, by David Kelly https://www.amazon.com/Social-Media-Strategies-Mastering-Instagram-ebook/dp/B01JMJDYHU
- 500 Social Media Marketing Tips by Andrew Macarthy https://www.amazon.com/500-Social-Media-Marketing-Tips-ebook/dp/B007L50HE6
- Social Media Advertising: How To Be Successful In Advertising On Social Platforms, by Bogdan Rusu https://www.amazon.com/Social-Media-Advertising-Successful-Platforms/dp/1977724787/
- Email Marketing Rules: Checklists, Frameworks, and 150 Best Practices for Business Success by Chad White, https://www.amazon.com/Email-Marketing-Rules-Checklists-Frameworks/dp/1546910638
- The Sales Funnel Book: How To Multiply Your Business With Marketing Automation by Nathan Williams https://www.amazon.com/Sales-Funnel-Book-Marketing-Automation-ebook/dp/B06X9BGWC5
- The Art of SEO: Mastering Search Engine Optimization, by Eric Enge, Stephan Spencer, Jessie Stricchiola https://www.amazon.com/Art-SEO-Mastering-Search-Optimization/dp/1491948965
- SEO 2018: Learn Search Engine Optimization With Smart Internet Marketing Strategies https://www.amazon.com/Search-Optimization-Internet-Marketing-Strateg/dp/1979286973

- Growth Hacker Marketing by Ryan Holiday https://www.amazon.com/Growth-Hacker-Marketing-Primer-Advertising/dp/1591847389
- Growth Hacking, Mildred Kelly https://www.amazon.com/Growth-Hacking-Essential-Techniques-Successful/dp/B00R74ICYI
- Guerilla Marketing Weapons, Jay Conrad Levinson https://www.amazon.com/Guerilla-Marketing-Weapons-Affordable-Maximizing/dp/0786158115
- Dot.bomb, My Days and Nights at an Internet Goliath, J. David Kuo, https://www.amazon.com/dot-bomb-Days-Nights-Internet-Goliath/dp/0316507490

CHAPTER 8

Using Public Relations

Public Relations (PR) is an industry where you gain exposure to audiences using news outlets and third-party publishers such as publications, blogs, and social media—where you don't actually pay for placement. The goal is to gain free coverage by talking about items that are of interest to the public.

PR typically includes branding, media relations, publicity, relationships within your industry (e.g., the Apple community and Apple Consultants Network), event management, and special events.

In some organizations, PR also includes employee relations, investor relations, diversity programs, analyst relations, and even marketing communications. However, those will be covered in other chapters. We'll start this chapter with some basics of PR, with a focus on media relations and publicity.

Getting Started With PR

Too often, when small business owners create a business plan, they include advertising and marketing plans but neglect to consider the importance of public relations (PR). It makes sense, considering that we're bombarded with advertising every hour of the day—yet we often fail to understand the role that PR plays in the ads and articles we're reading on a daily basis.

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_8

PR is much less expensive than advertising but can be just as effective, adding third-party credibility to products and services. In many cases, I'd rather pay for PR than advertising—according to the goals your organization has.

Whether you choose to engage a firm, or whether you attempt to conduct PR yourself, there are a number of things you can do to maximize the impact "the press" can have on your organization. Here are a few things new small businesses should do when starting their PR:

Gather All Your Social Properties

One major function of PR is online reputation management. As a small business owner, it's important to make a list of all of the online profiles, platforms, and social media sites your business is on. That way, you can quickly crosscheck your online reputation with each of them, formulating a PR plan to potentially amplify great reviews or rectify any negative reviews.

Publish a Media Kit

Once you've gathered all your social properties into a simple list, you can publish them on a page. I usually like to put it on a page called Press that's easily found from the front page of your site. Include the list of social properties from above, as well as a bio for the company with important facts, links to mentions in the press, past press releases, and how to get in touch with the company (e.g., `press@companyname.com`). The media kit could also include logos, photos, PDFs of marketing-type collateral, guides on how logos should be used, etc.

Gather Local Media Contacts

No matter where your business is located, it's important to aggregate a local media list of all persons at newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV outlets within your given geographic region. If something exciting happens with your business, you want to be able to call or e-mail them quickly for media coverage.

Gather Industry-Specific Media Contacts

Most vertical industries also have specific websites, blogs, magazines, podcasts, stations (e.g., YouTube playlists). Put a list of those together as well, and look for a specific contact who you might be able to reach out to should you encounter anything that might be of interest to them (just don't bug them too much).

PR Template

When a chance for press comes up, you want someone within your organization to have writing skills. Statements, columns, blog posts of your own, and press releases are powerful ways of interacting with the media, and though you can hire experts to perfect your writing on a per-post basis, it's valuable to have someone within your organization capable of getting the first draft going, especially in fields where domain knowledge is important.

Starting a PR plan is one of the best things you could do for your small business. Don't neglect to include and actively work on PR as you formulate your advertising and marketing strategies, as it's one of the most critical aspects of any of those plans. You may also go a step further and chart your plan to a calendar. When you do, avoid announcements on Mondays and Fridays, and try to align them according to when the logs for your website show that you have the most visitors, so you can capitalize on existing traffic!

Decide What Kind of PR Works Best for You

You can spend tens of thousands of dollars per month on PR. You can also limit your PR expenditures to an email every day with a list of media outlets that are soliciting the community for quotes and respond to those you like when you have time. Most businesses invest in PR, advertising, and marketing when business is slow. If I could give you one piece of advice above all else, it's to be deliberate.

Being deliberate about how you approach business development allows you to be more opportunistic. You can usually find some really great deals on the things you have to spend money on if you understand your identity, your market, where you want to take your business, and, based on those, how you expend capital (be it political capital to garner attention, social capital to get people to repost, or actual cash to do everything else).

A few examples of ways to get PR for your organization might include:

- Getting quoted in an article about a topic you are an expert in
- Getting a spot in a local news show
- Getting an article you wrote placed in a newspaper or magazine
- Writing blog posts on your behalf (I'm a writer so I don't like people writing on my behalf)

These items are usually free. What isn't free is to have someone stay in constant contact with all of the media you think works with your customer base. But there are a lot of ways to do PR on the cheap. Before we get into some of those, let's first talk about how not to become a pest and have people make filters that just delete all your e-mails.

Local PR

If you do managed services in a given geography, then there is likely a limited set of publications that serve that area. This will usually include large newspapers, local magazines, smaller periodicals that cover given neighborhoods, local websites, etc. These are some of the best people to make friends with. Not only are they often just really cool people, but they also provide some valuable insight from time to time when you're talking to them. I find I learn as much as they often learn, just understanding things from new perspectives. Oh, and I guess it's cool to be in their rolodex when they need a quote as well.

Make friends with your local newspapers. You can often just read articles in those news outlets and easily find contact information, be it e-mail, Twitter, or carrier pigeon. As you might have guessed, I like to hang out with reporters in general. But they're also great contacts to have in the PR world. Not only are they people to whom you can send information, but they also frequently have questions as they master enough of a subject to write about it.

Some things to think about when doing PR:

- Understand the beat: Each reporter will cover a specific beat, or a topic for the reporter to cover. If you send a technical story idea to someone that covers style, it's likely to fall on deaf ears; however, if you send a story idea to someone that actually covers tech, then you might get further with a follow-up idea.
- Don't spam the press: People who write articles get a lot of e-mails and phone calls from people looking to get attention from the media. Try to be cognizant of this and only send timely and relevant information with a focus on industry or local trends—and keep in mind that most local press have a focus on home and small business, not highly technical or enterprise trends.

- When you send e-mails, don't include attachments when possible: It's easy to tell people to respond if they'd like a photo or something else you might include in an e-mail attachment. E-mails with attachments are more likely to end up in a junk mail folder and fill up the receiver's e-mail!
- Try to get a backlink to your website: Doing so increases the page rank of your site and also increases the likelihood that people might reach out to you for goods or services.
- If you get a call about something, make sure to be up front when you don't think you're an expert in something.

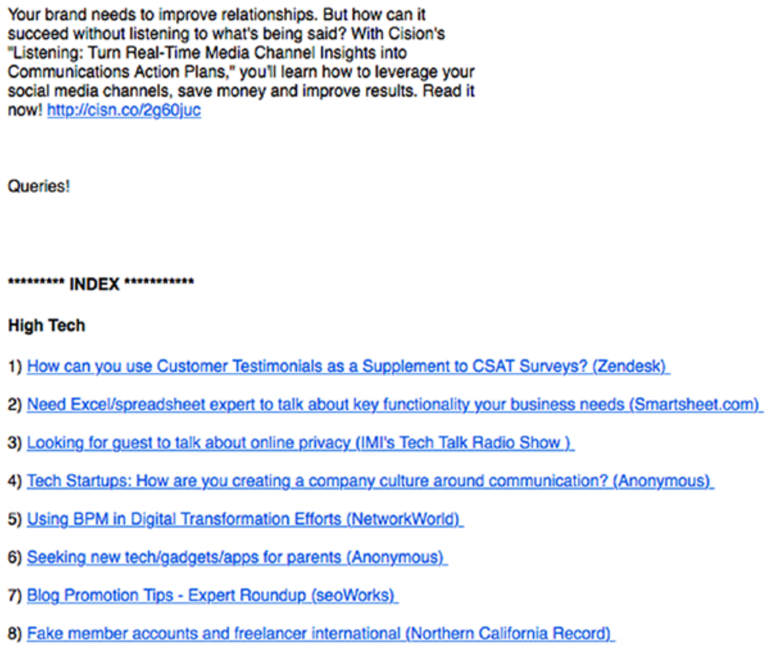
Tip When you engage in philanthropic pursuits, don't spend much time doing PR to them. Those should be done because you want to do good for the world, not for the sake of some cheap publicity.

Once you have contacts, don't squander those relationships. Like any relationship, nurture them. Be a resource, but when it comes to outgoing communications, think of how you would like to be communicated with if you were in their shoes. In addition to local contacts, there are a few ways to make national contacts. In the next section we'll look at one way to do that, using the popular Haro website.

Haro

Haro is a website that connects people who write the news with people that want to be featured in the news. Reporters, bloggers, and others in the press can (and do) find quotes, examples, and stories for the projects they're working on. Countless PR agencies around the world use Haro to monitor these requests and connect their customers to the writers and editors involved.

As can be seen in Figure 8-1, there are a number of inquiries sent daily. I usually recommend building a filter so you only see the ones that might be pertinent to your business. This means focusing on the content of the messages and looking for words like "Apple," those containing various Apple products you consider yourself an expert on, "consulting," or your local geography.


Your brand needs to improve relationships. But how can it succeed without listening to what's being said? With Cision's "Listening: Turn Real-Time Media Channel Insights into Communications Action Plans," you'll learn how to leverage your social media channels, save money and improve results. Read it now! http://cisn.co/2g60juc

Queries!

********* INDEX ***********

High Tech

1) How can you use Customer Testimonials as a Supplement to CSAT Surveys? (Zendesk)

2) Need Excel/spreadsheet expert to talk about key functionality your business needs (Smartsheet.com)

3) Looking for guest to talk about online privacy (IMI's Tech Talk Radio Show)

4) Tech Startups: How are you creating a company culture around communication? (Anonymous)

5) Using BPM in Digital Transformation Efforts (NetworkWorld)

6) Seeking new tech/gadgets/apps for parents (Anonymous)

7) Blog Promotion Tips - Expert Roundup (seoWorks)

8) Fake member accounts and freelancer international (Northern California Record)

Figure 8-1. *Inquiries sent to Haro*

The name of the game is speed. The quicker you can respond with a quote, the more likely it is to get used. Additionally, since there is a finite number of minutes in a day, focus on things that you can either use to bolster your credibility with local press and customers or those you believe might generate customer leads. Getting quoted by media just for the sake of doing so isn't really worth the effort.

Responding to requests for quotes is one thing, and as it's easy to do, the value is often lost in the sheer volume of responses. Trying to get a story picked up by media outlets is quite another. In the next section we'll look at press releases, a common way to passively post an alert to media, with the hopes that someone finds your post interesting enough to write about it. Before you get into press releases, keep in mind that you might have done a lot of work to prepare for something like a new initiative, but that doesn't make it newsworthy.

Press Releases

A press release is a document that informs the press about an event. A software company might put out a press release that they've got a cool new feature. This is usually done in hope that a media outlet will pick it up and run with it. To be honest, I'm not a huge fan of press releases for local consulting firms that typically stick to a geographic area. The cost of running a press release on Newswire just isn't worth it.

Now, if you have a major event that a media outlet might find interesting, that's a different story. Apple, as with many disruptors, is popular in the media. So if you release a service or acquire another firm and that is indicative of a trend, then that might be of interest to a local reporter. For example, let's say you acquire a home automation firm so you can help make the most out of the spiffy new HomePod. That could lead to interest around the growing ubiquity of home automation. If you hire a second or third tech, that's probably not newsworthy.

Now that we have some basics about press releases, we can cover some quick tips to get you started.

Press Release Tips

Press releases are a timeless, yet current public relations avenue for communicating news, events, and updates regarding your business or organization to media outlets. These brief, informative writing pieces have managed to weather the test of time, with millions being e-mailed to newspapers, TV outlets, and radio stations every single day.

The media loves press releases. They're like tiny bundles of news stories dropped on reporters' laps. Given that the media cycle is in constant need of content, you should be taking advantage of press releases with every opportunity possible.

Here are a few quick tips to review before we delve into an example press release.

- **Brevity:** Reporters don't have time to comb through 2-pages of your business announcement. It's recommended to keep the release between 300 and 500 words, effectively communicating your message without boring the reader.
- **Catchy Title:** In order to catch the reader's interest, you need a one-of-a-kind news-spun title that isn't also over-the-top.
- **No Sales Language:** A press release is about communicating the news. It's not a time to promote your sales and services in an obvious way.
- **Avoid Jargon:** This is always a good idea, but even more so when someone else might not go as deep with a certain type of technology as you do.
- **Stick to the facts:** It's easy to let a flourish slip into your prose. Especially if you've been writing marketing docs. But don't. Keep to the facts.

- **Don't Try Too Hard:** A press release isn't a creative column submission with the local opinion editor. It's a news announcement. Treat it as such.
- **Quotes:** Including quotes from the business owner or spokesperson is a great way to humanize a press release. Be sure to take advantage of this opportunity, including one or two quotes from someone important at your business or, even better, a customer.
- **Grammar:** Those who have careers in writing appreciate good grammar.

Once your release is done, you have two options: you can either e-mail or call it out to local news media personnel, or you can submit it to syndication platforms like PRWeb.com and Newswire.com. The two aren't mutually exclusive—for a wide variety of coverage, consider doing both! Also advise the reader to put it on their website or use in social media or blogs in order to promote it even to someone not in the "media."

We'll continue on with the HomePod example from earlier while we dissect the anatomy of a press release.

The Anatomy of a Press Release

There's no single piece of advice I can give you about how to write a press release that will catch the attention of someone in the media. Instead, I can tell you how most people write them and give you some best practices about what's in them. Let's start with the best practices for each section, beginning with the headline.

The Headline

As with most things you write that you want people to read, the way to grab attention is with a great title. When working with press releases, you call the title a headline. And as with most headlines, you want one that grabs attention. Let's say you're based in Los Angeles and you want to go after the emerging home automation industry using the HomePod as a wedge. First, you build a service offering. Then, you come up with a great headline that pretty much sums things up. Some ideas might include:

- Local Tech Firm Introduces Comprehensive Home Automation
- Local Shop Introduces New Home Automation Services
- A New Era of Home Automation Centered Around Apple
- Local Firm Brings Home Automation to Businesses

These headlines are fairly different from one another. But there are some lessons to learn here. In these examples, most are kept short and easily digestible. Your name could easily (and probably should) replace the "Local Shop" or "Local Tech Firm" in the headlines. There should be one catchy or trendy word but not so many as to be unapproachable, and importantly, headlines should typically be eight words or less.

The Header

Next, let's talk about the header. This is at the top of the page and contains some pretty basic information. On the left side, you need two lines. The first would read when to release the information. The reason this is necessary is that some content is under embargo, which means you want someone to write about it but not actually release what they've written until the embargo is lifted.

The second line would include the date you're sending the release. On the right side of the header is the contact information. This should include a name, phone number, and e-mail address, each on its own line.

The Dateline and Lead

The first paragraph of your press release contains the dateline and lead. This is one of the most important parts of the release and any reader will likely stop reading immediately if you don't keep their attention, so don't bury the lead here. Start with your city followed by a dash (known as the dateline) and then include a sentence that wraps up the release in a nice pretty bow (known as the lead). An example of an opening paragraph might read like:

> LOS ANGELES – Charles Edge of Megaawesomeconsultancy announces suite of new services that brings cutting edge home automation technology to small businesses, leveraging the Apple platform.

The Body

Throughout the body, we're going to cover what's often referred to as the inverted pyramid. Start with the most newsworthy aspects of the release: the Who, What, When, and Where. Then go to the important details, and wrap up general and background information, which we'll cover in the next section.

An example of the body might include two or three paragraphs that lay out the necessary details, such as the following example:

> Edge vows to bring Home Automation technology to every aspect of small businesses at a rate that more than pays for itself in energy savings. George Technicianopolis has been named head of the Automation business unit.

> "We are bringing out-of-the-box solutions to Main Street so businesses can control HVAC, lights, and monitor energy consumption," said Technicianopolis. "And not only does it allow companies to save on energy bills, but it makes everyone's lives easier."
>
> Technicianopolis will be at Huge Tech Conference on April 1st. Here, organizations and the media can see a model home, and control every aspect with standard voice controls.

Notice in this excerpt, we included a quote or two from the business owner or someone at the organization. An additional quote could come from an analyst or a statistic from a study as well. There's also a call to action to join the company at a showcase where more quotes can be obtained and where someone from the media could get hands-on experience with the technologies being mentioned.

General Information

You don't need to provide a summary to a press release. But you can include a paragraph of background information that you reuse in each press release you put out. Rather than give an example of this, I'll just include some bullets to consider including in the paragraph.

- How long the company has been in business
- How many customers the company has
- Anything newsworthy or legitimizing about the company
- Any quotes from industry analysts or influencers in the industry about the company
- For smaller companies, information about the principals of the company

An example of the general information might read something like the following:

> Founded in 1602, Megaawesomeconsultancy brings modern technologies to small- and medium-sized businesses. The company focuses on Apple technologies and carries the largest inventory of Apple hardware in the world, as it has since its founding, centuries before the founding of Apple itself. Megaawesomeconsultancy has 894 employees, with offices in Venice Beach, Calif.
>
> "We will save the environment, one HomePod installation at a time," said Charles Edge.
>
> For more information on Megaawesomeconsultancy, visit `http://www.krypted.com`.

Finally, and this is worth repeating: a press release isn't a book. Keep a press release to a single page and always have it proofed to make sure it fits with AP Style Guides (a link to the latest version of that is included at the end of this chapter) before you submit it.

Once you have a press release built, it can be submitted via prweb.com, Newswire, or directly to various contacts you may have in the press. One thing you might choose to do PR on is seasonal offerings, as reporters are always doing catchy stories around holidays and other time-bound events, which we'll cover in the next section.

Seasonal PR and Marketing

Seasonal PR and marketing comes every year, if not multiple times of the year. By the time jack-o'-lanterns start to appear on front stoops, businesses ranging from the Boy Scouts of America to the neighborhood gym have started preparations to bring in enough business to keep them open for the year, in many cases. In 2016, holiday sales represented nearly 20 percent of total retail industry sales nationwide for the year, according to the National Retail Federation.

Businesses that have their act together stand to do well in what most prognosticators say should be a healthy year for holiday sales. Those that don't may spend January wondering what went wrong.

One of my first jobs was managing retail point-of-sale systems. While visiting brick and mortar stores, I got a lot of exposure to the preparations people were making—or failing to make—for the holiday rush. Many of the same lessons also apply to online retailers. Ten key suggestions:

- **Start early**: Some strategies take time. You might have all the right ideas, but if you don't start immediately, you won't have time to implement them before the holiday rush. Given that more than half of holiday shoppers are done shopping by December 10th, you only have a few weeks to capture their business—so start targeting them in November (which means starting your PR efforts in October).
- **Follow the latest trends**: Sure, you know your market and how to appeal to it, but don't get overconfident. Look up and see what trends are hot, both geographically and in the industry. Do your research. You may have missed something.
- **Leverage Small Business Saturday**: It comes on Nov. 25 this year. As a small business, you should be able to rock this. American Express and a number of other organizations can help drive business to you with their Small Business Saturday campaigns.

- **Take any form of payment**: American Express, Discover, gift cards—and cash works too! There are more vendors than ever for processing credit card payments, from Square to PayPal Here, to QuickBooks GoPayment, to Stripe. Adding local payment or coupon options (such as the coupon books my daughter's school has me sell every year) can also provide leads and co-marketing for you. And gift cards can easily be done with services like Gyft or Clover. Love 'em all!
- **Work with Groupon**: Groupon as well as Amazon Local and other similar sites are great for driving business, much in the same way that traditional coupon books can. Just be ready for a potential torrent of new business *after* the holidays (after all, you have to earn that revenue to recognize it).
- **Start a loyalty program**: Loyalty programs can be small and low-tech. Or they can be a service such as the Belly loyalty rewards program. You can also use the good old-fashioned punch cards and stamps—the "buy 10, get 1 free"-type of stuff. The great thing about a program like Belly, though, is you get an online presence driving business your way. Also consider loyalty programs that include a bunch of different businesses.
- **Rev up your PR machine now**: If you operate in a local market, it's a great time to look for creative ways to get your story out through social media.

- **Personalize the customer experience**: This can be as simple as remembering a customer's name and what they like. The fact is, consumers are willing to pay more for a better experience. Automate as much of the experience tracking as you can but not in a creepy way (like bombarding customers with multiple e-mails every week).
- **Partner with a non-profit**: Don't do it to make money, but because it's right. This can be as simple as tithing a percentage of profits for a limited time to a charitable organization. Or you can get out and do something in person that's meaningful, such as leading a collection drive.
- **Be smart with promotions**: This doesn't mean merely holding a 20 percent off sale. You could hold a photos-with-Santa event or give double the loyalty points for a limited period if you have a loyalty program.

There are also a thousand ideas here that I could never think to mention, and you know your customers better than I possibly could, so use this list as a starting point and do as much free stuff as you can, both seasonally and out of season, before you look to hire external help.

Hiring a PR Firm

This chapter has included a number of tips on getting free public relations. Public relations is key to building out a truly scalable sales organization, as the passive marketing obtained via PR is not only the top of your sales funnel, but PR also provides air cover for all leads as they traverse through the sales funnel.

At some point the free efforts have less and less return on investment, or the available PR resources in your area or field are saturated and it's difficult to get started in the first place. This means it's time to stop going it alone. Maybe you don't have time to consistently "do PR." Maybe you need better assistance to uncover great potential. Maybe you want to reach a larger audience than you could on your own. This is when it's time to hire some help.

Hiring help doesn't mean you have to pony up tens of thousands of dollars to a huge firm, either. I can pretty much guarantee you that there is a PR club/organization in your area. The first place to start would be the Public Relations Society of America, at prsa.org; from there, search the Internet for local PR firms. In this "gig economy" looking for individuals you could pay directly to help with your PR efforts is a also great way to keep costs low in the beginning.

The important part is that whomever you hire makes you participate in things. Whether that's writing content, responding to e-mails to set up appointments for interviews, connecting to local groups, or even buying that new shirt for your first television interview! Beyond that, take their plan and then look for ways to figure out if the PR function is then working for you, because if it isn't, then you'll need to find a different firm to hire until you find the perfect fit.

Understand How They Work

Be careful of charlatans. Public Relations is challenging to quantify, because it's usually not performance-based. But really, most agencies or sole proprietors will have an idea of what they want to do with your company, and how much time that will take. They usually reverse-engineer a retainer based on an estimation of how much time it will take them to deliver the results you want. And sometimes they'll luck out and do more and other times they will do less. But give yourself permission to ask for transparency for how they came to a retainer amount. If you understand their assumptions and limitations, you'll have a better relationship.

Note While monthly retainers are the norm, you can do project-based PR with an agency. This might be a good way to get started without a lot of long-term commitment.

While it can be challenging to quantify the relationship with a PR firm or agency, there are a couple of tips if you want to try.

- **Measurable outputs**: Quantify deliverables. For example, how many articles or interviews or placed bylines. Multiple outputs is acceptable and subject to review at least every 6 months.
- **Measure quality beyond quantity**: Implement an article rating system and have a goal. That way "you" can measure the quality of the placements vs. just the quantity. I have an example of a rating system I use if you are interested.

When you work with someone, they should understand what you do, how you want people to perceive your company, the places that they should do media outreach for, what's required before doing any media outreach, and the scope of the relationship you'll have with them. They should be able to build an effective plan in the pre-sales stage, or at least an outline of what they'll be doing on your behalf. Make sure you see a plan and agree on it before you cut a check to anyone. Otherwise, don't.

If It Isn't Working, Switch Firms

I recommend giving any PR effort or firms at least 6 months. Most will work quarterly anyways, so this is really just renewing your contract for a second quarter. After 6 months, you should know the impact that a given PR firm is going to have for your organization.

After the first quarter, you should be feeling a little buzz in the market. If you've been getting media attention, but have not seen any lift in the business yet, then you're probably on the right track. PR isn't immediate so you have to be a little bit patient. The important thing is that you know what efforts your representation is conducting on your behalf and agree with them. It seems like these things always take longer than we initially think they will.

During the second quarter, you should start seeing business coming in from PR. If at the end of the second quarter you don't see any lift, then it's time to either renegotiate your contract or, more likely, find a new firm. If it takes you three of these cycles to find the right firm, so be it. The right PR can be one of the biggest game changers for any company.

Things to Stay Away From

Getting media attention is fun at times. But you can easily ruin relationships if you say the wrong thing. A little common sense goes a long way; however, when you're put on the spot and you need to respond quickly, you might say something you shouldn't. Sometimes, you can ask for questions beforehand, but that doesn't really cover the way conversations can meander.

You can guide where the conversation goes, to some extent. So have a plan. And, if you don't know how to answer a question, it is OK to ask the reporter if you can get back to them after the interview via e-mail. Some things you really probably just shouldn't talk about publicly.

- **Financials**: Stick to what is public. Your financials can be a big topic. When it comes up with local or business press, know what you can and can't say going into an interview. If you're the owner, make sure you know what you want to say, since you're allowed to say anything you want.
- **Politics**: Half of your country will be annoyed by anything you say. I use this rule when I'm onsite anyway, but be careful about discussing politics. Even if you agree on 9 out of 10 issues within a given audience, that 10^{th} thing will potentially cause friction with a customer, and there's really no need for that. Having said that, I am all for being open about who you are, and just because you own a business doesn't mean you can't have an identity, so I don't necessarily include things like sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion with politics, even though it's easy to do so. Especially with how divisive politics has gotten these days.
- **Customers**: Unless you have explicit permission in writing from someone at one of your customers (with the authority to discuss the work you do with them publicly), don't do it. And even if you do have that, make sure to understand the boundaries of what they're cool with you discussing with the media.
- **Vendors**: There are a few issues that you can run into with vendors. One is talking about specific business topics, like margins. You're likely contractually bound not to discuss these, but it warrants mentioning anyway. Additionally, make sure you don't say anything that could be perceived negatively.

There are other things that you shouldn't discuss as well. Be smart about what you say—especially when you're "off the record," as I've had a number of times when I said something that was supposedly off the record and it ended up being put in print!

Conclusion

Public Relations is one of the more legitimate ways to get the word out there about your company. But it's hard to track the actual impact that media attention can have for your organization. Having said that, with little effort, you can establish a brand and drive some traffic back to your site, hopefully converting a higher percentage of incoming calls than you do for other forms of outreach.

It may be hard to quantify the impact of Public Relations, but it's not usually hard to quantify the impact of advertising, which we'll cover next, in Chapter 9.

Further Reading

- The Associated Press Stylebook, https://www.amazon.com/Associated-Press-Stylebook-2017-Briefing/dp/0465093043
- Traction: Get A Grip On Your Business, by Gino Wickman https://www.amazon.com/Traction-Get-Grip-Your-Business/dp/1936661837
- Trust Me, I'm Lying: Confessions of a Media Manipulator by Ryan Holiday https://www.amazon.com/Trust-Me-Lying-Confessions-Manipulator/dp/1591846285

- The Icarus Deception: How High Will You Fly?, by Seth Godin https://www.amazon.com/Icarus-Deception-How-High-Will/dp/1591846072
- PR Tools to Toot Your Own Horn – Strategies and Ideas for Low-Cost Small Business Public Relations, Diane Seltzer, https://www.amazon.com/Tools-Toot-Your-Own-Horn-ebook/dp/B00AFNWE74
- Spark: The Complete Public Relations Guide for Small Business, Robert Deigh, https://www.amazon.com/Spark-Complete-Public-Relations-Business/dp/1973721953
- Pitched: A Simple DIY Guide to Public Relations for Small Business, Jennifer Fortney, https://www.amazon.com/Pitched-Simple-Public-Relations-Business-ebook/dp/B079Y6R3QQ
- PR Works!: How to create, implement, and leverage a public relations program for your small business, Nancy Marshall, https://www.amazon.com/PR-Works-implement-leverage-relations-ebook/dp/B01468WYN2
- The Art of the Pitch: Persuasion and Presentation Skills That Win Business, P. Coughter, https://www.amazon.com/Art-Pitch-Persuasion-Presentation-Business/dp/0230120512

CHAPTER 9

Advertising

There are those who can sell. And for those who can't, there's advertising. Just kidding! The top of the sales funnel is often built through sound advertising. It's those ads that make the phone ring and establish the leads that many a sales team will be trying to close business on. In Chapter 7, we looked at Guerrilla Marketing, and according to the size of the organization, this might be the place most efforts are best spent.

But as you grow, you'll need to look at primarily traditional advertising, which is what we'll spend the remainder of this chapter covering. While not every aspect is traditional, there are elements that are (and besides, my concept of traditional isn't the same as yours, my dad's, or my grandmother's concept would be).

The Three Phases

I've come up with my own little classification system for organizations as they embark upon the adventure of advertising. Sales is the best way to increase your business. Advertising helps sales by providing the legitimate authority to the company. If they've heard of you before and are just talking to someone in sales, a lead is more likely to convert to a customer.

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_9

Advertising is the top of the funnel. Let's look at how that top of your funnel is likely to mature over time:

- **Not yet**: You're just starting your business. You're too busy shoveling poo to buy a shovel. You can't keep up with the new business anyways, so what's the point of buying advertising. Maybe if the local Rotary club or an organization in which you believe calls, you'll make a donation for a table or to have your business listed somewhere. Maybe you'll also post the occasional response to a forum or speak at a conference. But while these are things that advertise your company, you're not really doing any traditional advertising yet.
- **Dabbling**: You've been in business long enough to understand the conversation you want to have with potential customers. And you're getting a good idea of what a good customer might look like. These are theories that need to be proven. During the dabbling phase, you should be exploring various advertising mediums, the target demographics, the needs the customers have, the sales cycles, and the return-on-investment (ROI) for each. If you're deliberate, you'll end up able to target the most desirable customer with a message that will make them call, click, or just buy.
- **Investing**: You're done dabbling once you have a predictable ROI from your advertising spend. Now it's time to invest. Get professional help to increase that ROI and then scale the spend in the most appropriate medium. This might be using an outsourced service or hiring a team internally. If you're stuck in the dabbling phase, you can leverage outside services to try and move yourself into the investing phase more quickly.

- **Refining**: This is where real growth happens. And it's the hardest place to get to. You've got a predictable model for spending your advertising budget. And you've been increasing your investment. You're stable. But you've gotten to a point where the cost to acquire business is not going down or has started to tick up. If not, it will happen. Then it's time to refine the message and the medium. By now, you have clearly proven that advertising is working, but keep in mind that it can always (and I repeat, always) work better.

Whatever your place in the above maturity model, it's all about your comfort. How much of your hard-earned profit are you willing to not take home as a draw? How much do you want to reinvest in the business? There's a chance you never want to take a risk on spending any money on advertising and are happy as a one-, two-, or three-person company. And that's wonderful. But if you choose to grow beyond that, it's time to look at buying some advertising.

Buy Advertising

Advertising can be really expensive. But there are small ways you can buy that can have a substantial impact on your business. When you purchase advertising, you are basically engaging in passive marketing. Don't expect every click to net you a new $100,000 customer.

Where's the right place to buy advertising? SEO, covered more in Chapter 7, is critical in shaping advertising campaigns. Chances are that SEO is a far smarter spend than traditional advertising campaign for nearly everyone who's reading this book.

Here are some mediums that many will look into.

- **Online ads**: Buying advertising on the Internet is likely the most important kind of advertising you will do. This includes buying the top listing on search engines as well as buying banners on websites.
- **Print advertising**: This includes local newspapers, local magazines, national print publications, industry-specific journals, and coupon books.
- **Podcasts**: If you're in a large city, there are podcasts about that city. If you specialize in an industry, there are podcasts for that industry, so put your initial focus on those and then get less specific from there.
- **Radio**: According to the type of audience you cater to, there's a good chance that there's a radio show somewhere that is tapping into the same audience. This might be public radio, a talk radio show that caters to a given neighborhood, or something I've never thought of, because I don't service your customers; you do.
- **Mailers**: You can buy lists of addresses. You can also pay a service to include lists when you have mailers printed. These are inexpensive per item you send, but you have to send a lot to get anyone to actually act on them.
- **Billboards**: Billboards are one of the Airport terminals, billboards in neighborhoods you want to get new business in, and billboards are incredibly ineffective for the type of business you're likely after. Unless you have someone in the advertising field that you trust tell you to purchase advertising on a billboard, don't do it.

- **Memberships**: We won't really cover this one further. But when you join professional organizations, especially those that cater to a given geography, do everything you can to get a link to your site and your phone number on there.
- **Television**: I have never seen a consulting firm successfully pull off an ad on the television. The closest thing might be the Watson ads from IBM. And I've yet to encounter an Apple consulting firm that is at the size to justify a television spot. But these aren't as expensive as you might think. Alternatively, consider advertising at the local movie theater. They're always looking for people to buy ads that appear before a movie. And you like customers who are early!
- **Cable**: Some areas have a local cable channel that runs advertising (for non-profits these ads are often free).

Now that we've done a quick overview of these, let's dig into each, starting with blogs.

Blogs

I have a blog. About once a year I get an e-mail from someone and actually try out their product based on that unsolicited e-mail. About once every couple of years I end up writing an article about one of those products as well. And I've even put them in a couple of books I've written. Some of them, I actually still use. Some have even told me that they got a fair amount of business through my posts.

So, advertising to bloggers, be it through unsolicited e-mails or some other way, can work to get business. But if that's all you wanted from bloggers, you'd be better off spending those advertising dollars on something more transactional. Many bloggers (who aren't me) are influencers, so one aspect of reaching them is that you have a higher rate of conversion. Your services or product can also end up getting picked up by people in the media that follow those bloggers. Which can end up with mentions in various media outlets, albeit these are usually industry-specific.

Blogs also provide backlinks. It stands to reason that if backlinks are what give sites high listing on search engines, then the more of those you can get, the better. And to some degree, getting a good natural listing in the search engines has a lot to do with being relevant. Having a site with a good page ranking mention you is a great way to get those backlinks.

You can also buy mentions in blogs. Avoid purchasing backlinks, though. Not all backlinks are created equal. Supposedly, if you purchase a backlink on a website, that backlink *should* be tagged as a "No-Follow," which means that search engine crawlers don't count the link toward your rank. Well, kinda'. Track the links that come into your site, but don't assume that those links tell the whole story of the impact of your work to get bloggers to mention you.

Bloggers are a weird bunch. You can usually reach them with e-mails (check the website or registrar for addresses if you don't have them already), connect on Linkedin (chances are that you aren't too many connections away from them if you need an introduction), message them on social media, etc. Being that I've gotten a lot of these, let me throw out a few tips.

- Personalize the communication.
- Be nice.
- Explain why your pitch is pertinent to your audience.
- Include a link (but not eight).
- Make sure your pitch fits in the first couple of lines.
- Use language similar to the language the blogger uses.
- Avoid repetitive e-mails.

If you think that blogs are a good place for you to advertise and you don't get any traction getting someone to write about your goods or services, then also consider buying some advertising on the site. This can usually be done directly with the blogger, or through an advertising network. Another way to get your message out there is through podcasts, which we'll cover in the next section.

Buy Advertising on Podcasts

I have a podcast, so I'm partial to podcasts of course. But why did I start a podcast? Because I was paying obscene amounts of money to large podcasts for advertising products. That and I have a big mouth.

Chances are that if you're reading this book, you probably don't want to advertise on my podcast. You want to advertise in places where your customers will be listening. As with most advertising, local consulting firms should stick to local media outlets. Look for podcasts that talk about your specific city or cities. Look for podcasts that cater to the industries you want to support. And remember that just because you like a podcast, that doesn't mean you'll have a good ROI from sponsoring it.

Speaking of ROI, many podcasts can be thought of as "dark social." This basically means that visitors of the podcast aren't coming from the website of the podcast. Instead, they'll be attributed as "Direct" traffic if you're looking at them in Google. But I keep telling you to track all of the things! A great strategy to try to track the impact of an ad campaign on a given podcast would be to have the URL used to visit the website reflect a URL specific to that podcast. This isn't natural, so consider offering a deal to use that special URL. For example, visit myawesomeconsultingfirm.com/macadminspodcast to receive 10% off your first purchase. You've heard this with other podcasts already.

Most podcasts desperately want to sell advertising. So they'll cut you a deal if you just ask nicely. I always ask for discounts, even for my cable bill. It can't hurt to ask, and if you don't, you're just leaving money on the table. After all, you'll provide the podcast with text that will be read during the podcast.

Search Engine Advertising

In the previous chapter, we discussed Search Engine Optimization, or SEO. Another way to get listed at the top of almost any search engine is to simply buy your way there. Google, Bing, and other search engines allow you to purchase the first few places in a listing (usually with a term like "Sponsored" appended to the listing) or purchase a place on the sidebar of the search engine. This is how they usually make money.

There are entire books out there on effectively buying this type of advertising. And I'm certainly no expert. But I've had some pretty solid successes, especially when it comes to buying advertising on search engines. The first reason is that I leveraged SEO to figure out the right words to buy. I can't stress this enough. The second is that I started out making small purchases. The third is that I focused on long tail search. Let's unpack these.

You can't rely on SEO bringing you business. SEO can help grow your business but is also useful to help you best understand what keywords you can buy that drive traffic to your site and, more importantly, the kind of keywords that drive traffic that converts into purchasing customers. Even if you aren't ready to start spending money on search engine advertising, creating content, building landing pages, refining the messages on your pages to convert traffic, and capturing analytics will help pave the way for future spending on search engines like Google.

Once you start understanding the journey a potential customer, or lead, will take on your site, you can start to spend a little money on sites like Google, Bing, Yahoo, and even Pinterest. Growing your purchases from a modest spend is a way to protect your advertising capital and let you build a solid practice. One of my favorite tools for this is free: Google Analytics. But there are other solutions such as WordStream.com that help enable you to buy keywords with lots of traffic more easily because they help you to analyze current searches for words.

Many companies start out by purchasing words like “Consulting Los Angeles” or “Apple Consulting Venice Beach.” In general, the more words, the cheaper the ad buy. Buying longer streams of words that often lead to less clicks but more conversions (or buying customers) based on those clicks is known as long tail search and is a very effective way to keep your spend in check and to spend less time filtering out people who might be searching for help in another country or might be searching for the wrong thing. As an example, a quick analysis shows that “Mac” is not going to likely net you a single customer with a $100 spend. “Mac consulting” might. “Mac consulting Minneapolis” is really honing in. But your phone should ring every time someone searches for “Mac consulting Minneapolis Xsan” or “Mac Consulting Minneapolis Lightspeed.”

Note We put the word Minneapolis in the above search. You can also target ads based on specific demographics and geographies to help maximize your campaign effectiveness.

You can also use tools to help you refine the ads and find hidden gems of search awesome. Products like Kenshoo, Adobe Ad Cloud, Wordstream.com, and others will let you aggregate statistics, ads, do A/B testing across platforms, and provide a lot of the value that you would need to hire a consultant to get otherwise. But a smart use of money would be hiring a consultant to help you set up those tools, then decipher analytics, and make good ad buys.

Ultimately, you need to make online advertising work. If you explore none of the other mediums in this chapter, this is the most critical. Search engines are likely your best bet in finding new veins of customers that you can then continue to grow out of. Now that we've covered Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Advertising, let's look at buying ads on websites, often referred to as online, or display, advertising.

Online Advertising

Search Engine advertising is one thing. Buying ads on websites is another. Targeting specific sites is going to be the most cost-effective but also the most laborious to actually buy ads. Keep in mind that when you spend more time buying an ad than the ad cost in terms of your billable rate, you're not going to be able to buy much advertising!

Some of the most valuable ads I've ever purchased have been on websites without advertising, or those that really just don't charge as much as they should. I ran an ad on AFP548.com for years and I still feel a little guilty about how little they charged. But while finding smaller sites to buy ads on usually has a great ROI per dollar spent (which extends to CAC, or Cost to Acquire a Customer), trying to find more and more sites, process payments to those sites, and communicating back and forth with site admins can be a total time suck.

The easiest way to buy ads is to purchase them on big advertising networks. These networks will handle a lot of the back-end work, aggregate statistics for you, help you zero in on good buys, perform the buys automatically, and handle all of the billing. This is of course done at a markup and can be random, leading to your ad running on sites you might want nothing to do with. But it's effective.

A great way to find an ad network you want to use might be to go to a site and find a vertical ad network that represents that site and others. This will give you a channel that you can buy on. Most will allow you to do Run of Site (ROS) or even Run of the Network (RON), which helps them do bulk sales and helps you pick up some cheaper ads here and there. As you get into less and less targeted buys, the Cost Per Click (CPC) likely goes down, but hopefully the CAC stays about the same. With larger networks running an ad, it's not uncommon to see prices as low as $10 CPM, or Cost per mille (per thousand impressions). However, the effective CPM is often a quarter of that. The larger buys become a numbers game, and often wildly ineffective for small consultancies.

Some of these larger networks to check out include AdBrite, Adcash, DoubleClick, Advertising.com, ValueClick, Rocket Fuel, Right Media, Zedo, Google AdSense, Ad maven, Clicksor, BuySellAds, Media.net, Infolinks, Chitika, and Kontera. Check out each and look for features that appeal to you. There's a lot, so you can afford to be picky.

Focus on the geographies you serve. Ad networks should be able to limit your ad to specific geographies. This gives you more impact per dollar spent and helps keep you from having calls with customers in areas you don't or can't serve. If you are national or global, then reserve a fair amount of your media spend for the markets you're more recognizable in for the multi-touch marketing impact, and use a different ad with a broader message for ads that aren't bound to a given geography.

Advertising on social media is another means of display advertising. You can buy sponsored posts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and pretty much any social media outlet. Keep in mind that these come with a very low cost but aren't usually very effective in the beginning when selling business services. They are a great way to round out a display advertising portfolio and very much worth experimenting with.

Radio Advertising

Advertising on the radio is a lot like advertising on podcasts, but it's your parents who will hear the ad, not your kids. This isn't to say that you shouldn't advertise on the radio. It's a great way to reach decision makers. But think about this before you choose radio over podcasts: does the person who calls you listen to a podcast on the way home from work, or do they listen to the radio? If you think your customers (or potential customers) listen to specific radio programs, then you should certainly sponsor programs or pay for ad space.

If you do work with radio, don't buy just one spot on the radio. When buying radio advertising, make sure to buy at least three slots per time. So if you choose to sponsor Marketplace on NPR, sponsor it at least three times. Think about it similarly to having to put new foods in front of your kids three times before they will actually eat something new. If you are going to sponsor multiple programs, time them out so you can best understand which program is driving new customers. And make sure to have a landing page that you mention in your spot, like "Get a free evaluation of your network by the best consultants in Baltimore at mygreatconsultants.com/marketplace."

Radio advertising isn't cheap. And it's hard to get quantifiable metrics on "dark social" like radio. So if it's a challenge to work with, why is the medium still around? Because it still works for certain industries. If you have a limited budget, focus on online advertising. If you have money left over, then look at mediums like radio and print. The nice thing about radio advertising is that a lot of people who work in businesses are trapped in their cars while getting to and from work, and repetitive brainwashing to a captive audience like that will over time build brand awareness.

Print Advertising

One of the hardest types of advertising to get right is print advertising. If you don't run a brick and mortar store that sells Apple equipment or peripherals then you might want to stay clear of print advertising. Having said that, a mass mailer is a way to get the word out about your business. Just expect a large percentage to go into the trash.

There are exceptions when it comes to print advertising. An invitation to an open house is a great way for a support company that operates in a community to make contacts. The invitation idea can be extended to a movie night or other marketing event. Another exception would be after you meet someone in person. A thank you card is a great way to remind them that you'd like a chance to win their business, especially if that card is handwritten.

Tip I went to finishing school in the South. So I feel the need to tell you that thank you cards must be sent within 6 months or not at all.

Finally, have your print advertising professionally prepared. Or if you think you can do professional-quality ads, just have someone look it over before you send it out.

Coupons, Sales, and Specials

Apple pretty much doesn't ever offer coupons off the cost of a product. But you're not Apple. If you're flush with new customers, then there's never really a reason to offer discounts. But if you're just getting started out or building out a new company, then you might find it useful to get a few new customers by offering some kind of a public-facing discount.

According to the type of work you do, you might find Groupon or Amazon Deals fit the need of landing you some pretty sweet new clients. The conversion rates on those are low. There also aren't many companies that leverage those types of sites for business services, so assume a primarily consumer customer.

To get into larger businesses, you might try offering a discount on an annual contract instead. But consider using an ad in a business journal, print advertising, banner ads on a site, or even a listing for a journal. Again, use a special URL for each medium you choose to advertise on, so you can easily track the impact in a number of different ways. This is key. Let's say you get hundreds of clicks on your ad but no transactions. That usually means the messaging or price is off. The same can happen with getting the wrong types of phone calls if you put a phone number in a listing, which we'll cover in the next section.

The Wrong Calls

One problem that can arise with advertising is that you might have the phone and e-mail lighting up, but they might all want something totally different than what you're selling. When this happens, you have a few options. If all of the people calling want the same thing, then you might choose to go ahead and offer that. But if they're not, you'll likely want to tailor your message to get more specific about what you do. This is a great problem to have but something you'll want to fix pretty quickly so as not to waste more time than you or sellers at your organization have to give.

Make sure to respond to every person who reaches out. For starters, it's the right thing to do. But if that's not enough, if you don't respond, you'll be making a bad impression on someone that might be a potential customer some day. Normally, the wrong calls are very similar. So to simplify your response, use a tool like Text Expander or create an e-mail in your drafts to automatically respond to these requests. This is a great place to find a vendor to which you can redirect these inquiries. We talked about forming relationships with other organizations in Chapter 6; this is a great opportunity to have another vendor to which you can bilaterally refer business.

Marketing Development Funds

Chances are that you sell products or align with a partner. Many of the largest tech companies like Microsoft, Cisco, and Apple provide something known as Marketing Development Funds (or MDF) for those who sell their products. Ask all of your partners if you can get MDF for a campaign, and you may get all or part of the campaign paid for. Additionally, co-marketing with a larger company can increase the legitimacy of the campaign in ways you couldn't do on your own.

Most MDF will come with strings. Maybe the partner wants to attend an event with you. Maybe the partner wants a business plan. I've yet to see strings that were attached to MDF that I didn't eventually find to actually be as valuable as the funds themselves. Business plans make you think about a campaign before you waste money. Sometimes the structure required helps you think of things in a new way. Having marketing staff from a partner attend an event with you is always a good thing. You can learn more about the product, and if they're sales staff, you might even find a great person to refer you some business.

There are no sure things in advertising so there's always risk. MDF can be a great way to share the risk of a campaign and learn more about advertising and marketing along the way. It's all these little bits that make you into a mature businessperson.

Conclusion

Advertising should make the phone ring (or these days, I guess, the e-mail client ding). You likely cannot have more than two or three people on a sales team without advertising. It's easy to have large amounts of money just get up and walk away when buying ads.

You can easily spend $5,000 a month on Google clicks, only to get a bunch of calls from people who want services you don't provide. Many a podcast will cost $10,000 to advertise on, and you may have no way of knowing you got a good lead from them. If this seems daunting, find a local resource to help guide your efforts instead of just going out and buying whatever looks good, or focus on Public Relations.

There's no reason not to stay in the "not yet" category that I described earlier in this chapter. Don't let your pride jump in here and tell you that you need to be buying up ad space or that you need to hear your ad at the beginning of your favorite podcast (unless it's my podcast).

It would be better to save wasted advertising spend until you're ready to spend it wisely. But if you are about growing, you will eventually need to spend here. And when you do, find someone you trust, because there's a lot of really well-meaning but completely useless organizations in the advertising industry. So as with other parts of the business, challenge everything you hear that doesn't make sense, and when in doubt blatantly copy the marketing and advertising brilliance of Apple (without, of course, violating their copyrights)!

Further Reading

- Keeping Up With The Quants, by Thomas H. Davenport and Jinho Kim https://www.amazon.com/Keeping-Up-Quants-Understanding-Analytics/dp/142218725X
- Marketing in the Age of Google, by Vanessa Fox https://www.amazon.com/Marketing-Age-Google-Revised-Updated/dp/1118231937
- Getting Naked A Business Fable About Shedding The Three Fears That Sabotage Client Loyalty, Patrick Lencioni https://www.amazon.com/Getting-Naked-Business-Shedding-Sabotage/dp/0787976393

- The 22 Immutable Laws of Marketing, By Al Ries and Jack Trout https://www.amazon.com/22-Immutable-Laws-Marketing-Violate/dp/0887306667
- Permission Marketing, By Seth Godin https://www.amazon.com/Permission-Marketing-Turning-Strangers-Customers/dp/0684856360
- Building Brand-width, Closing the Sale Online, Sergio Zyman and Scott Miller, https://www.amazon.com/Building-Brand-closing-online-hardback/dp/B003ACLZDG
- Engaging Customers Using Big Data: How Marketing Analytics Are Transforming Business, Arvind Sathi, https://www.amazon.com/Engaging-Customers-Using-Big-Data/dp/1137386185
- Raving Fans, Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles, https://www.amazon.com/Raving-Fans-Revolutionary-Approach-Customer/dp/0688123163
- The Purple Cow, Seth Godin, https://www.amazon.com/Purple-Cow-Transform-Business-Remarkable/dp/014101640X
- Being Digital, Nicholas Negroponte, https://www.amazon.com/Being-Digital-Nicholas-Negroponte/dp/0679762906

CHAPTER 10

The Art of Selling

Ross Perot should be writing this chapter. But he's been too busy building two MSPs that he sold for over 10 billion dollars between them—and making a bold run to become the president of the United States. As such, he wasn't available for comment. But, his story is a pretty good one about selling managed services, as well as how easy it can be to lose your path when selling anything, including something so simple to discuss as managed services.

Ross Perot was a top salesman at IBM in 1962, when he left to start Electronic Data Systems (EDS). His sales background enabled him to build the company into a $2.4 billion behemoth when he sold the company in 1984. He was later an angel investor in NeXT, and then started Perot Systems in 1989, which later sold to Dell for $3.9 billion. The important aspect of his story for the purposes of this chapter is that Perot was a salesman. He knew how to build a sales organization but not the technology.

Many Apple consultancies are started by technical people. To the hyper-technical business owners, sales is a necessary evil. To those savvy with business, sales is the foundation required for any organization to succeed. In this chapter, we'll look at building a sales organization, as this is one of the biggest gaps that needs closing in Apple service providers today. And it starts with choosing a methodology that works for your organization.

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_10

Choosing a Sales Methodology

Sales is the air that a company breathes. Not getting enough sales stagnates growth and can end the life of an organization prematurely. Many an entrepreneur is good enough at sales to make it to the point where it's time to scale up. This is because there's legitimate authority. But what's next? There are probably about as many correct answers here as there are organizations that have effectively built sales teams, and all of those answers are correct. But one item that every sales organization needs at some point is a sales methodology that best represents their product, values, market, and goals. And choosing one early means you don't have to retrain undisciplined sellers in how to represent your company.

Why Sales Methodologies

Companies need to be efficient, creative, and unique to capture new customers. You also need a good product to get brand recognition and build customer loyalty. But if no one uses a product or service in the first place, you never get the chance to build that loyalty and hopefully that magical word of mouth that comes with happy customers. Most of the businesses I talk to do engage in passive marketing and word of mouth as their only sales tools. So the ability to close every incoming sale is paramount. Scratch that, the ability to close every qualified lead is critical.

Many argue that how you close sales deals has one of the greatest impacts on increasing sales and promoting your business. Closing small sales deals is easier and takes less planning, and larger deals require more effort and thoughtful planning. Closing opportunities that are inappropriate for your business will eat up time dealing with dissatisfied customers, while netting you some pretty harsh criticism that might make future work with anyone hearing that criticism difficult. But the sales process is when you set the tone that denotes what a successful engagement with a customer looks like.

A common pain point for a growing business is building a scalable sales model. Most businesses start with a business owner selling themselves and their product. People who believe deeply in what they do can often sell a product, if only because their blood, sweat, and tears is intoxicating to customers. But what happens when that next seller comes into the organization—and then another, and then another? The typical next steps are to try to train other people to sell exactly like you did, to arm them with the same words and tag lines you use. And when that works, wonderful! But it won't always work. Building a sales team is about direct relationships between customers and new sellers. And to arm your new team, you can leverage the decades of sales dogma available by leveraging a methodology and the processes around it that already exist, rather than rewriting the book.

Every business looks to achieve success. If you have a flush sales pipeline and can actually close deals, you are off to a great start. Finding the right combination of sales methodology for your customers, your product, and your philosophies helps you save time and get your new sales staff on a path that enables you and subsequent sales management to report on your sales pipeline, as well as enter a sales conversation at any point and provide helpful guidance to a new generation of sales staff.

Choosing a Methodology

What are some of the top sales methodologies in use? The one you select should match with the personality of both your sellers and your customers. If you haven't hired anyone in sales yet, then focus on you as the seller and the customers. Using a canned methodology will help you while you're starting the process. And be open to learning new tactics, no matter how successful you might have been up to this point.

In the following few sections, we'll provide a brief description of many of the most common sales methodologies in use today. We'll also include a link to a book or two for each in the Further Reading section of this chapter.

Target Account Selling

Used for over 25 years, Target Account Selling is a standard in the sales world, with over 650,0000 sellers trained to convert smaller customers (or smaller groups within larger environments) into bigger and more permanent customers. Target Account Selling breaks larger deals down into smaller components. Using a strategic plan throughout the life of the sales cycle, Target Account Selling de-emphasizes politics of an account.

Target Account Selling is popular due to the ability to automate the whole sales process via Salesforce, making it easier and simpler to integrate with existing workflows. The cost of training the staff for target account selling is high, but most experienced people you hire will already understand this methodology.

SPIN Selling

When Neil Rackham wrote the book "SPIN Selling" in 1989, I doubt he knew that it would still be in use decades later. The name "SPIN Selling" always makes me think of Leonardo getting on the phone to sell some junk stocks. The name just feels like the reason a lot of sellers get a bad rap. But that doesn't mean it has to be a bad methodology (if I thought it were I certainly wouldn't have put it in this list).

SPIN stands for Situation, Problem, Implication, and Need-Payoff. You ask questions to understand the buyer's situation, issues, consequences, and situation, respectively. SPIN Selling requires pretty good communication skills and can seem more like a communication technique than a sales methodology at times. SPIN Selling has proven to be a great technique to attract more customers in as easily prescriptive a way as possible. In this methodology, the salesperson is trained to ask questions based on a customer's choices and preferences, which expose the needs of their organization. This theoretically establishes trust and helps you align your solutions with the services and product you provide.

There are no concrete steps in this methodology to unravel the needs and demands of the customer, but it surely helps in maintaining strong customer and sales representative bond. This is very much a classic sales methodology and best used with smaller, more transactional sales that don't have a bunch of stakeholders involved in the buying process.

SNAP Selling

I figured I'd put the two acronym names side-by-side. "SNAP Selling," from Jill Konrath in 2012 makes a huge, huge assumption: that everyone is as busy and "frazzled" as the author. The goal is to speed up the sales process by being Simple, iNvaluable, Aligned with the needs of the customer, and a Priority. Part of the focus is about getting "in the head" of your customers. It's a good, easy read. Whether I'd implement it as a methodology for a whole company would likely depend on the types of sales I'm making. For example, the P is for Priority. If you're selling something that isn't a priority, can you make it one? If not, move on. I don't think that works for large-scale insourcing options that involve very complex deals. Because really, then you'd just be left with SNA.

Always looking to be relevant is a challenge. But, to me the most important part of this book is the value chain that it demonstrates, not the methodology. Everyone in sales should read it, even if the sales department doesn't leverage it as a methodology.

The Challenger Sale

The Challenger Sale was a result of a pretty massive research project by Matthew Dixon and Brent Adamson, which resulted in a book called "The Challenger Sale." "The Challenger Sale" breaks sellers up into five buckets: Relationship Builders, Hard Workers, Lone Wolves, Reactive Problem Solvers, and Challengers. The Challengers are the more successful today, given the prevalence of large sales in large ("Enterprise") environments.

Instead of unraveling the needs and demands of the customers, the Challenger Sale methodology is used to build consensus in larger teams that are comprised of many levels of stakeholders, common in today's business climate. The Challenger Sale simply challenges the customers by making them aware of the pitfalls within their industry. By delivering a static message to all decision makers, you can also help guide them by challenging the customer to see their needs in a different manner that aligns with your value propositions.

Challengers teach customers and customize their message, taking control of calls. The Challenger Sale then requires a seller research market trends and customers' preferences so they stand out. It does have a drawback in that it does not aid any kind of automation tool as it has no clear strategy for handling large sales, but instead turns the process into bundling large, complex solutions. However, despite this drawback, it has proven to be quite a successful strategy since its conception in 2011, as it is a response to today's educated and online buyer because it challenges them to allow you to provide coaching and be prescriptive instead of discovering their needs and offering them solutions. The Challenger Sale is very popular among highly technical companies (e.g., software companies) with large salesforces.

Value Selling Framework

Developed in 1991, the Value Selling Framework creates a repeatable process, or map, based on customer buying processes. By building a process, rather than customizing each deal, you need less management so you can focus on the basic sales skills with team members. Having said this, there's more documentation required, including qualification, asking documented questions to better understand needs, mapping each opportunity to each of your product's capabilities, and then building out a plan to close each opportunity.

Solution Selling

Solution Selling was the first methodology that I ever received training on. Basically, sell a solution, rather than a product. Since released by Mike Bosworth in 1988, this has been a foundation for a number of other methodologies as well. And it was a reaction to a shift into a lot of different vendors starting to sell solutions that were much more complicated than they had ever before been.

Solution Selling provides a deeper insight into today's mature and informed buyers. This methodology has evolved over time (many haven't) based on a large network of trainers that help the methodology keep pace with complex and rapidly changing business climates, as well as based on the fact that dealing with change is built into the DNA of the methodology overall.

Conceptual Selling

From Robert Miller and Stephen Heiman, Conceptual Selling focuses on the buying process and managing the stakeholders involved when selling to a given organization. This means you need to focus on listening and be good at gathering information. While gathering information, you provide the relevant information for your products and services and leverage that to gain commitment at each level of the potential customer's organization. The reason all of this works is that you don't buy a specific product or a specific service, but instead buy the concept that the offering represents.

This means asking questions that fall into five categories.

- Confirmation: Review any information you've obtained.
- New Information: Explore exactly what the customer would like to achieve (e.g., deliverables).
- Attitude: Understand what connection the stakeholders have.
- Commitment: Understand how far the customer can go, or how much commitment they have to seeing the sale through to completion.
- Issues: Look for roadblocks in the sales process.

As with all of the methodologies, the important thing here is to listen. Listening to the customer, you understand what they need, and can break their needs and status down into like categories, etc.

The Sandler Selling System

Developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s by David Sandler, the Sandler Selling System is franchised and boasts over 250 offices and is taught in 23 languages. Sandler starts with uncovering the needs of the customer and then tailoring a pitch based on their needs. Well, pretty much all of the methodologies start with that, even though most of the calls I've sat in on involve a sales rep launching into what it is about their product that's so great. Maybe they pretend to listen to what I need first, but often not even that.

Because Sandler was developed in the 1960s, it's got a focus on people. I like to think of it as a Zig Ziglar-esque methodology (we'll link to Ziglar's books in the Further Reading section of this chapter, as it's a must read for anyone in sales). But, where it differs from most other methodologies is what comes next. Sandler Sales has more emphasis on bilateralism than any other methodology. It's about having two parties (the buyer and the seller) equally invested in the sales process. This is done by having your reps bring up the roadblocks to completing sales early, providing the customer with options and assistance in overcoming those obstacles. While this doesn't completely end up with a bilaterally equal investment, it does allow you to show that you've put skin in the game and aren't going to waste the time of the customer and of your organization in a deal that can't close. Think of this as a bit of reverse psychology: the potential customer basically ends up convincing themselves to buy by investing the time in getting the seller's obstacles removed.

Many a high-tech company has a complex product to sell, but those in that industry are often leerier of slick sales tactics. Sandler is the most mature of the methodologies, and with an emphasis on looking and acting professional, selling HR and business solutions into large organizations really works. And parts of Sandler work in high-tech nerdy engineering, but other parts do not. As with other methodologies, choose which parts work well for your organization, but when choosing Sandler, take a keen eye on your target audience, and how they may interpret some of the behaviors as manipulative. By being cognizant of that potential interpretation, you can make sure not to promote behaviors in your team that aren't taken the wrong way.

MEDDIC

Meddic, from Jack Napoli, as with many great things, hails from the era of Kurt Cobain. It stands for Metrics, Economic Buyer, Decision Criteria, Decision Process, Identify Pain, Champion. Here, we're enabling sales teams to be effective by helping to compose a plan to close each deal. With good automation in place (e.g., Salesforce integration), you can direct the best person to each customer and help them with messaging by having managers be prescriptive in making a consistent delivery of the sales methodology. This involves time spent in a qualification sage, reviewing key messaging, and then working with the customer. If you're interested in really tight control of your pipeline, this may be the best methodology for you; however, many may find the amount of time it takes to prep each customer, combined with the required documentation, to be too labor-intensive.

CustomerCentric Selling

A lot of products require a lengthy sales process. And many also require a complicated solution be delivered to a customer. CustomerCentric Selling involves turning your sales staff into collaborative consultants that become trusted advisors to customers. This makes CustomerCentric Selling dependent upon several kinds of behaviors.

- You're going to close deals on the customer's timeline, not yours (unless you leverage special pricing and discounts to bring their timeline forward). This might be hard to reconcile against increasing pressures on properly managing your pipeline, but it's a good long-term/multi-quarter way to run the business (after all, if an opportunity closes in the first week of next quarter rather than the last week of this quarter, you've got a great start to the next quarter).
- Decision makers aren't always the same as buyers, especially in larger organizations. Target your sales efforts at the decision makers more than the buyers.
- Put the product in the hands of your customer.

- Learn where a customer is at and meet them there, rather than using presentations that don't speak to a customer's needs.
- To learn where a customer is at, ask relevant questions about their business instead of jumping into what it is your organization can do for them.
- Focus on the solution rather than the relationship (the relationship comes once you've solved their problem).
- Don't act busy; that's an old school technique that is supposed to manipulate customers into thinking you're awesome because you're in high demand. Instead, focus on having the best solution to meet the needs the customer identifies.
- Help potential customers buy your products, rather than convincing them with pushy sales techniques.

Making the Methodology Selection

There are about as many sales methodologies out there as there are really, really good account executives, sales engineers, and sales executives. This might be because it seems like when you get to an elite skillset, you take the body of knowledge you were introduced to and apply it to your style and franchise that out.

These sales strategies can become documented methodologies and can help your business flourish. But they require sufficient training, competence, and professional skills that can grab and engage today's informed and mature customer rather than simply convincing them. Sales is hard.

A methodology can amplify a good seller, helping them close more business, or punish a high performer making it harder to close deals. No methodology will be perfect. The tenets of each are eerily similar in some cases. But the underlying concepts are often to listen more, talk less, respect the time of your buyer, run your routes at their pace, respect your potential customers, and be helpful even if they don't buy your product. Each can also have a lot of value for your organization in the details.

The methodologies I reference here have varying degrees of content in the article. This isn't because any methodology is better; it's more that I have worked with some more than others and have had varying degrees of success with them. No matter the methodology, it all starts with arming a good seller with a good product to sell. But the methodology will help, will align staff to be on the same page, and will provide you with plenty of canned training materials on which to base your training and enablement assets. Now, let's go and hire some more people to close those sales!

Implementing Your Methodology

You now have a methodology that you think works. It's time to hire your first seller. This person should be someone you could see yourself grooming into a sales leadership position. Don't make any promises, just in case things only half work out. But hire for aptitude, not seniority. You might end up hiring someone that sold you a car, or someone straight out of school. And likely, if you're hiring for capacity rather than a book of customers, you'll end up being one of the first tech sales jobs that this new seller ends up with.

People new to industries are often among the easiest to train. They typically don't come with a preconceived set of notions about how things are supposed to work, and they usually have a lot of skills that you might not otherwise think of—often helping innovate the way the business, or even the industry, works.

If you're hiring someone new to the industry, then implementing a sales methodology really just requires that you read some books or take some classes on that methodology. When you do, try not to let your own opinions alter the way that you approach these things. It's worth mentioning that nearly every entrepreneur develops their own methodology based on their personality. Personalities don't scale. Therefore, the methodology, sales training, and sales enablement means that you don't have to spend $1,000,000,000,000 to clone yourself (multiple times).

Working with Big Companies

Working with larger customers is a natural point of growth for many small and medium companies. There's a certain thrill you get when you land your first big deal with a massive customer—a banner account that will help grow your business and also proves that you've "made it."

But there's a risk as well, which I learned the hard way. If you aren't careful, a large company can make up an equally large percentage of your business. And then one day, no matter how good of a contractor you are, they can be gone, leaving you in a precarious position; often at no fault of your own. By then it might be too late to take steps to minimize the impact of losing a customer like this, and you might end up getting forced to be creative to retain employees (and to pay them).

Here are five lessons I learned the hard way to keep in mind when partnering with big companies:

- **Understand your customer's latency**: This means knowing the answer to questions like, "How long will the customer really take to complete decision-making and to provide approvals to a project?" and "What's the timeframe for you getting paid once that project is completed?" When I landed my first major company as a customer, I didn't realize it could take up to 6 months to get paid, just because I needed a PO to be approved by someone. I was also unaware how common it would be to have an occasional invoice stall for an additional 3 months due to routine account audits. Being able to plan my cash flow around such schedules would have saved me a lot of stress.
- **Don't fall victim to "death by meeting"**: In a large company, many more stakeholders are usually involved with every project. While there are good reasons for this, it does add latency to getting projects started. This extra time is what I call the "hurry up and wait" time. Given this, be prepared by ensuring to budget enough time for the project in your pricing. A great start would be to ask at the outset the cadence of the meetings your big customer will require.
- **Ask about compliance**: If you have access to a file, you might also need to meet certain security guidelines while viewing it. You've already gone through the effort of bidding, meeting with, and closing your big customer, so don't accidentally kill the project by not meeting their specific compliance requirements.

Ask for a list of security and compliance guidelines upfront to help cut back on latency and also ensure that you're meeting certain requirements.

- **Know the fiduciary requirements**: This involves knowing the answers to questions like, "How much insurance do you have?"; "Are you OK providing an overview of your organization's financials for the past 3 years?"; "If someone else were to look at them, would the books actually make sense?"; and "Does the big company you're partnering with have a requirement that they not represent more than a given percentage of your organization's billings?" The point here is to know the specifics that are required by your partner organization, and then be prepared for additional fees that contracts may not address.
- **Competition can be fierce**: There is likely a line of other vendors waiting to work with the big company you've partnered with, but don't let that drive you into making decisions that might end up being terrible for your business. Use it as motivation to offer something truly unique that will continue to set you apart from your competition and to make your customer thankful for choosing your business.

The key thing to keep in mind is to take the right steps to ensure they don't accidently put you out of business! Be mindful of the requirements that are communicated when you engage in such a relationship, and be prepared for these new large customers to take time away from your base of clients that put you where you are. A big new relationship comes with branding, making you a legitimate authority in your space, and, of course, hopefully profit. Working with large customers doesn't come without its own challenges, but it's absolutely worth it. As long as you go in with your eyes wide open, they can also take your organization to the next level!

Conclusion

In my opinion, sales and marketing are the hardest part of running a business. But I come from an engineering background so I probably would think that! While probably not the right strategy for everyone, in this chapter I tried to guide you through a methodical approach to selling. If you hire one amazing salesperson who needs no management then you might not need to focus on methodology and stuff like that. But if you are new to sales then following along with a methodology will arm you with some valuable insight to help provide guidance to your new stuff. And if you grow beyond one, then you've got an excellent and pre-defined path you can follow to get them training.

We looked at hiring sales here and there in previous chapters. And in later chapters, we'll look at the other dark arts of marketing and advertising, providing air cover for your sellers. If you don't have those, then your sales teams might find it hard to prospect leads and nurture them into closing or transacting business.

Now that we've looked at selling your core service, let's move on to adding items that your sales team can transact on in Chapter 11.

Further Reading

- MEDDIC 3: `https://www.amazon.com/MedDic-3-0-Electronic-Medical-Dictionary/dp/0785996273`
- The Challenger Sale, by Brent Adamson, Matthew Dixon `https://www.amazon.com/Challenger-Sale-Control-Customer-Conversation/dp/1591844355`
- Customer Centric Selling, Bosworth, Holland, Visgatis `https://www.amazon.com/CustomerCentric-Selling-Second-Michael-Bosworth/dp/0071637087`

- The Sandler Rules: 49 Timeless Selling Principles and How to Apply Them, Mattson https://www.amazon.com/Sandler-Rules-Timeless-Selling-Principles/dp/0982255489
- The New Conceptual Selling, Miller, Heiman, Tuleja https://www.amazon.com/New-Conceptual-Selling-Face-Face/dp/0446695181
- Solution Selling: Creating Buyers in Difficult Selling Markets, Bosworth https://www.amazon.com/Solution-Selling-Creating-Difficult-Markets/dp/0786303158
- ValueSelling: Driving Up Sales One Conversation At A Time, Thomas https://www.amazon.com/ValueSelling-Driving-Sales-Conversation-Time/dp/0976999404
- Target Opportunity Selling, Read https://www.amazon.com/Target-Opportunity-Selling-Performers-Reveal/dp/007177307X
- What Great Salespeople Do: The Science of Selling Through Emotional Connection and the Power of Story, Zoldan, Bosworth https://www.amazon.com/What-Great-Salespeople-Emotional-Connection/dp/0071769714/
- The Challenger Sale: Taking Control of the Customer Conversation, Dixon and Adamson https://www.amazon.com/Challenger-Sale-Control-Customer-Conversation/dp/1591844355

- SNAP Selling: Speed Up Sales and Win More Business with Today's Frazzled Customers, Konrath https://www.amazon.com/SNAP-Selling-Business-Frazzled-Customers/dp/1591844703
- SPIN Selling, Rackham https://www.amazon.com/SPIN-Selling-Neil-Rackham/dp/0070511136
- Fanatical Prospecting, Blount, Weinberg https://www.amazon.com/Fanatical-Prospecting-Conversations-Leveraging-Telephone/dp/1119144752
- How to sell SaaS, Antonio Garrido Caballero https://www.amazon.com/How-Sell-SaaS-difficult-competitive/dp/1537648845
- Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In, Fisher, Ury and Patton, https://www.amazon.com/Getting-Yes-Negotiating-Agreement-Without/dp/0143118757

Note This list is a little longer than usual because it includes a book for each of the selling methodologies. But it's worth mentioning that any book by Zig Ziglar is also a great add: https://www.amazon.com/Zig-Ziglar/e/B000AP7VIY/

CHAPTER 11

Diversifying Your Portfolio

Many a consulting firm starts off doing hourly consulting. At some point, we invariably expand into insourcing, selling hardware, managing software subscriptions for customers, writing software for customers, specializing in specific products, and, one of the most popular, dabbling in managed services.

When looking to diversify your portfolio of offerings, get started small when you can. If you have traditionally only provided managed services, consider having your team work on fixed-fee or special projects. If you usually do hourly consulting, bring on a managed services customer so you can identify everything you need to scale up that practice. Getting started with other areas on a smaller scale will allow you to learn how to bring on new products or services without a huge amount of risk. The first step is to decide what you want to add to your portfolio of products and services.

What Is a Good Addition?

I've heard people tell me what I should be doing for a long time. And each has a different perspective. Sometimes you will hear the same things repeatedly. Sometimes you'll hear something once and think "hell yeah, I should be doing that." But much of finding new opportunities to expand

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the reach of your company will come from the gut—that same instinct that caused you to start the company in the first place.

There's no way to know for sure whether something is a good idea. But there are clear signs that something is a good idea and clear warning signs. Let's look at some signs that you've found a great idea.

- Nearly every customer says that you should sell them a given product or service. If you hear something weekly then you should take notice. You might not have to build a huge solution, as you might be able to white label (or rebrand) an offer from someone else who maybe specializes in that product or service.
- You recommend a given product or service a lot (and customers buy it). Who are you recommending it to? First think about whether you can white label it, and analyze the costs around monetizing it for your company. If you can't, then consider doing something on your own.
- You are referring large amounts of business to someone else and not making enough of a markup or commission on it.
- There is a huge gap in the market. Either no one is actually doing something, or those who are happen to be incompetent or missing the mark.
- You see a competitor failing to deliver: Be careful about doing something just because a competitor is doing it. You don't win wars by fighting an opponent's strategy. But sometimes, you can see that a competitor has a good idea and that they're just not delivering it in a way that makes sense.

- You see a company delivering a product with a massive barrier of entry and you think you could go down-market and deliver most of what customers need in a much cheaper OR easier-to-use fashion.
- You really, really want to do something—like your gut is just telling you absolutely you have to do it.
- Your staff really, really want to do something. And they're willing to own an initiative, even if they have to work on it on their own time.

You've identified some initiatives and taken a step back to decide if it's a good idea. Now take another step back and think about it even more critically. In the next section, we'll look at some ways to keep yourself honest and how to look at things critically before moving forward.

Be Wary When Moving Forward with Initiatives

You have an amazing hour-long meeting with a potential new customer. The meeting goes so well that you decide to bring in some food and take the meeting to another hour. You strike up a genuine friendship with a potential customer, and you walk away from that meeting feeling invigorated and ready to take on new business challenges. There's only one small hitch: your company doesn't do what the customer is looking for.

Maybe you're in the same ballpark. Maybe the customer provides a beachhead into what you consider an emerging market. Maybe you see the chance to pivot and be able to double your business by entering into a new market segment. But yeah, you really just don't do what the customer wants. You call your office and tell the people on the other end of the phone about this amazing new opportunity. They don't seem as excited, but based on your excitement or based on their inability to connect with you on this level, no one is telling you no.

What You Should Do Before Proceeding

This happens all the time. And there are a few reasons. Sometimes there is actually a real opportunity. But often, you're about to waste a lot of your time and that of others if you try to force your will upon embarking on a new opportunity that is foreign to you and your team. Don't force it.

There is no greater killer of inertia than a failed initiative. It can cloud all of your other lines of business if you aren't careful. Ultimately, here's a litmus test you should apply in these situations.

1. How large is the market that you can address? Obviously, you need to identify the potential business you can get out of this new venture, keeping your blinders on for a bit and only looking at a constrained set of customers that you can actually connect with. You might find that the market is much larger than anyone thought. You might also find that there is a very small number of potential customers or that the market is already saturated with other vendors. This research also helps drive pricing beyond comparing the price to your current rate card.

2. What will you and your team need to accomplish in order to address the new target market? Addressing this new market might involve hiring new employees, creating a small team that focuses on the new market, writing apps or web interfaces, and much more. Understand the work required not only to prototype the new product or service but also to be able to sell it at scale. Once you understand the required investment you can make a good decision whether or not to move forward.

3. Are you able to sell the new service or product into the new market? Your sellers might be focused on a completely different demographic. They might not be able to communicate on the same level with the new demographic. You might not have any leads beyond the first customer. But you might be perfectly aligned to take on this new adventure!

4. Do you have buy-in from staff? If you do the research listed previously and list out solid arguments for either proceeding or stopping, then getting buy-in from the staff should be simple. Be careful not to impose your will too much. But when the market conditions are perfect for your organization to come in and provide some good disruption, it's basically obvious that the venture is worth pursuing.

5. What will the opportunity cost be to your core offerings? If you aren't getting buy-in, even though you have a good business plan, you have to ask why. If your core business is going to suffer, then you might need to look at dipping into savings or outside capital to fund the new venture. If the business plan is sound, then make that judgment call. I'm not averse to risks; provided they're taken using logic and reason rather than based on emotional responses to great meetings and people.

Additionally, make sure you don't have any contractual obligations not to enter into a market. For example, if you've been a reseller for a number of software vendors, then there's a good chance that you've signed a contract stating you won't compete with them in the same industry they're in for a certain number of years. Make sure to seek legal advice when it comes to any contracts you may be in breach of if you are even a little bit concerned that you may violate them.

Are You Overvaluing Your Time?

Listen to the research. Listen to your staff. Don't try to put a square peg in a round hole unless it makes sense. Be open-minded, just as you're asking others to be open-minded.

The important thing to remember is that you have a core focus. And reaching outside of that to go after new business will not only introduce you to a space where your company might not be a premium player, but you will also be detracting from what makes you great. There are certainly a lot of arguments that you need to be nimble, and be able to pivot quickly, but be careful not to let your emotions and your personal time investment outweigh that of your organization as a whole!

Finally, the time you invested is never wasted. The potential customer you want to work with will understand if the opportunity is not right for you. The time you spent researching better educates you on markets. The time you spent working with your employees to determine if the opportunity makes sense provides great team bonding. Every single person in the chain will respect you more if you back down on an initiative. And given that they'll share in the ownership of success, they'll also be elated when everyone gets huge bonuses if the initiative works out!

Implementing a New Offering

Once you've decided to go ahead and start with a new line of business, you have your work cut out for you. Especially if you've never done so before. And the planning stage will often decide the outcome, before you send your first email or make your first call to existing customers. In this section, we'll provide some tips and strategies for making sure the new service is a success (or getting as close to making sure as possible).

Review the Offer

The offer might not be a good idea. Take a critical approach to your review of the offer you've come up with. Make sure the offer is easy-to-understand, that it appeals to potential customers, and that you will make a healthy margin. This is similar to the process we did in Chapter 1 when building our menu of services; however, it also comes with a built-in market you can cross-sell the solution to: your existing customers.

Compare the Offer to the Market

A little bit of market research goes a long way. You know your customers, but you also want to keep them—and there's no faster way to lose a customer than to sell them goods or services above market rate. Additionally, if you're planning on using a new offer to entice new customers, then know what kind of competition is out there. You may even choose to make a new product a loss-leader (or one that loses a minimal amount of money) in order to recruit new customers.

Make a Project Plan

The project plan is a plan for how you will implement a new project. Here, your goal is to build a visual representation with timelines and milestones for how you'll implement a new endeavor that makes sense to anyone you might show it to. This will help you sell the plan to existing employees as well as track performance against a timeline.

I find that many entrepreneurs will tweak mind maps until the end of time. But I like Gannt charts. Like a lot. I would always recommend starting with a brief outline in a mind map, then getting that into a Gannt chart as quickly as possible. Gannt charts allow you to do resourcing and dependency mapping, which would be challenging in a Word document or a mind map.

I've done entire courses and certifications (including the Project+ and PMP). Let's break the process down in some digestible steps.

- Define the stakeholders: I know, I pulled that word out of my PMP certification exam and it bothers you because it feels all corporatey and you run a small business. Too bad. One thing that's nice about things like the PMP is that you end up using the same vernacular as others in that field. If you're talking about project plans, especially if there's a project manager involved, then you should try to use their words, especially if you want them to maybe hire you again in the future. If this is for your own product, then scale the project plan as you would any other initiative.
- Build a communication plan with the stakeholders: If you're the only stakeholder, then this is pretty easy. But stick to your check-ins with yourself. If there's a bank or investor, make sure you understand how often they need to be communicated with. If there's a subcontractor, then let them know well in advance how often you expect them to check in with you, and monitor (a.k.a. guard) the timeline of the project.
- Define the starting point: Where are you now? Do you have any code written, infrastructure built, or component software or hardware purchased? Define these.

- Define the outcome: What do you want this to look like in the end? What time constraints do you have? How long do you want to wait to go to market? Identify each milestone of the project with a due date, even if the due date is an arbitrary date you make up to keep yourself honest.
- Perform a gap analysis between the two: Brainstorm everything that needs to happen to get this project off the ground. Don't worry about breaking the larger chunks up yet, just make sure to be as holistic in your thinking as possible.
- Define resources: Make a list of all humans, service companies, hardware, software, cloud services, virtual machines, and anything else you think you might need. Don't worry about lunch though; I think you'll figure that part out on your own every day.
- Define required tasks: Remember that gap analysis? Now it's time to break each one of those items down into tasks. In my opinion, never have a task that's more than half a day on these. Each could be part of a larger entry uncovered in the gap analysis. At each check-in on the communication plan, you'll want to cover the percent that each of these tasks is complete, and so the smaller the chunks the less risk that an overrun of costs for one task will go unnoticed and that you might be left holding the bag for the overspending.

- Define dependencies: When doing dependency mapping, think of what's required for each and every task. For example, you have to build a virtual machine before you can put a host OS on it, you have to do that before you can put a database service on it, you have to do that before you can cluster that database service to another in the database cluster, and you have to do that before you can attach it to a web service. When you get a lot of tasks, you end up with a lot of interwoven task dependencies. You can make sure that you don't end up with a task that stops work down the road.
- Map resources to tasks: Once you understand everything that needs to happen and the dependencies on one another, define who does what, and what you might need to purchase before you can have certain tasks be completed.
- Calculate risks: You think it'll take 4 hours to set up the first exchange server in a cluster. But could it take twice that? I like to calculate the risks of each task independently but to be realistic. Others like to calculate risks across a number of tasks, or as a standard percentage.

All of this probably seems like it's going to take more time to do than you initially thought. It is. If a customer or another vendor asks you for a project plan, then you need to make sure to factor additional costs in communicating at their cadence into the project. But once you have a visual representation of the project flow, it's easier to communicate with everyone involved about what you want and where, similarly to a blueprint when building a cathedral.

Note To produce a Gannt chart on a Mac, use a tool called OmniPlan that allows you to create them on your Mac. There are also Excel templates for project plans and a number of SaaS-based services.

Once you have a visual representation of what you're trying to do, you can best understand the go-to-market costs for the technical and infrastructure requirements. Next, it's time to understand the cost of the sales plan and how long it will take before you can start recognizing revenue from the new project.

Make a Sales Plan

Many of us will get stuck in the solutioning of a new product or service. No matter how good the tech is, if no one buys it then it isn't a success. So often, the capacity to sell the new product or service is what makes the endeavor a success. And that will usually start with a sales plan. What does a sales plan look like?

- Make marketing materials: I actually like to start most projects with a glossy one-sheet or a piece of paper that provides an elevator pitch. Watching people's faces when they read the headline and then the descriptions is a great way of getting a quick and dirty response of how the market will interpret the new offering.
- Compile talking points: This is more of an in-depth review. I like to start with an FAQ on a company wiki and then keep a running list of items to add to that FAQ every time I get asked a question. Occasionally I'll go and update the outline of the FAQ so it flows better.

- Communicate with sales teams about the new product: The more in-depth your technical presentation, the less likely the message is going to be easily digested. I like to have a few meetings, with the first introducing the concept, the second digging in deeper on sales strategies, and the third doing role playing. Then make sure to schedule ongoing update meetings.
- Communicate with front-line employees about the new product: Keep in mind that sales teams aren't the only ones who sell products. Support, operations, and accounting can talk about sales and usually talk to as many existing customers as anyone else in the organization, making for a great cross-selling touch-point.
- Update systems so the new product or service is easy to sell: I know I've said this already, but one thing you just can't buy in business is inertia. When you've got it, don't let it go! This means removing as much friction from the sales process as possible. Make sure skus are listed with good directions for when to use them, teams are ready to sell (enablement has been done organization-wide), and that any resellers are notified and enabled.
- Make sure you have buy-in from sales teams: This is the most important aspect. If they don't think they can sell a product or service, sellers will not be confident when they're in front of customers.

Once you've built a sales plan and a project plan, then it's time to get started. And the flow should follow both plans. But because things don't always work out, we'll cover failing fast in the next section!

Fail Fast

OK, so here's a secret. Your plan might have a tiny flaw. Or, it might be a terrible plan. Or, it might be a terrible idea. So I say "fail fast" with a little hesitation. But, your plan might go on losing you money for years if you don't eventually stop. So how do you know when to let go? The same way you know when to start someone on your fantasy football team or when to buy a given stock: intuition. Study the numbers. Especially trend lines (which we cover in Appendix D) and do so as intelligently as possible.

If you really feel like an initiative is going to be just the thing the company needs, then make an educated decision to keep going. But make sure to look at the following first:

- Sales for the initiative
- Costs for the initiative
- Potential customers that are planning to purchase
- Timelines for the completion of a given project
- Pricing for goods and services
- Access to competition that your market has

Finally, don't forget to estimate the impact of pulling out of an initiative. Will customers be put in a bind? And how can you soften the message, while being final about any decisions?

Dealing with Failure

We can't always be successful. You'll hear a term "fail fast" in all of the business books. I would say that while you want to be quick to respond, don't do so until you understand why you're failing. Sometimes, as business owners, we have to put our egos to the side and be as honest with ourselves as possible. There's a chance that pivoting is better than failing.

There's also a chance that the timing is wrong and we should cut our losses while we have the chance. Either way, there are two main buckets into which I'd put failures in an Apple consultancy: customer initiatives and technology initiatives.

Why Customer Initiatives Fail

Sometimes, we decide to jump into a new area, and we fall flat on our faces. And that's the way new initiatives are supposed to go. This can be especially challenging for people who have never experienced failure in a professional area. The reasons why our initiatives fail are infinite but can really be summed up in a few different areas, including sales, project management, customer perception, and architecture. Sales is typically because what you're trying to do doesn't resonate with customers. Project management is about the plan not being followed well. Architecture is about the plan being wrong, and customer perception is that the idea isn't communicated well (so more of a marketing fail).

Since most Apple consultancies are going to focus on technology projects, we'll dive into this a bit more granularly.

Why Our Technology Initiatives Fail

One of the most frustrating things in business is when your technology initiatives never get implemented. Why do so many fail, costing organizations untold expense, negatively impacting trust in those championing projects, and hurting the ability to complete other projects? There are about as many answers as there are projects that fail. Let's look at some.

- **The Strategy Misses the Target**: You have a goal. This goal is to address a problem, make an improvement to systems that make them more useful, complete an upgrade, etc. You translate that goal into a strategy. But not every strategy can be perfect. If an initiative fails to launch, consider a new strategy, iterate on an existing strategy, and re-think whether the goal is worth the expenditure.
- **Unclear Goals**: If your whole team understands the underlying goals of a project, they are more likely to make decisions in alignment with what you're actually trying to accomplish. As you add team members, make sure they're onboard in a way that not only tells them what to do but also provides the "why."
- **No Buy-In**: Different parts of an organization have different reporting lines and different goals. To get buy-in from other teams, look for ways that your project can be beneficial to other groups within your organization. The political capital you could end up walking away from if your initiative resolves problems for others can be immeasurable.
- **Conflicting Initiatives**: Sometimes these goals are complimentary and sometimes they are at odds. To keep your initiatives from going down the political abyss, involve others in the planning phases of any major initiatives. And as your projects mature, look for ways to keep communication flowing, to keep conflicts at a minimum. After all, conflicts often mean overlapping costs, so this should help keep your costs in check as well!

- **Costs**: Your accounting department will throttle me if I don't mention cost. You can have good, fast, and cheap: pick 2. To make sure your initiatives stay within an appropriate cost structure, have a target Return on Investment (ROI) for each. A realistic ROI is often the most important aspect of a project. The ROI isn't to "make more profits." Instead, ROI should be represented in clear, concise, and quantifiable metrics, well communicated throughout the organization, not just the stakeholders on your team.
- **Bad Tactics**: No matter how good your strategy, your initiative may fail. Often, when the proverbial rubber meets the road, the tactics leveraged to close your gaps might be incomplete, in the wrong order, based on bad assumptions, or just end up being bad ideas. I find the best way to protect from poor tactics is to use peer review to identify potential pitfalls and bad ideas.
- **The Technology is the Wrong Fit**: Sometimes technology is too new, buggy, doesn't meet the goals of the initiative, or is just crappy. The best way to make sure your software is the right fit is to solicit as much feedback as possible. For example, if you are implementing a new CRM and haven't discussed the project with sales teams, then how can you be sure the CRM is the right fit for the organization?
- **Project Management**: Depending on the scale of a project, a good project manager will reign in many of the most critical aspects of a project, communicating change with key stakeholders. Before you start a

project, decide how the project will be managed and set up milestones and a communication plan early.

- **Impatience**: Step one, do some stuff. Step two, make all the monies. I wish every project went that way. Sometimes there are 192 other steps that span 3 years. Know your ROI, but also know the aging process to realize that ROI. A new product may require a year to mature, which includes architecture, scoping, implementation, waiting for vendors, starting gain positive momentum, etc. This time is valuable when you're improving your organization but should not be implemented improperly due to the team rushing through the project.
- **Communication**: Your team needs to be clear about all the things: underlying goals, project plans, who the key stakeholders are, who's funding the project, what to do when going over budget, and anything else that's important. This isn't a repeat of the previous items—it's to emphasize that if people don't know about each aspect of the project, they cannot successfully implement it.

Finally, this section is about technology in businesses. But nearly all of the reasons strategies fail are applicable across types of organizations.

Dealing with Success

Dealing with failure is one thing. But dealing with success can be just as telling. When things work out and you start selling and delivering well, you'll feel the new initiative start to pick up some steam. Things can start to feel easy. But business shouldn't be easy and won't be for long.

So if you're fortunate and an initiative works out, a competitor will iterate and do it better if you aren't careful. Therefore, once things are working well, take a step back and take a hard look at every aspect of the operation, with a keen eye on how to do everything better. This doesn't mean it isn't awesome, but everything can always be better. And getting complacent shouldn't be an option. Here are some ways to critically look at successful endeavors in order to avoid complacency.

1. Increase the return on investment: Look for incremental improvements, such as raising the cost of goods sold in order to control demand or reducing costs by introducing new tools and automation.

2. Increase scalability: If things are selling, then you're gonna want to gain efficiency as they sell. Chances are you won't be able to hire fast enough. How can your organization grow without more people? Consider subcontracting some work to scale the business. Just make sure you're doing so at a rate that scales faster than hiring staff.

3. Keep adding to your portfolio: You had some success with one area, why not try another!? What other additional goods or services might you be able to bring to market? Additional skus for sales teams to cross-sell or markets that you can get into are a great way to keep revenue soaring. Make sure you understand each market, opportunities, and risks, but keep the inertia going in a way that doesn't cause customers to say "they just keep calling me to sell me more things."

4. Look for more ways to get to markets (or routes): Think about adding sales channels, creating new sales enablement assets, and meeting with those who sell in order to help them sell better and communicate how you're continuing to strengthen each product line. Even if you think you're running at capacity, stay bullish on sales and subcontract more work if you have to—provided your margin stays strong, of course.

5. Streamline the organization: How can you make the organization run more efficiently given the new products or services you've introduced? Are you getting value from every part of the operation? Can you merge processes between lines of business (such as support) in order to increase the effectiveness of each?

6. Make things better for the team: Poll for employee attitudes and how the culture is holding. Make sure to listen and do what your team is asking for, and not making too many assumptions. For example, pretty much all employees want more and better training. A workforce that feels like their essential needs are being taken care of will be happier and more successful.

The best time to review the business is when things are going really well! The best time to think of how to make each product line better is when the product line is doing really well. But take a holistic approach and examine every part of the organization and how it can be better, without bleeding all of the inertia right out of it.

Don't just look at one area, either. If you only improve the employee experience, then your costs will get completely out of control. But if you only ever improve efficiency, you will alienate customers and the people who are becoming increasingly more efficient (usually to the point of having no more fun). And if you just keep adding more and more things to the portfolio, then the organization will seem chaotic to staff and probably greedy to customers.

But a balanced approach that is well-communicated with employees is likely to keep staff happy and around for a long time!

Conclusion

You should experiment with various lines of business. And you will fail at some. If running a business were easy, then everyone would do it!

There's no magic way to do this. I would like to leave you with one parting thought in this chapter. Fail fast, but don't discount the line of business entirely, as implementation could have been due to a bad strategy, employees not being invested, timing, or a variety of other attributes. Additionally, success could be due to the opposite attributes and might not last.

Basically, if you decided not to sell hardware earlier, revisit that decision. If you experimented with doing managed services and it didn't work out, try again—at least, if you're interested in those lines of business.

Further Reading

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- Project Management for the Unofficial Project Manager, Kory Kogon, Suzette Blakemore, James Wood, https://www.amazon.com/Project-Management-Unofficial-Manager-FranklinCovey/dp/194163110X

- The Cluetrain Manifesto, Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, David Weinberger, https://www.amazon.com/Cluetrain-Manifesto-10th-Anniversary/dp/0465024092/
- Who Says Elephants Can't Dance? Louis V. Gerstner https://www.amazon.com/Who-Says-Elephants-Cant-Dance/dp/0060523808
- Crossing the Chasm, by Geoffrey A. Moore https://www.amazon.com/Crossing-Chasm-3rd-Disruptive-Mainstream/dp/0062292986/
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- The Lean Startup, Reis https://www.amazon.com/Lean-Startup-Entrepreneurs-Continuous-Innovation/dp/0307887898
- Microsoft Rebooted: How Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer Reinvented their Company, Robert Slater, https://www.amazon.com/Microsoft-Rebooted-Ballmer-Reinvented-Company/dp/1591840392

CHAPTER 12

When to Stop Growing

This is going to be a short chapter. A prevailing business philosophy is the concept that if your revenue isn't growing faster than the industry standard, then you're getting passed by your competition. That's crap. You should be happy with whatever size your company is. If you want to grow it, then great. If not, then you don't have to. Grow along with your level of comfort; otherwise, you can't do so positively.

There is no limit to how big you can grow your company; the only limitation is how comfortable you are with the size of the organization. I've seen a number of companies stop at two, and just sit there for 30 years. I've also seen some that hit about 50 and that's the sweet spot. And I've seen organizations slow growth that don't want to do so. No matter the situation, as with many things in business, it's important to have clear and concise communication about what is happening.

This chapter is for a very specific situation, which is that the company leadership has made a cognizant choice that they do not want the company or a group within the company to grow any further, at least in the immediate future. Usually this is because they want to focus on other things. You can often refer to this type of company as a lifestyle business. Even if it's only temporarily so.

One of the biggest challenges is retaining employees when you've made a decision like this, so we'll start there.

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Communicating with Employees

Halting growth is hard. The most important thing here is that you are open and honest with everyone about what you are doing. Especially if you've been growing and you're intentionally slowing down growth. Tell people why you're slowing it down, and be clear about how the strategy of the organization might change in the near-term future.

Slowing down growth reduces your risk, but also reduces the opportunities you might be able to provide to staff. Later in this chapter, we'll look at ways to keep teams motivated, but for now focus on making everyone you employ feel safe. Explain why you're slowing down growth, how you'll be doing so, and what opportunities each person has in the new paradigm.

Expect some turnover. After all, what's the future for each person on staff? This doesn't always happen immediately, and it's often an amicable parting of ways provided you're clear about your intentions, but if people leave, expect a little customer turnover as well. This is inevitable whenever there's a perception that there's less opportunity at a job.

Leading (And Retaining) Teams After the Growth Subsides

Building and growing an organization is fun! Managing an organization that is static or shrinking can totally suck. But it doesn't have to. Employee satisfaction is an amazing thing and a key aspect of making your company an awesome place to work. During times of growth, everyone is invariably happy with their jobs. Staff see an incredible growth opportunity, a lot of great new team members they can mentor, and there's a general buzz in the community that surrounds expansion. But eventually the expansion slows in every organization and on every team. And I've never met anyone who was ready for it when it came, except those who are slowing growth intentionally.

How is a leader to react? How do you keep a cohesive team who has done everything the organization asked of them engaged? How do you provide the rewards of a great career path if not within your team? Let's look at some important concepts to keep in mind as you turn the corner into the next phase of your company's life cycle.

1. **Make sure employees feel safe**: Employees need to feel secure in their jobs. When employees take on more work and see that hiring has slowed, they will assume the worst. Be completely transparent. Show enough respect for staff to explain as much as allowed, even if it means they start to leave of their own accord. Of course, this starts with having a sound strategy!

2. **Understand what motivates people**: We're all motivated by something different. Make sure to understand what motivates team members, or have their supervisors find out. Then double-check by surveying staff and comparing those results to the qualitative analysis done by your team. This is often easier than it was, as you're not spreading your attention across opening new offices, hiring, etc.

3. **Provide different ways to recognize success**: When an organization decides to shift priorities and limit funding for a team or a company slows down, the key metrics on which you gage performance must mature as well. This often starts by moving from billings to margin, from margin to channel empowerment, between various types of work, or from any of these to innovation.

4. **Find ways to be more visible in the organization**: As growth in teams slows, increasing visibility within an overall organization or community allows team members to feel positive about their roles in the organization. Allowing employees access to other teams also allows for networking, more idea sharing in ways that might not have been possible during times of hyper-growth, and fosters a greater sense of teamwork within the organization. Becoming more visible also provides exposure to each member of the staff.

5. **If you love someone, set them free**: Champion your best employees; but be willing to replace them as well. Even if doing so makes your life harder, rewarding great work will inspire the next generation to be better. Alternatively, not recognizing the potential in your staff leads to disgruntled employees and crappy work. Watching my former staff flourish in new roles is the area of my career I get the most satisfaction from; hopefully, you do as well! If your organization is not growing, then there is usually a cap to careers within the organization. You can offset this with profit sharing.

Ultimately, the ability to lead a growing organization is easier than leading an organization that isn't trending up and to the right on spreadsheets. Taking on a static organization is really easy, because someone else already dealt with reframing how the organization survives. But doing that reframing means taking care of staff, first and foremost. Look for how the team fits in the new layout. Let the team help not only define the strategy but also lay out the tactics to achieve the strategy. Empower everyone to contribute on every level, if you haven't already.

Whatever you do, don't retreat within your team. Focus on the happiness and well-being of the team, but when the growth slows, look outward for opportunities to contribute to all areas of the organization and community. Look for ways to help employees and ways to do what is right, making sure to align their needs with those of the organization. And keep in mind that aligning the strategy of a group with that of an organization is the key to success of the organization as a whole. If each manager simply looks to bolster their team, they will do nothing more than fracture an otherwise cohesive organization.

Letting People Go

Sometimes we outgrow where we want to be. We win that big contract and we can't fulfill it, or we lose it. Then we have to detract. And it sucks. In this section, we'll explore what you should do when letting people go. And some tips for making the process go in as ethical a fashion as possible, while not destroying the company.

I've had to do different types of layoffs in the past, and I believe in the dignity of those on the other side of the table far too much to take it flippantly. Ultimately, reducing the size of an organization starts with finding ways to try and keep the best, brightest, and most committed to stay on your team. But when you can't, and you have to let staff go, there is no feeling of dread on those days.

For those that stay, make sure to communicate your strategy to the best of your ability, and be transparent where possible. Tell them whether there will be further cuts. If there will be, then they may leave of their own accord. And you can't choose who's going to stay and go. But by being honest, you'll retain a relationship if you want to, and you won't have people running around saying you did them wrong. Most importantly, though, you won't actually be doing them wrong.

For those who will no longer be with the organization, be respectful. Provide as much severance as possible and a great reference when appropriate. Have an exit interview with each. And have the last check on your desk so there's no question that the move you are making is irrevocable. I tend to find that once people realize that a decision is final, they can immediately start making plans and find closure.

Managing Finances When You Stop Growing

Growing companies are often flush with cash. But when you stop growing, your costs often don't stop as well. Taxes go up. Inflation goes up. Cost of living increases, at a minimum, need to be given to employees annually to keep them.

At some point, if you don't grow customers and employees, you're left with trying to find ways to make more money in a seemingly shrinking company. Some ways you can go about doing so include:

- Write a sentence down on real paper with a real pen about how to cut each entry in the Accounts Payable column of your General Ledger. Inspecting costs with a microscope will help you figure out what you can cut without negatively impacting performance of staff and what you can't.
- Renegotiate every contract. How much are you paying your lawyer? Pay them less. How much are you paying your accountant? Pay them less. If you can't renegotiate, start looking for other contractors who are equally as qualified.
- Review your current and future plans with your tax advisor. In many cases, if you convert to a different type of company, that isn't geared for growth, then you could end up paying out less money in taxes.

- Pay down any debts your company has. Interest on debt can kill you. Especially credit card debt. And should you choose to sell the company, it will be far easier if you have fewer liabilities.
- Convert employees to contractors. This is my least favorite option, and potentially even more expensive than having W2 employees on staff anyway. Just know that in my experience, if you convert an employee to a 1099, they're looking for a new job immediately. No, really, even if they tell you it's cool, they are.
- Go virtual. This is especially tough when you're trying to convince staff to stick around, despite a lack of personal opportunity for growth (or at least the perceived lack of opportunities). But rent is often as much as a staff employee. The most important aspect of going to a virtual workplace is to keep community; otherwise, the distance created between you and employees will cause them to be more likely to abscond with your customers—or in their eyes, their customers.
- Purchase property. Wait, I said reduce costs and pay down debts… Mortgages on commercial real estate are typically 15-year notes, so it's usually a pretty big investment. By redirecting rent, though, you should be able to easily build more of a rainy day or retirement fund. And you should net more return than you could do with other investments.

Whichever options you choose, make sure you understand your revenue and costs before you make any decisions, and make sure to build up even larger cash reserves, or invest profits in low-risk investment vehicles. Or forget everything I've said and see a financial advisor!

Conclusion

No amount of alcohol is going to make you feel better on a day when you have to lay off four or five people. The easiest way to avoid that is to grow deliberately, rather than as a reaction to business. This means not hiring and firing as you bring on certain new customers. Instead it means knowing what size you want to be and how you'll get there. It also means knowing when to slow things down or perhaps even when to avoid entering into a contractual relationship that could potentially bankrupt you.

Grow when you feel comfortable, not when you feel obligated for the sake of pride, profits, or pressure. I can't reiterate the word deliberate enough. Growing at the right time is more sustainable, better for the people around you, and ultimately better for your health. There's a chance that once you've gotten to your maximum organization size, you'll choose to sell the company, which is what we cover in the next chapter.

Further Reading

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CHAPTER 13

Sell the Company

You successfully built a solid company. You have customers, you have good business processes to deliver great services, and after 2 or 20 years you are ready for something new. Maybe that something new is to find investors so you can reach a new growth point that requires an influx of cash (even if only to maintain cash flow). Or maybe you actually want to straight-up sell the company and let someone else deal with it.

In this chapter, we'll look at how to set a price on the company by ascertaining the value. We'll look at the types of agreements you make when you exit a company, and we'll look at what it looks like if you're staying on with the company.

But before we get started, let's talk about feelings. No matter what you do or how you do it, selling part or all of the company is a very emotional time. And the longer you've owned the company, the more emotional it should be. Many are likely to tell you to leave the emotions at the door. Keep in mind that the loyalty of your customers beyond the contracts they may have signed with you cannot be assigned a price. Nor can the community, no matter how wonderful, of employees that you have. Instead, a valuation is about assets and liabilities.

The contracts you have with customers are assets. The time that you owe customers who prepaid, and your bills, are liabilities. It's that simple. Or usually it is. In the first section of this chapter, we'll look at who's going to buy the company.

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Who Is Going to Buy the Company?

Consulting firms are typically acquired by other consulting firms who want to fill various gaps in their business or as a means for non-organic growth.

- **Skills acquisitions**: Some acquisitions are about buying the skills you have on your team. This is often the case when a very large company is buying a much smaller organization that makes a product that will be discontinued. For example, let's say you have a consulting firm and a very large customer wants to go enterprise-wide with Apple devices. They might just acquire your firm to become their new support team so they can get the project done much quicker.
- **Customer acquisitions**: Other acquisitions are all about the customers. The purchaser might not want any of the databases or staff. This is common when getting gobbled up by a seemingly similar company, especially if they're in the same geography and have been a long-time competitor.
- **Inorganic Growth**: A traditionally Windows-centric MSP might want to add an Apple practice to their portfolio rather than build one from the ground up. Or another Apple practice might want to get into your geography, and instead of slowly starting to sell into that geography, they might want to buy an existing leader in the market.
- **Product**: Another organization might be interested in acquiring yours because they want a product that you have developed. The services products are typically a pre-packaged bundle of services that provides a

deliverable. Along with acquiring name recognition of the product, the purchaser is also often looking for know-how around how to develop the product. Keep in mind that the value of the product to the purchaser is about domain knowledge and customer acquisition. Anything beyond that could be developed internally at the purchaser without having to buy another company.

- **Software**: Software product might be something customer-facing that customers pay you for or might be an internal software product that is used to allow your organization to be more efficient and therefore more cost-competitive. If done properly (and packaged properly), software can be a huge selling point; however, keep in mind that integrations between internal systems are usually going to already be established at an organization that might be purchasing your company and so might not increase the value of your company.
- **Another SKU**: Some organizations already sell software, printer services, or something else to customers, and your team might just provide the best possible new SKU that can be cross-sold to customers. When that happens, you may become an attractive target acquisition because the acquirer can sell the crap out of what you do. This is great when you have excess capacity and good business processes but don't have a strong sales team.

When is the community you built considered an asset to the company? Usually, when there's a greater impact that the purchasing organization can take above and beyond the standard value of your assets. For example, let's say another services provider purchases your company and wants to tap into tools that you've built to manage tickets or integrate with common services management tools. Or this can occur when the purchaser can expand their platform support and, in doing so, not only takes on your Apple customers but also sells Apple services to their other traditional customers.

Hopefully you've become an expert with all things Apple at this point. And doing so is trendy. Many a large company wants to know what their "Apple strategy" is these days. Even if the organization looking to acquire your firm doesn't say it, this is likely on their mind and should factor into the negotiations when you're trying to justify a higher value of the organization.

Valuations

A valuation is an estimation of your company's worth. A mature organization will hire a professional appraiser to determine the valuation. These are often compiled by large accounting firms like Mackenzie, Accenture, or Deloitte—and they're not exactly cheap. But they're worth it!

Preparing the company for a valuation is a task that can take multiple years, according to how large the firm is and how it's being sold. So the earlier you start, the better. Some steps to prepare the company for a valuation are provided here.

- Make a list of all liabilities. Liabilities are what you owe. This includes traditional debt, such as credit cards, but also any contracts where you've received money from a customer and not yet delivered services, such as annual retainers. Also look at any outstanding contracts for property, internet access, insurance, legal, etc.

- Make a list of all assets. Assets are what you own. This includes traditional fixed assets such as property, as well as depreciating assets (or assets that go down in value over time), such as computers. Assets include contracts as well as a percentage of the value of customer business that is not contractually bound. The length of the relationship with the customer and a steady rise in the business done with the customer makes that percentage higher.
- Subtract the liabilities from the assets. Once you've put together a list of what you have minus what you owe, this is a simple calculation. Practice Generally Acceptable Accounting Practices (GAAPs) and make sure to have an accountant help you so as not to have any surprises later in the process.
- Document the margin for the last 3 years. A healthy margin can make a valuation higher. How much do you bring in, and how much does it cost to run the business? The more you can document the better, such as per-customer, per quarter, etc. Plotting things out on a spreadsheet and having a solid trendline will help with the process.
- Project future growth. I like trend lines. Microsoft Excel is excellent at producing trend lines (as is Keynote and Numbers). See more on trend lines in Appendix D.
- Put a price on your intellectual property. Consider a company blog and the related SEO you get from that, your sales pipeline, your contacts (including the customers), various Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), databases used to automate the business,

and anything else you built as company intellectual property. In the event of a sale, it stays with the company. If you want to keep any of this when you leave (or re-use it to start a new business), negotiate that during the sale.

- Focus on MRR. Monthly Recurring Revenue is the most predictable way to establish value of a company. Preferably when contractually bound. The rise of MRR can be plotted on a trend line to prove that the company is moving in the right direction. MRR can include the sale of your products but also the resale of subscription services, such as Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Google Apps subscriptions, Office 365 Subscriptions, leases, and other commissions.

Ultimately, what is the company worth? The answer, no matter the valuation, is whatever someone is actually willing to pay for the company. To the right purchaser, the company may be worth far more than it is on paper, as they may have a plan to cross-sell services, they may have a system they can put your customers into where they can amplify margin, etc. But in most cases, I've seen companies worth far less than what the owner thinks they're worth, especially in organizations that have primarily relied on hourly consulting efforts, with no long-term contracts.

Multipliers

Mergers and acquisitions can take on a number of different forms. Rather than pay cash for a company, I have seen a number of acquisitions where the purchaser is basically buying staff and customer lists/contracts in exchange for a percentage of the business that is done with the clients. Consultancies struggling with apathy, growth, or margin make great targets for such an acquisition. Should you be evaluating an offer, or structuring an offer of this sort, keep in mind that the principals in an organization rarely stay around following an acquisition.

So, what makes the multiplier? What someone is willing to pay for a company. That's all. But things that help are even, ascending numbers for profits. This means moving much of your business to MRR as we covered previously.

Non-Compete Agreements and Covenants

The sale of your company will likely come with an agreement that you will not compete with the purchaser. Your non-compete agreement or covenant (which is similar to a non-compete but even more binding) is an asset that the purchaser paid for.

Non-compete agreements are more binding in some states than others, but in general, whatever the law says can pale in comparison to the legal fees to prove what the law says. If you will be working with a former customer in any capacity, I would try to get a waiver to do so.

I've heard many consultants say, "But the client called me first," or, "They're not being treated right by the new management." One of the things that likely made your company successful is the fact that you were good to your customers. You probably formed personal relationships with many outside of work, and it will be hard to see them potentially not taken care of in the way that you would have taken care of them. But you are legally bound not to interfere. And violating that agreement may come with serious repercussions, so be cognizant of your risk, and the risk to your former customers, if you do so.

Are You Going to Stay with the Company?

This is one of the most important questions. The company will likely do better if you're still there, at least for a time. And any mature purchaser will understand this and likely want you to stay, at a minimum, for the transition period.

After years of owning a company and making all of the decisions, it can be awkward to suddenly be asking others what they would do, or for permission. If you will be staying on for any duration of time, make sure to work out some details with the new owners of your company.

- What authority do you still have in regards to hiring and human resources?
- What spending authority do you have?
- If working in sales as well, what discount authority do you have?
- How are you going to be phased out, including a final date of employment?

If you are planning on leaving, make sure to work out an acceptable exit strategy with the new owners. This should include milestones with fixed dates attached to them. I've found that being transparent to staff is important, so letting everyone on the team know the schedule is best, when possible.

Wielding Political Capital

Going from owning a business to working in a business can be challenging. When you own the business you can chart the course for the team. When you don't, you can't. Instead, you have to wield political capital sometimes. For example, you do a favor for someone. Because then they owe you. That's how it works, right? No.

You do a favor for someone because it's the right thing to do. You should expect nothing in return. It's called being a mensch. Maybe you get something in return; maybe you don't. But it always works out in the end. I see a lot of different people who try to manipulate situations in order to get a specific outcome. Don't.

These days I try hard not to manipulate anyone. But I have. In the end, when people realize that you are manipulating them, they will never trust you again. That is bad. But that is not the only reason to avoid such behavior. Avoid it because it's just plain wrong. If you can't win a heart and mind with the truth, don't bother.

Suddenly then it seems like there might not be such a thing as political capital. But there is. It's called karma. And there's no reason you should think about it. Instead, just be a good person. Practice honesty. Be virtuous. Help others. Avoid judging others. Help those less fortunate than yourself. Then, you won't need to wield that political capital because your actions will guide you and you will prosper in the ways you are meant to.

This does not mean you shouldn't have an opinion. Nor that you should try to convince others that your opinion is the correct outlook on a given situation. Nor does this mean that you should be weak. You can be strong and have an opinion that isn't shared with everyone in a given organization. And you can gain political capital by not always having to be right (even when you aren't).

And if you are a decision maker, you can be the gatekeeper to make sure your part of an organization contributes to the mission of the organization. When others make requests of you, do what's right—not just for your budget or team but for the mission of the entire organization. And when you have needs from others, trust they will do the same—hopefully without setting the expectation that you will need to repay them. You may build trust with others; but neither party should walk away with an expectation of repayment unless negotiated at the time a favor is given. But then it isn't a favor, is it?

But humans are human. And so power struggles occur. Stay clear of too many. Heed those old adages our parents taught us, like “take the high road.”

Ultimately, we’ve then defined political capital as trust, rather than what you can do for others. Trust is built on merit and cannot be rushed. Your capacity to help your part of an organization (and long term, all parts) is then based on the political capital you and your team can build, which takes time, success, and patience. Remember that, and avoid the mistakes we were taught to avoid in kindergarten, and I think you’ll do great!

Conclusion

You gave control of the company to someone else. Don’t go second-guessing them all the time saying things like, “That’s not how I would have done it.” This will not do anyone any good. This doesn’t mean that you need to be inauthentic and just agree with everything the new ownership says. Instead, give the benefit of the doubt, and address concerns privately in order to give the new ownership the best possible chance of succeeding.

I heard a great analogy once: “The old mayor shouldn’t be second-guessing the new mayor all the time.” Wise words from a wise person. There’s a reason that the change occurred; respect boundaries, but try to be as helpful as possible—even if you don’t always agree with new perspectives.

Ultimately, you have options! You might choose not to sell your company after all and instead go an entirely different direction. Or you might choose to hang onto the company and move into being a part-time owner, which we cover in the next chapter. No matter what you do, throw a party.

Further Reading

- Selling Your Software Company: An Insider's Guide to Achieving Strategic Value, David Kauppi, https://www.amazon.com/Selling-Your-Software-Company-Achieving-ebook/dp/B01M59QA02
- Expensive Mistakes When Buying & Selling Companies, Richard G. Stieglitz PhD, Stuart H. Sorkin JD LL.M CPA, https://www.amazon.com/Expensive-Mistakes-Buying-Selling-Companies/dp/0982050062
- Finishing Big: How Great Entrepreneurs Exit Their Companies on Top, Bo Burlingham, https://www.amazon.com/Finish-Big-Great-Entrepreneurs-Companies/dp/1591844975
- The Excellence Dividend, Tom Peters, https://www.amazon.com/Excellence-Dividend-Meeting-Tech-Tide/dp/0525434623
- Just for Fun, The Story of An Accidental Revolutionary, Linus Torvalds and David Diamond, https://www.amazon.com/Just-Fun-Story-Accidental-Revolutionary/dp/0066620732

CHAPTER 14

The Part-Time Owner

Maybe you started a second company. Maybe you have someone else running the business. Maybe you can get to a point where you will no longer need to work. Maybe you want to workout 2 hours in the morning, have a luxurious lunch in the middle of the day, stroll into the office for 2 hours, and then hang out with friends. Or maybe you have another job and you just need this company to run on the side with little effort.

Wherever you land, you worked hard for this and you should not feel guilty. As such, provided your business is in good shape (and the word "good" is subjective, here), you shouldn't fear taking a little time to explore other adventures. Provided, of course, anyone that depends on you is well taken care of. In this chapter, we'll look at some ways to disengage while still managing to keep the lights on and the people happy.

A Part-Time Job

If you haven't grown beyond what one person can do, then doing consulting isn't a part-time company to run, it's a side job. You are moonlighting, participating in the gig economy, and can run the business that way. Especially if that's what you want out of this thing. And there's absolutely nothing wrong with that. This is your business and you should give yourself permission to run it any way you want.

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If you have aspirations of growing to a point where you can move into consulting full-time, then you should build a plan to do so. But if you're perfectly happy having a side job, then by all means there's no reason to go any further.

This means you should keep it simple. Don't engage in hiring employees, don't make long-term contractual obligations, and, most importantly, have fun with it. You can always decide to grow the company later. And if an opportunity to pick up that one big customer that makes the company an instant success comes along, you can re-evaluate where you are in life and whether you want to make a go of being a full-time consultant.

I've found a number of jobs mesh well with consulting. I know few software developers that don't also write apps or web sites on the side for customers. I know none who don't occasionally hate it when they have a deadline that causes them to work crazy hours because they have a day job. I know teachers who love consulting after-hours. Even though they're not really supposed to, I know plenty of people who work at an Apple Retail Store and then work with the occasional person at their home or small office. In short, these are traditional moonlighting gigs.

I also know people that have a few different part-time jobs going at once. There are Uber and Lyft drivers who help people with their Macs, lawyers who write software while bootstrapping startups, actors and musicians who show people how to use Garage Band on the side (which they learned in their 3rd job, podcasting), people who care for children a couple of days a week and write little apps for customers (which they learned to do to track the swimming lessons they give at the YMCA). Sites like Craigslist and odesk have opened up a lot of possibilities, and a lot of these people like the flexibility of taking time off whenever they want.

There are some things to be careful of, though. Don't overburden yourself. It's easy to take on too much work and get burnt out on doing several jobs at once. When you do, it's easy to let quality slip on each of the jobs and burn bridges. It also violates the golden rule that you should always be having fun.

One thing that can help with overcommitting is to keep within your skillset. Estimating tasks is easy when you know how to do them. For the things you don't know how to do, get some referral partners. These are people with skillsets that are complimentary to yours but not necessarily overlapping. For example, if you're asked to edit a home movie but don't know Final Cut or iMovie, then have someone in your phone to whom you can pass that type of work. You should be stretching your skills to keep from a monotonous existence but doing so in a deliberate way when possible.

Set an Expectation

Will you come in on Tuesdays and Thursdays or work half days? How can the customers or your team reach you when you're doing other things? Especially in the beginning, it's important to impose a communication plan and set an expectation of what customers and employees can expect.

Another good way to keep from overcommitting is to have certain hours where you work with each type of business. For example, spend Tuesdays and Thursdays with your Apple customers and the other days of the week with your other businesses. Or write code for customers from 8 PM to 10 PM each evening. This way you can easily communicate what they can expect and when.

When you take on projects, communicate when a customer should expect any necessary deliverables. Hourly consulting is easy, as you usually show up, do some stuff, and leave. If you're working on projects for customers from home or coffee shops, make sure to communicate early and often when deliverables will be delayed.

Put Someone in Charge

Some day you might end up with too much work. You might end up with other companies you want to start. That's when it's time to let someone else run parts of (if not all of) the company. This is delicate, as in many cases, the company has been your baby for a long time. But if you do it right, you'll have a much better experience than if you try to micromanage everything because you feel guilty for not being there.

Find Someone to Run the Company

You've decided to put your baby in someone else's hands. How do you find the right person? This is probably the single hardest thing you can do. Harder than the first person you hired, even. We often look for someone just like us. But that's likely not going to happen; after all, if they were just like you, they'd be staunch competition. But think of who you might want to put in charge. And interview a few of the following types of candidates:

- **An internal candidate**: Probably the most likely, and often the best choice if you've had someone involved in your company for a long time who is intimately aware of every facet of the organization. Usually, internal candidates have been watching you for a long time and understand why you have made the decisions you've made up to this point. These are great candidates for maintaining the status quo. But one thing you really want to hear from them is that they want to grow professionally in the ways that you need them to grow to lead the company, usually when it comes to business acumen.

- **A business guru**: Usually someone coming from an operational role at a larger company, business gurus will often focus on efficiency—getting more out of staff. If you are looking at someone like this, make sure they think of how the staff will feel, what customers will think of a focus on margin, etc. And make sure they still look to sales, not just expanding business within existing accounts.
- **A sales guru**: Most people that come from a sales background are most concerned about making it rain, whatever the consequence. The great thing here is that as owner-operators, many engineers don't have backgrounds in sales. The problem can be that someone who is hyper-focused on sales will frequently not concern themselves with margin. This can leave your company operating in the red, even while billing way more than ever before. When you're putting someone from sales in charge of running the company, make sure to teach them the intricate areas that negatively impact margin, and be clear about the margin you expect the company to run at.
- **A subject matter expert**: This might be another consultant, someone from a larger company, or an expert in the field. The subject matter expert might need to learn about marketing, public relations, human resources, etc. They will instantly have credibility with the staff and be capable of taking the reins on a technical level; however, I strongly recommend having two meetings a week with them to provide the business and sales guidance that is necessary to run a company.

Letting Go

When you appoint someone to run parts of your company, the most important thing is to set expectations and boundaries. The expectations are what you want to see as output for the company. Consider the following as some of the expectations to set:

- Set a sales target: This is the most common metric that outgoing owners focus on: how much money are customers paying you? It's not all that should matter, though, as we'll explore.
- Define the margin the business should run at: This is a simple way to gage the income and amount spent in a simple percentage. Just make sure you define what constitutes each (e.g., accrued revenue versus earned revenue, cost of goods sold, GAP rules, etc.).
- Set a goal for total number of new customers: If the organization starts focusing on cross-selling within customers then it will be easy to look healthy on paper without thinking about a future set of customers.
- Define the type, or classification, of work to focus on: Bringing in the right type of revenue is just as important as bringing in revenue. For example, a Managed Service Provider should be bringing in managed services customers, not project-based work. A windfall of project-based cash can be great but leave the monthly recurring revenue light after a while!

Start off with a weekly or monthly plan. Routinely review new sales, accounts receivable, accruals, and accounts payable with the new leader of the organization. Once you feel comfortable, you can start meeting less frequently. However, in the beginning, stay engaged without causing your prodigy to feel claustrophobic. Unless, of course, there are issues in the business.

When Things Aren't Going to Plan

Sometimes things don't go exactly as planned. Sales might start slipping, costs might start rising, retention of employees or customers may start dipping. Don't let any detail go without attention, especially early in the process of turning your baby over to someone else. When things aren't going to plan, the most important thing is that you show discipline when analyzing what's going on. That sets a tone that you'll be fair in dealing with the challenges that are expected in any business.

Don't Complain

Business is fun. We make strategies that align with our organization's goals and we then implement tactics that position us for success. Then after patience and hard work, when everything goes our way, we triumphantly watch our efforts bear fruit. And then we pivot and do the whole thing again.

Sometimes things don't go our way. Maybe the strategy was wrong or the tactics weren't implemented correctly. Maybe we had the wrong people in key positions. Maybe we found success, but what we considered success didn't line up with what our organization actually wanted us to be doing. Maybe it did line up, but the organization is changing (and all organizations are always changing). Either way, things will eventually change. And how we cope with change can shape the perceptions of those around us, as well as the satisfaction that our teams garner from their jobs.

A natural inclination of many these days is to complain to peers about changes in the organization. But while cathartic, complaining about change can brand you as being change-averse, or inflexible. Complaining will infect your team. Complaining will make you look incapable of getting on board with the new way. Complaining about change will, in short, hurt your career. But you need to do something, right? And it can be cathartic to complain about change. But don't. Instead, let's look at a few things you should do.

- **Celebrate success**: It's easier to handle change when you know that you weren't doing anything wrong before. It's important to celebrate past accomplishments. That way everyone knows that their efforts were appreciated by the organization. This can provide closure to the old way in a positive manner and prepare everyone for what's to come.
- **Formulate a new strategy**: Armed with information about where the organization wants you to go, analyze the gap between where you are and where you're going—and how to get to the destination. There's no reason to operate in a vacuum. Instead work with your peers and team to build a new strategy that everyone can agree on. After all, your team can't be fully bought-in unless they have some say in the strategy you're asking them to implement.
- **Be transparent**: Transparency will not only arm your team with all of the information they need about why you are implementing a new strategy, but it will also keep staff from being concerned about their place in the new framework you're building.
- **Devise tactics**: You have a strategy, now you need a plan to implement that strategy. The tactics you choose should be bought-in by every level of the organization. These should include any process changes and the expectation (both inputs and outputs) of the new tactics.

- **Communicate, communicate, communicate!** Once you've developed a strategy and how the strategy will be implemented, communicate the changes to everyone. This includes your team, but also those above you (as they should approve of both the strategy and the tactics) and those lateral to you (as you'll likely impact them).

Once you've spent the time to formulate a new strategy, stop and appreciate the work that's been done. Publicly thank those who helped you. Think of any time you could have spent complaining about the changes, and how much you could have accomplished in that time had you instead been getting feedback about what was desired of you and how you could deliver. You'll quickly find that you were much more productive in the time that you would have otherwise spent making yourself look bad to anyone standing around the water cooler listening to you.

Complaining doesn't really help anything. We've all done it, though. And it can help us to cope with change. And sometimes you need to do so—especially when you feel like your time has been wasted. But keep it to a minimum and be careful who you complain to, especially if you're in a position of management. That way you can get on with getting productive again. Once a new strategy is in place that the organization appreciates more than the old strategy, you'll likely find that you're better off than you otherwise would have been!

Instead of complaining, we're going to start with a common analysis technique to get to the bottom of an issue in the office: The 5 Whys.

The 5 Whys

The 5 Whys technique is used to find the root cause of a problem. That problem might be a software defect (when writing software) or a failure in a business process. Basically, ask why something happened. Then, use the answer to ask why again, and repeat the process a few more times. Usually, you find the root cause analysis within 5 whys. For more complex problems, it might take 7.

The goal of root cause analysis is to get to the bottom of something. Let's take accounts receivable as an example. Let's ask our series of questions:

1. Why is the company operating in a negative cash flow situation?
    a. Because accounts receivable are too high (over $1,000,000).
2. Why are accounts receivable over $1,000,000 for the first time in the history of the company?
    a. Because the company has a number of customers who are disputing their bills.
3. Why are customers disputing their bills?
    a. Because multiple trips were required to fix a single issue that customers claim shouldn't have taken multiple trips.
4. Why is quality dipping (or at least why is there a perception that it is)?
    a. We have a bunch of new people on staff to replace people that left.
5. Why did we experience high amounts of turnover recently?
    a. Because the owner isn't around, employees aren't getting paid enough, or they all found better jobs.

There, it's my fault! Either that, or we're not keeping our teams engaged, not compensating them enough, or there is a shift in the industry for our geography. The result is going to be different for everyone, but note that here we went from cash flow to turnover, a common link. In this case, settling the customer quality issues should happen immediately, and we should make moves to increase retention.

SWOT Analysis

The first way to analyze problems that we'll look at is SWOT. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. SWOT is best when used proactively, but we can use it to analyze reactively as well. We can use SWOT to look at risks and then link those to what went wrong.

First, let's define the components of SWOT.

- Strengths are attributes that give you an advantage over organizations (most likely your local competition).
- Weaknesses are attributes that put you at a disadvantage.
- Opportunities are areas you can exploit based on your strengths.
- Threats are areas your competition can exploit based on your weaknesses.

Start off with deciding what the objective of the analysis is. Think of this as the title and try to summarize it as succinctly as possible. Then draw a grid and label each box with one of the elements: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Then fill in the boxes. In my experience, a lot of things make sense once you've gone through the exercise, and if not, it's easy to solicit feedback on what should go where from others!

There are tons of other ways to go about looking at what you are going to do or what you did and analyzing results, or planned results. The most important aspect of these is to think critically about the business in a structured manner. I like to go through this stuff independently with people from teams I'm on. This gives me not only my own analysis but also how others think about the same topics.

Once you review what went wrong it's time to come up with a hypothesis for how to correct the situation. This hypothesis results in an attainable solution, SWOTs help you plan responses based on the possible outcomes of implementing your solution. The main objective here is to provide meaningful responses and not to just fill in the blanks.

Conclusion

You can always find someone to run your company. You might not want them to once you've found them, as you might miss running things. And no one will ever do as good a job as you would do. Never publicly admonish the person you put in place to run your organization. Privately, offer feedback.

While not easy, moving to overseeing a business rather than running a business can be one of the most rewarding quests of your career. You can be free to do a variety of things, like finally take a vacation, or start another company. Just keep in mind that usually, being a part-time owner will result in less sales and performance from the organization. And the long-term implication is often that the business will not last forever, so make sure to treat those you leave behind well, reward growth, and keep the business going so you can best take care of everyone who has chosen to spend their time with you.

Further Reading

- The Heart of Change, John P. Kotter https://www.amazon.com/Heart-Change-Real-Life-Stories-Organizations/dp/1422187330
- Lead the Work: Navigating a World Beyond Employment, John W. Boudreau, Ravin Jesuthasan, David Creelman, https://www.amazon.com/Lead-Work-Navigating-Beyond-Employment/dp/1119040043
- Retire Inspired, Chris Hogan, https://www.amazon.com/Retire-Inspired-Its-Financial-Number/dp/1937077810
- Don't Retire, Rewire, Jeri Sedlar, Rick Miners, https://www.amazon.com/Dont-Retire-Rewire-Jeri-Sedlar/dp/1592576893
- How To Earn More Money As A Freelancer, V. V. Cam, https://www.amazon.com/Because-Money-Matters-Freelancer-Economy-ebook/dp/B078YHZ2GX
- The Gig is Up, Olga Mizrahi, https://www.amazon.com/Gig-Up-Economy-Obsolete-Freelancing/dp/1626344930
- SWOT Analysis, Lawrence G Fine, https://www.amazon.com/SWOT-Analysis-Strength-Weaknesses-Opportunities/dp/1449546757

CHAPTER 15

Buying Companies

Acquiring a company can infuse your company with new blood. Your employees can be energized by a new flock of customers and your customers can find more value in the additional services you can then offer. In Chapter 13, we discussed selling your ompany. And in Chapter 14, we went through moving to being a part-time owner instead. Now, let's talk about growing your own company inorganically via an acquisition.

There are as many ways to go about acquisitions as there are companies that have been purchased. And there are many ways to find a company to purchase. One way is to look for companies that are on the market. Another is to look at companies that might not be on the market yet. Don't limit yourself to opening discussions with companies that are for sale.

Before you start, though, think about what you're trying to accomplish by acquiring an organization. In many ways, this is the opposite of Chapter 13, but builds on what we covered there. So first, let's talk about the why, or what you're actually trying to accomplish in an acquisition.

Make a List

Look for possible organizations that might align with yours. These may be companies you've done business with before, or companies you've competed with locally. Make a list of the ones you could imagine yourself operating. And think about what they add to yours. Maybe you're a solo

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practitioner and you would like to buy out a larger shop with the nickels you've squirreled away. Maybe you're the larger shop who would like to buy out the solo practitioner.

I don't always tell people to make lists. Some are list-makers, some aren't. But you really should make a list this time. Once you've got your list, move it into a Google sheet or Excel and add some columns. Now, let's think about what attributes you might get from an acquisition.

What Are You Actually Trying to Buy (or Roll Up)?

When most companies purchase another company, they're usually looking to acquire something specific. When consulting firms look to acquire other consulting firms, it's usually about existing customers, talent, technology, brand identity, and/or vendor contracts (and in my experience it's in that order). Let's unpack each.

- **Customers** are only as good as the contracts. Why? Customers can leave with staff who defect during the transition (including principals who came as a part of the acquisition). Rather than buy a company just for their customers, you might choose to just hire more salespeople, the staff of a competitor, and/or aggressively pursue their customers yourself.
- **Talent** on the Apple platform can be harder to find for other platforms. Apple consulting expertise is a growing market, but hiring a team or finding good staff can be a challenge. You could attempt to hire talent away from an incumbent, take on talent from new customers, train new employees, or go hire people from recruiting and headhunting sites—but the ability to

bring on two, three, or more engineers who can hit the ground running (especially if you're getting customers as part of a deal) is priceless, especially since they can be used to onboard net-new employees while providing a seamless transition to customers who might be acquired with a deal.

- **Technology** is usually easy to recreate in some way unless it's patented, or you don't yet fully understand the business logic. However, the time to market can be critical with new ventures. If a competitor has the ability to immediately deliver something that you've only begun to think about, then consider the cost of going to market and the lost business from being latent to market. This might be customer-facing technology (such as products that are cross-sold into customers with services, as well as implemented ticketing systems, client automation, integrations, middleware, etc.
- **Brand Identity** is something I've always struggled with. Being first certainly doesn't mean being best. You will frequently roll identities into one another anyway. You can also launch a new product or service and, with a media blitz about being new and fresh, often build a competing identity on your own. But if there's technology or a service that's already in the market, then it's easy to merge brands or bring another brand underneath your own. My challenge here is that I usually see people getting caught up in wanting to own the brand, not in wanting to provide value. One of my favorite consulting acquisitions was Geek Squad, who was acquired for the most part because they had

a good brand. However you might feel about the talent level in Best Buy stores or their brand, since neither you nor I make more than Best Buy does, it's worth giving them props for expanding that brand into all of their stores and making money off space that had previously been considered an exclusive warranty replacement department.

- **Vendor Contracts** can take a long time to get processed. Large computer companies like Cisco, Apple, Microsoft, and others might require certifications (both with regard to your staff and your company or location). You also need to be in business or established with a vendor to get a good line of credit for purchasing (let's not forget that for hardware and software you'll often pay up front and then take payment in 30 to 90 days). But more importantly than acquiring the contracts is acquiring talented people that know their way around these systems, know how to unlock the various SPIFs, and have contacts at those companies. Sure, you can figure it out, but in the process, you might end up losing far more than the cost of a rollup or acquisition.

When it's possible you want to get a little bit of each of these when you are navigating a good acquisition or rollup. Each has its own value. Just don't forget that you want to bring in everything you can. So rather than just tell people to get on board with how you're doing things, listen thoughtfully to what new people have to say and accept any process changes that might make sense, or table any you aren't ready to deal with.

Approaching Acquisition Targets

Many a relationship takes the tone with how that relationship begins. I guess some things come down to first impressions. Perhaps you already know the principals of an organization you want to acquire. Or maybe you are looking to meet them for the first time. Either way, approaching someone about acquiring their company is a delicate process.

Imagine if someone wanted to buy your company. You probably aren't going to go out for Happy Hour, have a few too many drinks, and wake up in the morning having signed away your company. I've heard stories that include things like hiring private investigators to follow people, having background checks performed without their consent, and going through the garbage at someone's home. Having said that, I've heard of large companies doing at least two of those as well, just to hire talent (or hiring headhunters to do it).

So let's not go that far. Let's say that maybe you do a little bit of due diligence (nothing creepy) and then look for any contacts you have in common. The warm introduction is, by far, always the best. And I wouldn't look for an introduction on LinkedIn or through e-mail (although you take what you can get in this world). I want to push for an in-person introduction—just lunch, like the dating service says. This gives you the chance to meet someone face to face. You don't have to say you want to acquire their company. Instead, you can say you just want to meet someone else who you've heard so much about!

Once you've met in person, if you get to that point where you want to start discussing an acquisition or merger, then I like transparent, direct, and early communications. "There's a chance our two companies might better serve customers as one company. How do you think we might make that happen?" Be direct, but not aggressive. After all, you didn't hire someone to go through this person's garbage, right?

The Finer Points of Acquisitions

The criteria for any acquisition absolutely begins with the P&L. If there's profit, then why would someone want to sell? If there's no profit and no plan to profit, then why would someone want to buy? But if you have a plan to find more revenue or cut costs by combining operations to become more efficient, then that obviously makes an acquisition more attractive, provided there aren't too many hurdles (which can crush you if you aren't careful).

Some questions that might limit liabilities:

- Can you get out of contracts for overlapping services? ISPs, leases for office space, the costs of RMM/MSA/CRM solutions, licensing for cloud services, E&O insurance, retainers for lawyers, etc.
- Can you liquidate unnecessary assets? The most substantial of these is property. If both companies have real estate holdings then it's likely that both are unnecessary (if they're within a short distance of one another). I've never seen real estate come as part of a deal in a rollup, but it would be an asset that might come with a purchase.
- Are there overlapping teams to do the same things? No one ever wants to think about letting staff go. Throughout this book, I've been a proponent of repositioning staff where needed. When it comes to core services you can likely use one operations team rather than two, which might give you the ability to repurpose someone into a net-new role that provides more value to your customers.

- Overlapping customer-facing talent is a great problem to have! If you end up in this scenario, then either bring on more sales personnel faster, or if you're a smaller shop, then grab your sales bag and hit the pavement, because those are the moments that you want to seize.

We had previously discussed what you want out of an acquisition or rollup. This section hopefully allows you to polish your business plan by finding a more efficient single organization than two separate organizations operating independently. The faster you can achieve operational efficiency, the more quickly your teams can learn to work together. Don't be afraid of delegating as much of the operations as you can so you can get in front of customers to maximize your chances to retain them and to understand their needs.

Company Culture

Culture is one of the most underrated aspects of running an organization. Having a great culture is at the heart of what motivates the best people to want to work for you. Lasting culture is founded on strong values that unite and inspire. An acquisition represents a single event that could destroy your culture if not done properly. So you have some difficult questions you're going to want to ask first.

Can you work with these people? We didn't really address this question when we covered selling your company, although through the book we have touched on culture. But you don't want a combative situation being set up inside the company you're acquiring. If you hired your team, then you know you can work with them and I sincerely hope you enjoy doing so. But you didn't hire these people. Ask the seller about the people.

Are the clients a good cultural fit? We frequently bring on similarly sized and/or minded customers. That's one reason why you might be looking to purchase another organization, to expand out of the beachhead you're in.

But if your staff can't work with the new customers, then you might have to make different plans. And it's best to know that before you've passed the threshold from which you can't return (signed on the dotted line).

I don't think there's a silver bullet here. Talk to the employees and be transparent. You'll figure it out.

Merging Operations

Based on the size of the organizations being merged, the new organization will likely not need people or vendors in certain roles. The most obvious, among smaller Apple consultancies that merge, is likely accounting. If the new entity needs double the capacity for accounting then you'll be happy to have the added resources. But if not, you will have some hard choices to make. We discussed some operational aspects you need to decide on before you acquire an organization.

- Systems
  - Accounting systems
  - RMM, MSA, and ticketing systems
  - Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
  - Patch and server management systems
  - Managed service components, including backup, cloud services, messaging, and groupware services, etc.
  - Contract management systems
  - File services
  - Messaging, groupware, and internal productivity systems

- Services
    - Outside accounting services
    - Tax services
    - Legal services
    - Custodial and facilities services
    - Financial and real estate services
    - Human resources and outsourced HRIS systems
    - 401k and profit-sharing services

The most important thing to keep in mind with all of these is to pick the best solution. At first, you might think that the tools you were using are all the best. However, if you ask to be taken through how they're used by the old team, then you may find that you like the business processes and the technology that drives them better than your own. And when the new team sees you embracing what is best, they are more likely to trust you concerning what is best for them as well.

The Numbers

Many business owners are going to find this the really crappy part. You find these great companies, you meet the employees, you merge operations, but in the process of building out a final product, you run into a problem with comp packages. Maybe the employees who come to you as a part of the acquisition have salaries that are too high compared to your existing team. Maybe it's the opposite problem.

Salaries should fit in a similar range, per position. If you haven't yet created position contracts and done salary leveling, then I would recommend doing so at this time. While you don't want to make drastic changes in comp, you want to be ahead of this before the merging of entities. If you are inheriting staff that is paid less than yours, then I recommend providing some kind of profit sharing or goals to get teams up to speed.

Note Leveling seems silly at smaller companies, but if you plan on growing, it provides guidance so staff can grow with the company.

If you inherit staff that makes more than what you currently pay, then check the levels. If the staff you obtain as part of the acquisition make above what the levels say they should, then find out why. They might be doing more than what you think. If not, then you have an issue that needs to be addressed. If addressing that situation causes people to make less money, then assume they will leave as soon as they can. If they don't, then assume they will not be in a positive place and could damage the morale of other team members.

Salaries aren't the only numbers employees will need to know about. Stock is easy if both companies have similar stock option programs. If the one you are acquiring doesn't have a program, then it's easy to roll the staff into yours. But if they do and you don't, then you either need to create one or provide commensurate compensation, such as profit sharing. And you need to zero out the money from stocks that the employees should have received as part of a vesting event if that's not handled by the seller. This can be really challenging math, so seek professional help to figure out what's appropriate. And when you figure out what's appropriate, if possible, do a little better than that.

Benefits are one more thing to look at. As with stock, if people will have less benefits, then they should receive additional compensation commensurate with replacing those benefits. If not, then assume a situation similar to salaries.

If you see a general theme with all of the numbers in this section, take care of the employees. Remember that in a services business, they are the most valuable asset and likely the largest cost in the company. You need to be profitable and have a multiplier to make an acquisition, and to make that happen, you need to first make sure that all of the numbers for the staff make sense. As with everything in this book, be deliberate.

Rather than Acquire

You might come to a place where you choose not to acquire another company, but in the process of trying to work out a deal, you really came to like the principals and/or staff at the other organization. That's awesome! In this case, there are still other options. Probably about as many options as there have been mergers or missed chances at mergers in the history of organizations merging or not merging.

The easiest thing to do is pass business back and forth to one another. You can't completely overlap or you wouldn't have started discussing acquisitions. If you will be passing business back and forth, I recommend an agreement where you can bilaterally refer business to one another and receive long-term compensation for doing so. You started the deal for a reason. Just because you realize at some point that you can't merge the organizations doesn't mean that you also have to walk away from the relationship you've formed with the principals, provided everyone acts ethically.

If you have the margin, start at 10% and work forward or backward from there. Why do I recommend there absolutely be compensation bilaterally? Because if there's no compensation and one party provides far more referrals than the other, then one party is likely to feel taken advantage of. Check the performance over time. Keep in touch, and honestly, be glad to have more friends.

Are Assets Transferrable?

Contracts are a funny thing. Some are locked to a given company or person. Some require various dependencies be met. When acquiring a company, it's critical to do due diligence and make sure that any assets are transferable to the new entity. Hire a lawyer to do so.

Re-evaluate any deals you've made once your attorney reviews them. If you have to make a deal before you have a chance to have all contracts legally reviewed, make contracts contingent on assets being transferrable. In fact, that goes for anything—all deals are contingent on any and every unknown in order to provide maximum liability coverage in case the deal falls through. As such, treat the following as assets:

- Partnerships, including reseller agreements, existing support contracts, and alliance agreements
- Contracts with customers, especially managed services contracts, but also including subcontracting agreements
- Contracts with vendors, making sure that prices aren't going to go up, and that all agreements will be enforceable once the name of the organization has changed and business based on vendors isn't negatively impacted

Once you have verified that all of the i's are dotted and t's are crossed, you can start completing plans to actually merge the companies.

Don't Make a Bad Deal Just Because You Can't Let Go

Ever bought something on eBay and spent way more on it than you really meant to, just because you got competitive? Now imagine that you spent thousands of dollars on legal fees and a deal is falling through. Sometimes that's a good thing. If, in the midst of due diligence, you find that the deal keeps getting a little less awesome at every turn, make sure to check that the investment is still worth it.

It can be hard to walk away from a deal at the last minute. Sometimes, you're unable because your pride gets in the way. And sometimes, it's because you have invested too much. Not to overuse analogies in this section, but something similar can happen when buying a house. You get an inspection done and you find the house needs a new floor in the bathroom, then a new furnace, then a new roof. At some point, the contingencies pile up too far and the risk becomes too high to proceed.

Similarly, between debts that are uncovered, assets that cannot be migrated, team members that defect, and potential customer attrition, there may come a time when you have to end the deal. Otherwise, you're upside-down. But if everything works out and you can make a better experience for your customers and employees by merging the organizations, then it's time to execute the deal!

Merge the Companies

Once a deal is in place, it's time to start executing your plan to merge the companies. Start by finalizing your plans. As soon as possible, communicate the merger with customers, vendors, partners, and other stakeholders.

Communication should be as thorough and transparent as possible. Make sure to include the following:

- You're taking care of the employees
- You're taking care of the customers
- Why you're doing this
- Specifics about how the customers will be better off
- The plan and timelines for merging services
- How communications with the company might change over time (e.g., how customers file tickets, etc.)

If you will be doing any press around the merger or acquisition (and you probably should), make sure anyone who is contacted about the merger is told that there's an "embargo" on press. An embargo is an industry-standard term that refers to media not releasing content until a specific date. In fact, if press goes early, you might cause concern among customers and employees, so consider doing PR after the merger and having a press release go out after the announcement. Don't do anything that could cause your team or customers to feel betrayed. Remember, this should be a good thing for everyone involved.

Conclusion

Be careful with acquisitions. You can easily get into a place where there's a cultural disparity or a deal isn't right. You need to make sure you have a vision of how to integrate the organization you're acquiring into your own. You also need to make sure you have a handle on costs, understand what you can do to control costs, and understand the impact doing so has on the bottom line. But if you can make more ROI per dollar spent on acquiring rather than building, then jump on that.

Just make sure to remember why you're doing all of this. It's never quite as simple as you seem to think at first. Usually, inorganic growth will come with some inefficiencies (the laws of thermodynamics it seems are true in business as well). Try to retain as much value as possible in the merger, and provided you've been careful and done sufficient due diligence, the two organizations should be stronger as a single entity!

Further Reading

- Let's Buy a Company: How to Accelerate Growth Through Acquisitions, H. Lee Rust, `https://www.amazon.com/Lets-Buy-Company-Accelerate-Acquisitions/dp/1564148459`
- Buyout: The Insider's Guide to Buying Your Own Company, Rick Rickertsen, Robert E. Gunther, `https://www.amazon.com/Buyout-Insiders-Guide-Buying-Company-ebook/dp/B001GQ2BWM`
- HBR Guide to Buying a Small Business: Think Big, Buy Small, Own Your Own Company (HBR Guide Series) Ruback, Yudkoff `https://www.amazon.com/HBR-Guide-Buying-Small-Business/dp/1633692507`
- The Art of Access: Strategies for Acquiring Public Records, David Cuillier, Charles Davis, `https://www.amazon.com/Art-Access-Strategies-Acquiring-Records/dp/1604265507`
- How to Buy a Business without Being Had, Jack Gibson, `https://www.amazon.com/How-Buy-Business-without-Being/dp/1426936184`

- When Is The Right Time To Sell My Business?: The Expert Answer from Richard Mowrey https://www.amazon.com/When-Right-Time-Sell-Business-ebook/dp/B01LDNKBN8
- Inside Cisco: The Real Story of Sustained M&A Growth, Ed Paulson, https://www.amazon.com/Inside-Cisco-Story-Sustained-Growth/dp/0471414255
- Mergers and Acquisitions for Dummies, Bill Snow, https://www.amazon.com/Mergers-Acquisitions-Dummies-Bill-Snow/dp/0470385561
- Mergers and Acquisition Concepts and Insights, Stephen Bainbridge, https://www.amazon.com/Mergers-Acquisition-Concepts-Insights-Bainbridge/dp/1609301323
- Here's the Deal: Everything You Wish A Lawyer Would Tell You About Buying A Small Business, Joel Ankney, https://www.amazon.com/Heres-Deal-Everything-Lawyer-Business/dp/1539850811

CHAPTER 16

Running a Consulting Practice Inside a Larger Company

Many companies have services departments. In the Apple space, these are primarily software vendors. Some hardware providers do so as well, such as large tape library manufacturers. Most companies that sell hardware and software that appeals to the enterprise will have products that their customers need to bring on services for. Some smaller software vendors will have services teams as well.

Some of the reasons customers might want to purchase services from a hardware or software company include the following:

- Services are required. This is often the case when a lot of customization is required.
- The customer doesn't have time to implement the hardware or software.
- The customer needs training to get up-to-speed on implementing the hardware, software, or updates.
- Customers need to bring on services for part of a project and would prefer to keep them on a single Purchase Order.

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-3835-6_16

The reason I mention these is that you can build packages or bundles around meeting these customer needs. But first, let's look at what the company you work for wants you to be doing (which can often be quite different from what the customers want you to be doing).

What Does the Company Want You Doing?

Many of us will take the approach that we want to sell services and grow a services business. Then we can hire more people and help more customers. But is that what our company actually wants us to be doing? Sure, money is money. But many companies will look for you to drive sales of the core product more than sales of services. Kinda'.

This is hard balance, and the most important part of finding that balance is to actually talk (yes, use your human words) to your boss and their boss. I'll tell you up front, most smaller organizations will say something like "go make all the monies," but larger organizations might come back with talk of things like building ecosystems of vendors. The important thing is to find the right mix of growth, margin, and community enablement. And for everyone to be on the same page.

Getting the Right Mix

As I said earlier, someone is eventually going to ask about margin and profit. And if you don't have a good story to tell (and in writing) then you're probably going to be looking for a new job. So what is the right mix?

The remainder of this chapter will focus on unpacking some of this, but before you start pushing an agenda and possibly are doing the opposite of what's being asked of you, consider the following (which you should review with your management):

- What profit margin is needed from the services organization?
- How many services are going to be given away for free in order to drive software and hardware sales?
- Will free services be credited back to the services team in the form of a charge back?
- How should sales enablement for services be handled?
- Should you plan on staff augmentation as part of your services packages?
- Will the services team be involved in getting the community (resellers, consultants, MSPs, integrators, etc.) enabled to deliver services, or will the two be competitors?

Note These aren't that many questions and even a CEO will be happy to answer them, given the potential impact to profits. These should be reviewed with your manager quarterly and probably up a tier annually as well, given that your manager might not always be in lock-step with their manager or any time there's turnover in the management chain above you.

Once you understand the margin goal and sales goal, set a rate. I would approach pricing the same that we've done in previous chapters. After all, a business is a business. The difference here is that you'd set aside whatever time has been allocated for free services. A warning though: don't get too synthetic with the numbers. If you're supposed to make 15 percent or 40 percent margin, that's your key metric. And when you know how much you need to make, you can build bundles and prepare your services to be sold.

Building Service Packages

Bundles are a great way to amplify the sale of services within a larger organization. They also reduce friction during the sales process because they're easy to explain. Once you know your necessary margin, look at your costs, look at the percent that you can bill versus the percent of time that the organization will be giving away to close sales, subtract out the reseller margin, and figure out a necessary daily number. Easy, right? Let's extract margin from a daily average price versus cost structure:

> *((Number of days billed in a year * MSRP) * Average Reseller Margin) / Annual Departmental Cost*

If you pull a report of the total goods sold, you start to get a pretty good picture of costs associated with running a team and the complexities that can arise. The above formula quickly goes into a spreadsheet or a database. And it only gets more and more complicated. Once you know your daily cost, the necessary margin, and the actual goals, now let's build a bundle. Wonder why I said to figure out pricing in the previous section (before you did this exercise)? As a sanity check.

Tip When at all possible, I prefer working in daily increments with services teams inside larger organizations. If you're sitting in a meeting or need to make a snap decision, knowing the daily cost and the daily profit gives you a great baseline. Even if you deal in fixed-cost Statements of Work, you're going to do the math to build the bundle based on an amount of time it will take to achieve your deliverables.

The bundle is meant to make it simpler to buy services. This makes it easier for teams to communicate what a customer is getting. There are two ways to approach bundling: days or deliverables. And then you need to decide if you will bundle services with other products in the portfolio of an organization. For example, let's say your organization sells training classes. You might bundle 5 days' worth of training and 5 days' worth of custom services, apply a 10 percent or 20 percent discount to that and then a customer is more likely to buy the bundle, thus potentially getting you additional sales that you might not have had otherwise.

Bundles of days mean less Statements of Work need to be written (less is very different than saying none). This impacts your costs, and customers always have an expectation that they will get a discount when buying in bulk. Just make sure that when stacked with a reseller margin that you will still be meeting your target margin.

Now that you've built out your services packages and the appropriate discounts that can be applied to them, it's time to put the processes in place that support the services component of the business or refine them to meet the new services packages.

Change Control

Once you've built the products and services you plan on taking to market, they should undergo scrutiny and then be put into a form of change control. The scrutiny will look different in each organization, but be thankful for it and not defensive in the least.

If no one feels comfortable providing scrutiny, go to the product management team. All product management teams are happy to give feedback on anything you might ask them of, including the product, everything around the product, the best way to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and endless debates about whether Led Zeppelin or Pink Floyd was more impactful to rock and roll music.

Operationalize Services

Every company is going to have different areas that need to be checked off before you can consider your new services packages and operations as being on autopilot, which is really the goal of any business function. According to the size of the company, there are teams you need to meet with to explain what you'll be doing and why. A few of these will even give you homework.

Here are some questions you should ask, and if there are teams at your organization who deal with these, schedule meetings to confirm your assumptions.

- **Legal**: One of the most important aspects of delivering services is to make sure your contracts with customers cover all of the goods and services provided to customers. Any time you change or add a SKU, make an appointment with your legal/contracts team and verify that these cover what you're doing. If your legal team manages corporate insurance policies, then review these as well; otherwise, work with both the insurance/risk team and the legal team to make sure that insurance policies cover the scope of the services you'll be providing.
- **Sales operations**: Most sales teams need a SKU. We'll talk about sales enablement later, but you need to equip sales operations teams with a list of product names and costs. Schedule this meeting early, as many organizations have specific change windows where SKUs can be changed due to similar windows with distributors and resellers. Typically, a change you make will not take effect with resellers for at least 60 days. Additionally, iron out any details with how communications and sales enablement are handled with partners.

- **Finance**: You have coordinated SKUs, but now it's time to figure out what happens when they're sold. Some details that need to get worked out include the following:
    - When is revenue recognized (e.g., upon delivery of the service or spread equally across the duration of a services contract)? How will finance report on that?
    - What kind of impacts do costs in finance have on the revenue that gets recognized, including commissions, costs, unallocated expenses, facilities costs, subcontracting costs, etc?
    - How is the income derived from those SKUs actually allocated once the revenue is recognized, and how will you report on this?
- **Ticketing**: This is an important component. You need to ticket in such a way that you don't make supporting customers even harder than it is otherwise. Therefore, your tickets need to use the same system as that of your support teams. But the ticketing system also needs to probably track travel and support reporting on the utilization of time-based consultants. Additionally, if you recognize revenue based on ticket closures, then make sure to work out how finance will get those reports.

Once you've sorted out all of these details, write them down. If your company has an intranet or wiki, put the information there. Be as complete as you can be and then have the teams you meet with confirm the notes you took, which then became articles. These also act as an FAQ for when people ask about how the services operations work in the future.

Now that you've got a bunch of details sorted out, expect more that I can't begin to prepare you for. Once those are sorted out, you can move on to getting marketing and sales enablement efforts underway. Before you start working with sales teams, first make sure your marketing team has provided some good air cover to support their efforts.

Marketing

Once you have a product, it's time to develop a marketing plan. This is similar to how you'd market your own consultancy, covered previously in the book, except rather than spending your own money, you're probably going to try to convince someone in a marketing department to spend their budget.

Getting allocated budget is the easiest at the end of a year. If you start at a company in July, and they've already planned all of their advertising and marketing expenditures for the year, then chances are, you won't be able to get much done. But that's when it's time to start talking about the next year and what you want to accomplish then.

In the meantime, you'll want to build as many assets as you can. And you'll need to keep those assets up-to-date. This includes internal sales and marketing enablement assets, as well as external assets that teams can give out via e-mail campaigns, at conferences, etc. These assets include:

- **Customer success stories**: Customers bought services and got to market so much faster. And it was awesome. You see the draw there, right?
- **One-pagers**: Ideally, this would be one per product SKU, which could be handed out at conferences.

- **Stock imagery**: If you can't buy advertising yet, you might as well pick up some assets to start building advertisements in the meantime.
- **Contribute to other marketing assets**: Yes, it just so happens that the better you get at working with people, the more likely they are to be willing to help you.

Once you have some good lift on the marketing front, it's time to start working with sales teams on enablement.

Sales, Sales, Sales

Sales teams are your best friends and your worst enemies. They sell your services and so in a way are the reason you're at the organization. But they also want to provide discounts quite often. And discounting services and other ancillary SKUs is often much easier than discounting the core product. And honestly, the company is in business to sell the core product, so it should be.

But you have a margin target. And comping services to win sales is causing your blood pressure to go through the roof. If there are a lot of free services going out, eventually someone is going to ask why the margin of the services business sucks. Even if they say they won't ask, they will. And when that happens, it's important to be able to tell a compelling story. The easiest way to do this is to show on the actual P&L that you're making profit (and let's face it, how can you not make profit in services?!?!). How do you do so with free services? Charge-backs.

The simplest way to describe a charge-back is it's taking the discounted service days and charging it to another team. If a sales team is "dinged" for discounting your SKUs or giving them away, they're far less likely to do so, even if a charge-back is performed using a soft cost rather than the opportunity cost that you aren't billing.

But as mentioned, sales can be your best friend. They are the lifeblood of the organization, bringing in new business and closing sales of the services you're charged with delivering. And the more attention you give them, the more services are front of mind and the more they sell. So here are some of the levers used to drive desired sales behavior in your organization.

Always make sure sales and account teams have all of the assets they need. If they need something, make it. And before they ask, you might as well build the following:

- A one-pager that can be distributed externally, describing each SKU.
- E-mail templates describing the service or bundle.
- Talk tracks around services and bundles.
- Statements of Work per SKU to provide to customers.
- FAQs or Wikis outlining common questions and answers about the service.

This is removing any barrier to the seller feeling comfortable selling your services products and therefore making them more confident. And quite frequently, confidence is the most important aspect of selling. If you want to increase the sales of services, focus on making those sales teams confident and staying in front of them doing brown bag lunches, enablement meetings, dropping off donuts, and, of course, asking them for feedback.

Once services are selling, it's time to build a team to deliver services. Unless you've already built a team. Then it's time to manage that team.

Staffing

Careers of employees in a consulting firm are pretty straightforward and we dedicated an entire chapter on them in this book. But careers of service employees in a larger company are a bit different. Keep in mind that your best possible outcome for one of your staff is to leave you. Or replace you. The best feeling is when those who deserve to do so, replace you.

All that training, all that work, and suddenly they're better off when they leave the services team. Why's this? Well, let's start with why employees would be leaving in the first place.

- **To get in front of the product**: How many people have been in front of as many customers in real-world scenarios as those who go to customers and do work? Those are often the best situations to then build product roadmaps. At some point, many in services will get tired of complaining about priorities and will instead want to get more active about the future of the hardware or software that your organization makes.
- **To get closer to the product**: Services engineers often make great Quality Assurance (QA) testers (after all, they've been testing the product with customers after it's been released) or can easily end up moving into development teams provided they've acquired those types of skills.
- **To move into sales**: Few in services will want to admit this, but in a hardware or software company, they make some of the best possible system engineers you can ask for. Those who actually try to move into sales can not only talk the talk, but they can walk the walk as well.

- **Travel is too much**: The previous reasons were other roles that services engineers might move into. This is a reason someone might choose to leave the company outright, if you can't find a solution. Many team members begin the job loving the travel, but then as we grow up, we want to have relationships and children and settle down.

There are certainly going to be other reasons. But those are by far the main ones that I've seen thus far. Some organizations choose to build very small teams or not build a team at all and instead rely on subcontractors, which we'll cover in the next section.

Professional Services as a Service: Subcontracting

Focus. Software companies often need to focus on what they're good at: making software. But here you are, working on building a services team, potentially competing with your own customers.

Outsource everything, right?!?! First, we outsourced our ownership of hardware with leases. Then we outsourced the support of hardware to managed services providers. Then we outsourced our servers to hardware as service providers. Then we decided we'd rather use software as a service and moved to web sites that are hosted by vendors. In an age where we take old concepts and rebrand them "as a service" many software companies are choosing to hire other organizations to be their professional services arm, rather than building one themselves. This allows them to stay focused on their core business (e.g., building software, refrigerators, or fields of solar panels).

Most organizations that already have a Professional Services department won't be interested in something like this. You've done the work to build processes, you've hired road warriors, and it's a part of your budget. But if you're building a new company, or trying to react to hypergrowth, choosing where you invest your time and resources is important. And if services isn't part of your core business, then you might be able to accelerate more intelligently if you don't do services.

Overall, if you have a product that requires services here and there, outsourcing the entire services component is a low-risk way of delivering services while still capturing revenue. But there are a few questions you should ask vendors as you look to outsource services.

- **Margin**: How much money are we talking about here? If you are talking about 3 to 5 points then there's no great reason to embark on a journey like this unless you want to streamline the sales process for your core product or services.
- **Scoping**: Make sure to work out how scoping will happen if a customer needs something that isn't part of a standard services catalog.
- **Lateral Support**: Customers expect mastery when they pay the vendor directly, so make sure to work out third-party support.
- **Discounts**: When a company runs their own services department, there's a pretty standard application of discounts to services in order to close sales. After all, on paper you want to look like you're selling as much of your core product as possible. Therefore, make sure you know how much of a discount is allowed (both in terms of percentages and annual revenues), and that all stakeholders understand the impact this will have to the margin of running a services organization. This is critical when subcontracting as it's possible to have a net loss on services sales if you aren't careful.

- **Visibility**: How are projects being handled? You should be able to see the date and time that services are delivered and more importantly integrate that into the accounting system so your finance team can recognize revenue properly.
- **Customer Satisfaction Problems**: Customers are often likely to call their sales team when they have a problem. You want your sales teams selling, not back-peddling to deal with unhappy customers. So, have a standard script for dealing with unhappy customers.
- **Customer Surveys**: Customer Satisfaction isn't just reacting to angry customers when they call in. Being proactive and reaching out to get surveys is a great way to keep tabs on how customers feel about services being provided.
- **Follow-up Support**: Can the subcontractor directly engage with the customer? If not, then there should be strict rules around this. If so, then sales and account teams need to understand the potential impact to future services sales.

The word "risk" is the most important aspect of this type of endeavor. There is always the risk that something goes wrong with services. From travel delays causing resources, to missed appointment times, to accidentally shutting down a network for a customer and causing them to stop business on their busiest days of the year, I've seen it all. If you build your own services department, then you are taking on some risk. If you have a large enough team, that risk will be amortized across the staff and likely not impact margins too much.

Conclusion

What are you supposed to be doing? Growing a services organization? Focusing on profit? Squeezing margin out of the organization? Building a stronger sales funnel? Helping to close sales? Improving the product? All of the above? There's about as many answers to this as there are companies that have services teams. In general, smaller organizations are going to be after service dollars and as organizations grow larger and more mature, these conversations need to be revisited repeatedly.

Having your own company can be pretty sweet. But there's a lot of risk. If you've been running your own consulting shop, and you are ready for a new gig, then running a services team in a larger organization is certainly one of the places you may choose to look for your next position. Or, if you've been in other positions within a company and are moving into services, hopefully we've managed to provide a little insight in this chapter into some things to do and ways to look at the business.

Most organizations that sell hardware and software to businesses will have a services team. And most will have a different perspective on what that means. In some cases, like when Gerstner took over IBM, a software company can become much, much more of a services organization. But that was an intentional transition.

Ultimately, job requisition numbers in growing companies are hard to come by. If you require too many services around your product, then perhaps some should be redirected to user experience positions.

Further Reading

- Zone to Win, Geoffrey A. Moore, https://www.amazon.com/Zone-Win-Organizing-Compete-Disruption/dp/1682302113
- Communication Strategies for Managing Conflict, Mary Lou Higgerson https://www.amazon.com/Communication-Strategies-Managing-Conflict-Jossey-Bass/dp/1118761626
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- The Standard for Portfolio Management, The Project Management Institute, https://www.amazon.com/Standard-Portfolio-Management-Project-Institute-ebook/dp/B077SP9NRQ
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APPENDIX A

Getting into a Rhythm

I usually recommend that you look to improve your business at all times but most specifically before each new year. And then as you add new stuff in January, it's never a bad idea to look to clean out some of the new clutter and focus on efficiency moving into the summer. So, what have I always liked to do during my spring clean-up at small businesses (including my own business)?

Close Accounts You No Longer Need

Accounts you don't use cost money. Typically, a monthly cost adds up over time. Services you don't use also cause stress. It may be a very small amount of stress, but every time you see that charge, you think, "I should be doing more with that." Clear your mind. Gain focus on the things you choose to do, and let the services you don't use sail away into the sunset. You can always come back to them. Or, if you're not using a service, you can always try to find a better service later.

If you're using services that are In-App Subscriptions, you can cancel them by opening the Settings app and then scrolling down to the iTunes Store and App Store option, tapping on your Apple ID, then View Apple ID, and provide your password. From here, tap each Subscription and disable the subscription or disable the Auto-Renew option for each.

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Remove Duplicate Services

Invariably, as we grow over the course of a year, we end up with different opinions, experiences, and ultimately ways of doing tasks. This often results in duplicative workflows that center around specific services. Look for these unnecessary services and apps in your company. Do you have a Box and a Dropbox account? Do you have Google Apps and Microsoft Office? Does your staff use both? Why? Sometimes you need to. Usually you don't. Simplify workflows by having as few apps for a given task as is possible. This not only saves a little money, but it cuts down on confusion and the amount of time it takes to onboard new staff!

Delete Apps You Don't Use

Every time you and your users look at your devices, and you see an app you don't use, you're wasting a split second of time. Every potential point of confusion is a place where you can streamline a workflow. Too many apps obfuscate what a user actually needs to do, introducing the chance for a business process failure. Too many apps can also take up needed space on mobile devices. Going through apps on devices with users (in a non-micro-managey kinda' way) can also connect you with user workflows and help you to understand where undesired change in business processes may have occurred. Some of those changes you may choose to ratify; others you may dissuade.

When you're reviewing your workflows, you also have a chance to centralize the ownership of apps, getting all of your apps into a single Volume Purchasing Program (VPP) account with Apple, so you can centrally manage the apps on devices, meaning a simpler check-in in future years.

Organize Your Files

Google Docs, Dropbox, Box, and other services will store files in your home directory on OS X or within each app on an iPad or iPhone. Centralizing your files under a single app is one step to organizing them. Then, you can move on to creating a file hierarchy and organizing your files in a way that makes the most sense. Creating one folder for each customer, one for accounting, one for marketing, one for sales, and then creating hierarchies within each of the departments or staff that manages a business function is always a good start. Consider finding the neat freak in the office to help with this. Once you do so, have a quick session for your staff on where everything is; otherwise they won't know where to look for their stuff!

Remove Old Fonts

Fonts can be a liability in a number of ways. Fonts must be licensed. If used in a way that isn't licensed, then you're violating an agreement and subject to fines or having to pay damages. Fonts can also cause devices to run slowly, or applications to crash. macOS has an app called Font Book that can be used to remove unnecessary fonts. The ones built into macOS and iOS should be left alone. Third-party fonts should be used sparingly.

Clean Up Your Mail

Getting spam e-mails can be a time-consuming burden. You get these e-mails every day, and you spend minutes here and there dealing with them. Check out anti-spam apps like Unroll.me, to help not only remove yourself from lists but also put all of your suspected spam into a daily digest so you can look at them all at once: `https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/unroll.me/id1028103039?mt=8`.

Connect Your Apps

One of the crazy things about a modern, app-based workflow is that you have data living in silos. There are a number of tools that help you connect these. One that is free is If This Then That (`https://ifttt.com`). Here, you can configure incredibly complex workflows, such as sending data from your scheduling tools to your Dropbox account, sending information from an e-mail to a spreadsheet, posting a blog post to Salesforce, or even controlling home automation equipment in your office through something like a Twitter account. The possibilities are endless.

Remove Old Device Drivers and Devices

You know that hard drive that hasn't actually spun up since 2008, that you still plug into your computer every day with hope that it will someday work again? You know that printer that ran out of toner 2 years ago, that you still have sitting on your wireless network? You know that Wacom tablet whose pen ended up in the laundry never to be heard from again? Get rid of the junk. And when you get rid of the hardware, remove the drivers from your computer if there were any. This often involves searching for an uninstaller on the Internet, deleting a printer from System Preferences for OS X, or forgetting a Bluetooth device on your iPad. Doing so might take a little Google mastery, but you might be pleasantly surprised when your computer runs quicker and is less error-prone!

Rotate Passwords

It's always a good idea to change the passwords of all of your devices, at a minimum once a month. This can be a burden in smaller companies. With tools like Bushel.com, you have the option to get your IPads and OS X devices automatically configured and centrally manage the password of your secure wireless networks. You can send new settings to each of your

Apple devices, making it less of a pain to configure. WEP, WPA, and WPA 2 security standards enable Wi-Fi settings securely. This doesn't help with Roku, Apple TV, those wireless printers, and other devices, but it does at least get the devices you have the highest number of (iPads and iPhones more than likely) covered so you have plenty of time to set up the password on your network appliances.

Review Your Device Security

Security is a different thing for everyone. For some, it just means having a password on a computer. For others, it means enabling FileVault for everyone. Clean up users in OS X (use Users & Groups from System Preferences). Disable any shared services you don't absolutely need (use Sharing from System Preferences), and follow some basic security precautions as I explore in my book here `http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/148421711X`. Or check out one of the many security guides available at Apple.com.

Backup is always important. This spring, check that your files are backed up, and test a restore of a few key files. And if you don't have a backup tool yet, check out something like Crashplan, from Code42 at `http://www.code42.com/`.

Update Your Device Inventory

Are you unable to keep a track of the devices that are being used in your company? Now, you can keep track of all the iPads, Mac computers, and all other devices that are being used in your company. With Bushel.com, you can get export information like device number, model number, number of devices, purchase date, and various other details. This gives you a spreadsheet to start with for depreciating assets at tax time. You still need to grab information for devices like printers, but you will have covered a few devices quickly using a tool like Bushel.

Review the Fees for Every Contract

If you just call your bandwidth provider, your credit card processor, your mail provider, and other monthly cost centers, you might just be surprised when they knock off 10 percent to 20 percent of your contract to renew. Definitely check the completion, but chances are you won't get around to switching to another provider anyway, so it can't hurt to give the incumbent provider of each service you use a shot to keep your business!

Make More Money

Stay focused on what it is your organization does. Use this newfound time from the above steps to Tweet more, spend time getting the word out about your organization a little more, and pushing the envelope of the products you're able to provide. This will ultimately be the best use of time, once your mind is free of the clutter that's built up over the past year!

APPENDIX B

Common Apple Terms

There are a number of terms common in the Apple space. While mastery of each subject isn't necessary for a consultant, or anyone in various areas of a consultancy, knowledge of the terms is a great help when communicating with customers and partners. These include the following terms:

- **Monolithic image**: An operating system image that comes complete with all of the software that is required for a computer to function
- **Package-based image**: An operating system image that is compiled based on packages and/or has a number of post-imaging tasks to install packages
- **Thin image**: An image that has no changes from what comes from the factory from Apple or that only contains a binary to enroll into a device management solution, such as the Casper Suite
- **Package**: Installs software on a Mac, similarly to a software installer/package on Windows. There are multiple types of packages, including flat packages and metapackages.
- **FileVault**: Built-in Full Disk Encryption (FDE) tool for Mac. This is similar to BitLocker for Windows.

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- **Pre-Flight and post-flight scripts**: Scripts you plug into a package that run before and after the payload of a package is delivered. A package that is just scripts with no payload is known as a payload-free package.
- **Regression Testing**: Scripted and automated tests to validate that your packaged software works as intended in different installation regressions
- **Device Enrollment Program (DEP)**: A program from Apple to automatically enroll devices into a Mobile Device Management (MDM) solution. Once enrolled, the Casper Suite can deploy our binaries to a device and therefore get native and in-depth management.
- **Volume Purchasing Program (VPP)**: Allows an organization to buy apps for Apple IDs or devices and automate the installation of those apps for OS X and iOS via a MDM solution
- **Enrollment**: Refers to the process of adding an iOS or OS X device to a MDM solution. This is an agent-less process as it leverages an API from Apple for managing Apple devices.
- **Supervision**: iOS device term, refers to further in-depth management of a device that's owned by an organization once the organization has proven that it owns a device by either plugging the device into Apple Configurator or deploying a device via DEP. This term comes up in OS X; however, an OS X device can invoke a root account (or an admin account), and so it's important to note that the root account can disassociate from management and therefore cannot be supervised.

- **Managed Preferences**: Also known as MCX. Managed Preferences are the legacy way of implementing policies on users, groups, and devices. The Managed Preferences framework is still used in OS X; however, Apple best practices are that Managed Preferences are now interfaced with through profiles rather than through directory services.
- **Native apps**: Apps that are written for OS X, rather than accessed through a thin client such as Citrix or a web browser
- **The App Store**: Apple provides the App Store for iOS and the Mac App Store for OS X. This can be challenging to integrate en masse without MDM, but easier with MDM, as you don't have complex packaging tasks.
- **iCloud**: Apple's consumer cloud service, used to provide access to mail, contacts, calendars, and file storage. iCloud is also used for consumer tracking of devices and Apple's Activation Lock.
- **Apple ID**: A unique identifier based on an e-mail address that a user uses to acquire content (apps, music, videos, iBooks). Each Apple ID is also used to access other services, such as Apple forums.
- **Short Name**: The username on a Mac, similarly to an account ID in Active Directory or on a local Windows computer (e.g., joe). There is also a long name, which can have spaces in the name (e.g., John Doe). Computers and groups can also have two names of the same sort.

- **Binding**: The process of joining a Mac to an Active Directory domain. Once the Mac has been joined to the domain, it is referred to as "bound."
- **AFP:** Apple File Protocol. The native file sharing protocol for Mac. This is being slowly replaced with SMB, now that there's full SMB/DFS support for the Mac.
- **Defaults domains**: Windows has a registry. OS X uses property lists stored in /Library/Preferences and ~/Library/Preferences to load settings into this structure, similarly to a registry. Managed preferences edit these domains and can restrict them from being changed when needed.
- **Property list**: A file in an XML format that contains settings configured in default domains. Typically files begin with the vendor name who created them (e.g., com.apple.dock.plist).
- **AppleScript**: A scripting language used to automate tasks on a Mac
- **Bless**: A command in macOS, used to define the logical volume a computer will boot from
- **Launch Daemon**: The services control function for macOS. In Windows, you have services, in OS X and other *nix based Operating Systems you have daemons. Launched is the daemon that calls other daemons and controls these services in OS X.
- **Home directories**: House each user's data. Typically stored in /Users but can be redirected to a different local folder or to a network volume.

- **Portable home directories**: Synchronizing user data with a directory on a server. The OS X equivalent of a Windows Roaming Profiles. OS X also supports network home directories, synonymous with Windows folder redirection.
- **Keychain**: Encrypted disk images that contain stored passwords, notes, and certificates, similarly to Credentials Manager in Windows
- **Login hook**: A way to run a script at startup. This is similar to a login script for Windows.
- **System Integrity Protection (SIP)**: New in El Capitan (10.11), restricts a user from being able to edit an operating system on a Mac
- **NetBoot**: Similar to PXE booting on Windows, forces a computer to boot to a network disk so that the volume is not in use and can therefore be imaged to. Like PXE booting, Netboot does not traverse subnets without an IP helper, an architectural option that will need to be addressed with every company as part of a reimaging solution.
- **Application signing**: Adding a signature backed by a certificate to all apps that are opened and packages that are installed
- **Gatekeeper**: Mac security feature that forces application signing for any apps opened
- **Profiles**: An XML file that pushes settings and commands to a Mac. Includes things like restricting what passwords can be used, can install printers and fonts, can deploy Wi-Fi networks (including 802.1x), and can join a Mac to an Active Directory domain.

- **MDM**: The agentless Mac and iOS management protocol that will likely replace agent-based or daemon-based management frameworks in the future
- **Push notifications**: Technology that allows for pushing changes to Macs immediately. Includes things like e-mail but also extends to user preference management. For example, immediately push a user's Dock to the right side of the screen.
- **User templates**: A folder structure that allows you to populate new user accounts with items on the Desktop, in the Documents, printers, preferences, etc.
- **Symbolic link**: Like a shortcut on Windows, but on a Mac
- bash, python, perl, and ruby are common scripting languages, similar to Powershell on Windows
- **Build train**: Apple's OS revisions follow a numbering schema
- **kext**: the equivalent of a driver in Windows; is used to add functionality for hardware that does not come with the base operating system. It is important to consider that because Apple makes the hardware and the operating system; all drivers that are necessary for all supported models of an operating system are included in the latest build, or version, of that operating system. Therefore, you will not need more than one image for a given major operating system release.
- **Dock**: The bar of icons at the bottom of the screen on a Mac that allows quick access to common applications and documents

APPENDIX C

Sample Managed Services Agreement

Don't use this sample of a Managed Services Agreement. Seriously though, have a legal expert draw up and/or build your services agreement, terms of service, etc. Different states have different requirements, as do different locales within states. This appendix is meant to help guide a conversation and is not a replacement for hiring a legal expert.

This contract was originally published at https://community.spiceworks.com/how_to/2401-it-consulting-contract.

Standard Services Agreement

STANDARD SERVICES AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT is made on **{DATE}**

BETWEEN

1. **[the Buyer]** of (the "Buyer"); and
2. **[the Service Provider] {YOUR NAME}**, of "{YOUR BUSINESS}", a corporation organized and existing under the laws of the state of {YOUR STATE}, with its head office located at: {PHYSICAL ADDRESS}.

collectively referred to as the "Parties". **RECITALS**

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
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The Buyer wishes to be provided with the Services (defined below) by the Service Provider and the Service Provider agrees to provide the Services to the Buyer on the terms and conditions of this Agreement.

1. **Key Terms**

1.1 **Services**

The Service Provider shall provide the following services (“Services”) to the Buyer in accordance with the terms and conditions of this Agreement:

1.2 **Delivery of the Services**

a. **Start date:** The Service Provider shall commence the provision of the Services on **Start date to-be-determined**.

b. **Completion date:** The Service Provider shall complete/cease to provide (*delete as appropriate*) the Services by/on **Completion date to-be-determined**.

c. **Key Dates:** The Service Provider agrees to provide the following parts of the Services at the specific dates set out below: **Key dates to-be-determined**.

1.3 **Site**

The Service Provider shall provide the Services at the following site(s): SITE NAME **(address to-be-determined)**

1.4 **Price**

a. As consideration for the provision of the Services by the Service Provider, the price for the provision of the Services is **{RATE} of work performed** ("Price").

b. The Buyer shall pay for the Service Provider's out-of-pocket expenses **comprising of at least travel expenses, room-and-board, ground transportation, and any other expenses incurred on the Buyer's behalf. Choice is given to the Buyer whether travel expenses will be provided upfront to the Service Provider or the Service Provider will request the booking of specific flights and accommodations which will be paid by the Buyer directly**.

1.5 **Payment**

a. The Buyer agrees to pay the Price to the Service Provider on the following dates **30 days after issuance of an invoice**.

b. **Invoices for time onsite will be sent in advance and will be paid by the Buyer before travel**.

c. **Invoices for work performed will be sent on the 15th of the following month. Net30 terms extended for all clients in good standing. If two unpaid invoices exist, no work will be performed until payment has been received on all invoices**.

d. The Service Provider shall invoice the Buyer through {INVOICING SERVICE} for the Services that it has provided to the Buyer weekly.

e. The Buyer shall pay such invoices **within 30 days of their receipt from the Service Provider except where stipulated in clauses 1.5(b) and 1.5(c)**.

f. The method of payment of the Price by the Buyer to the Service Provider shall be by:

   i. Check sent to the following address**:** **{PHYSICAL ADDRESS}**

   ii. credit card payment through **{INVOICING SERVICE}**

g. Any charges payable under this Agreement are exclusive of any applicable taxes, tariff surcharges, or other like amounts assessed by any governmental entity arising as a result of the provision of the Services by the Service Provider to the Buyer under this Agreement and such shall be payable by the Buyer to the Service Provider in addition to all other charges payable hereunder.

2. **General terms**

2.1 **Intellectual Property Rights**

The Service Provider agrees to grant to the Buyer a non-exclusive, irrevocable, royalty-free license to use, copy and modify any elements of the Material not specifically created for the Buyer as part of the Services. In respect of the Material specifically created for the Buyer as part of the Services, the Service Provider assigns the full title guarantee to the Buyer and any all of the copyright, other intellectual property rights and any other data or material used or subsisting in the Material whether finished or unfinished. If any third party intellectual property rights are used in the Material the Service Provider shall ensure that it has secured all necessary consents and approvals to use such third-party intellectual property rights for the Service Provider and the Buyer. For the purposes of this Clause 2.1, "Material" shall mean the materials, in whatever form, used by the Service Provider to provide the Services and the products, systems, programs or processes, in whatever form, produced by the Service Provider pursuant to this Agreement.

2.2 **Warranty**

a. The Service Provider represents and warrants that:

   i. it will perform the Services with reasonable care and skill; and

   ii. the Services and the Materials provided by the Service Provider to the Buyer under this Agreement will not infringe or violate any intellectual property rights or other right of any third party.

2.3 **Limitation of liability**

a. Subject to the Buyer's obligation to pay the Price to the Service Provider, either party's liability in contract, tort or otherwise (including negligence) arising directly out of or in connection with this Agreement or the performance or observance of its obligations under this Agreement and every applicable part of it shall be limited in aggregate to the Price.

b. To the extent it is lawful to exclude the following heads of loss and subject to the Buyer's obligation to pay the Price, in no event shall either party be liable for any loss of profits, goodwill, loss of business, loss of data or any other indirect or consequential loss or damage whatsoever.

c. Nothing in this Clause 2.3 will serve to limit or exclude either Party's liability for death or personal injury arising from its own negligence.

2.4 **Term and Termination**

a. This Agreement shall be effective on the date hereof and shall continue, unless terminated sooner in accordance with Clause 2.4(b), until the Completion Date.

b. Either Party may terminate this Agreement upon notice in writing if:

i. the other is in breach of any material obligation contained in this Agreement, which is not remedied (if the same is capable of being remedied) within 30 days of written notice from the other Party so to do; or

ii. a voluntary arrangement is approved, a bankruptcy or an administration order is made or a receiver or administrative receiver is appointed over any of the other Party's assets or an undertaking or a resolution or petition to wind up the other Party is passed or presented (other than for the purposes of amalgamation or reconstruction) or any analogous procedure in the country of incorporation of either party or if any circumstances arise which entitle the Court or a creditor to appoint a receiver, administrative receiver or administrator or to present a winding-up petition or make a winding-up order in respect of the other Party.

c. Any termination of this Agreement (howsoever occasioned) shall not affect any accrued rights or liabilities of either Party nor shall it affect the coming into force or the continuance in force of any provision hereof which is expressly or by implication intended to come into or continue in force on or after such termination.

2.5 **Relationship of the Parties**

The Parties acknowledge and agree that the Services performed by the Service Provider, its employees, agents or sub-contractors shall be as an independent contractor and that nothing in this Agreement shall be deemed to constitute a partnership, joint venture, agency relationship or otherwise between the parties.

2.6 **Confidentiality**

Neither Party will use, copy, adapt, alter or part with possession of any information of the other which is disclosed or otherwise comes into its possession under or in relation to this Agreement and which is of a confidential nature. This obligation will not apply to information which the recipient can prove was in its possession at the date it was received or obtained or which the recipient obtains from some other person with good legal title to it or which is in or comes into the public domain otherwise than through the default or negligence of the recipient or which is independently developed by or for the recipient.

2.7 **Notices**

Any notice which may be given by a Party under this Agreement shall be deemed to have been duly delivered if delivered by hand, first class post, facsimile transmission or electronic mail to the address of the other Party as specified in this Agreement or any other address notified in writing to the other Party. Subject to any applicable local law provisions to the contrary, any such communication shall be deemed to have been made to the other Party, if delivered by:

a. First-class post, 3 days from the date of posting;

b. hand or by facsimile transmission, on the date of such delivery or transmission; and

c. electronic mail, when the Party sending such communication receives confirmation of such delivery by electronic mail.

2.8 **Miscellaneous**

a. The failure of either party to enforce its rights under this Agreement at any time for any period shall not be construed as a waiver of such rights.

b. If any part, term, or provision of this Agreement is held to be illegal or unenforceable neither the validity or enforceability of the remainder of this Agreement shall be affected.

c. Neither Party shall assign or transfer all or any part of its rights under this Agreement without the consent of the other Party.

d. This Agreement may not be amended for any other reason without the prior written agreement of both Parties.

e. This Agreement constitutes the entire understanding between the Parties relating to the subject matter hereof unless any representation or warranty made about this Agreement was made fraudulently and, save as may be expressly referred to or referenced herein, supersedes all prior representations, writings, negotiations or understandings with respect hereto.

f. Neither Party shall be liable for failure to perform or delay in performing any obligation under this Agreement if the failure or delay is caused by any circumstances beyond its reasonable control, including but not limited to acts of god, war, civil commotion ,or industrial dispute. If such delay or failure continues for at least 7 days, the Party not affected by such delay or failure shall be entitled to terminate this Agreement by notice in writing to the other.

g. This Clause 2.8(g) and Clauses 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8 of this Agreement shall survive any termination or expiration.

h. This Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the jurisdiction in which the Buyer is located (or if the Buyer is based in more than one country, the country in which its headquarters are located) (the "Territory") and the parties agree to submit disputes arising out of or in connection with this Agreement to the non-exclusive of the courts in the Territory.

3. **Amendments to existing clauses**

4. **Additional clauses**

   a. The Buyer will be required to document approval by mail or electronic mail separately on each of the following components:

      i. ITEMS

AS WITNESS the hands of the Parties hereto or their duly authorized representatives the day and year first above written.

SIGNED by)
for and on behalf of)
[the Buyer])

SIGNED by)
for and on behalf of)
[the Service Provider])

APPENDIX D

Using Trendlines In Microsoft Excel

If you take anything away from this book, it's to always do what's right and the company will grow on its own. But once you've learned that, it's time to start number-nerding. And one of the most valuable skills you can have is projecting cash flow, income, and other items on a balance sheet. The spreadsheet in Figure D-1 lays out how many net-new employees a consulting firm hires each year. And then we try to use that information to project out how many employees we'll be hiring in future years.

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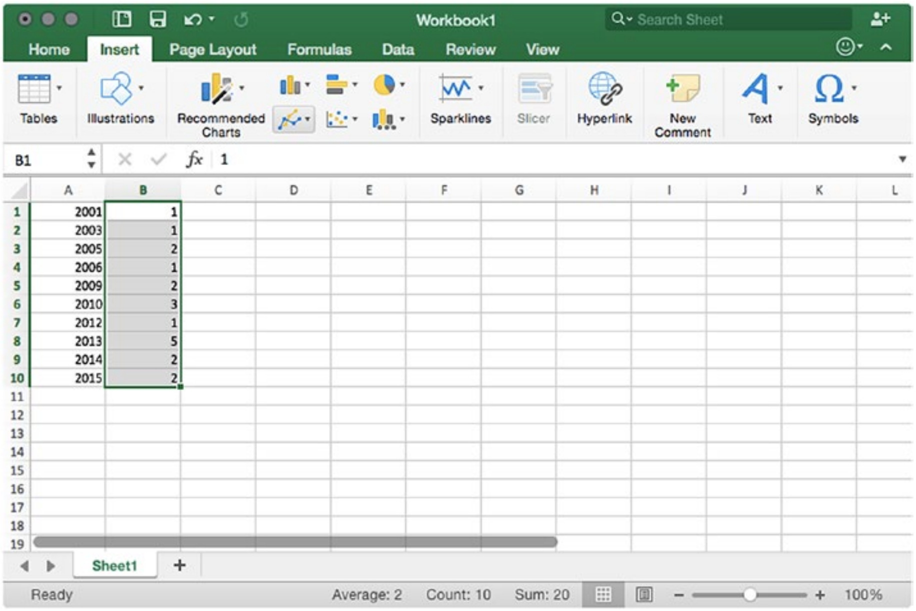

Figure D-1. *Serialize your date*

To then see a trend line, we'll add a chart element, select Add Chart Element and then select More Trendline Options… (Figure D-2).

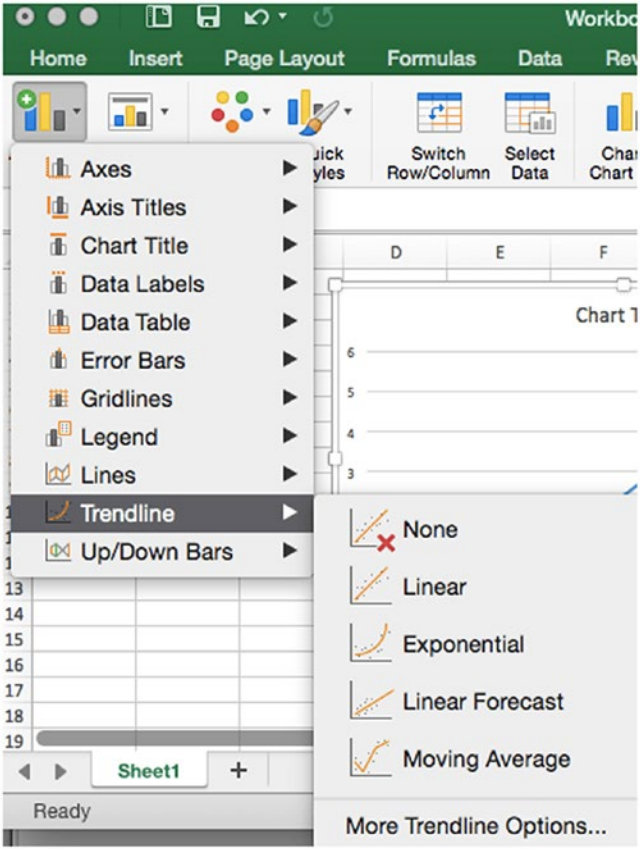

Figure D-2. Build a trendline

At the Format Trendline pane, click Polynomial and check the box for "Display equation on chart" (Figure D-3).

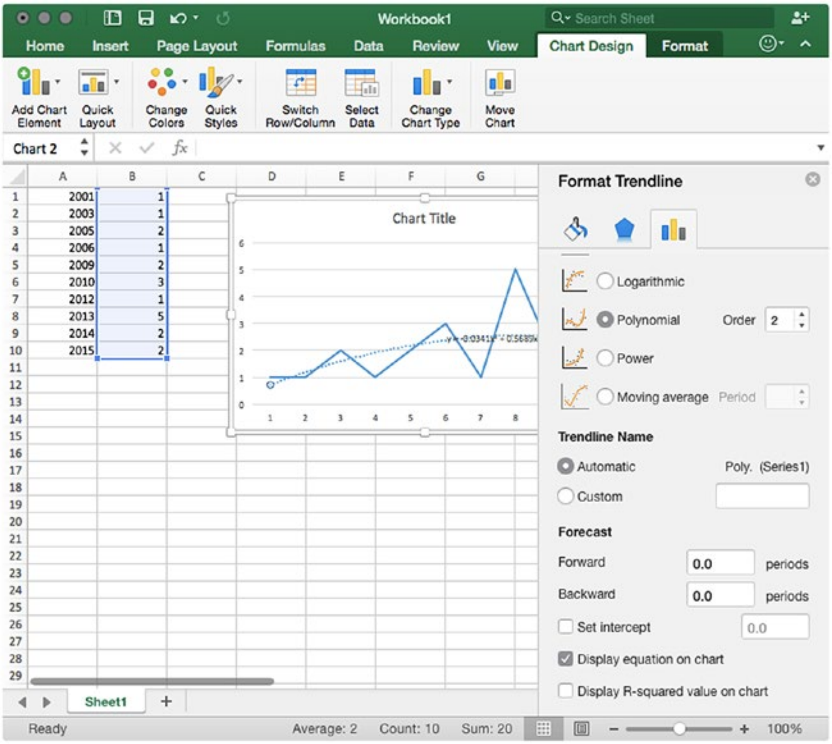

***Figure D-3.** Extract the formula from the trend line*

Then copy the equation into your clipboard and paste it into the formula bar (Figure D-4). Next, we'll remove the y and convert the symbols into formula elements.

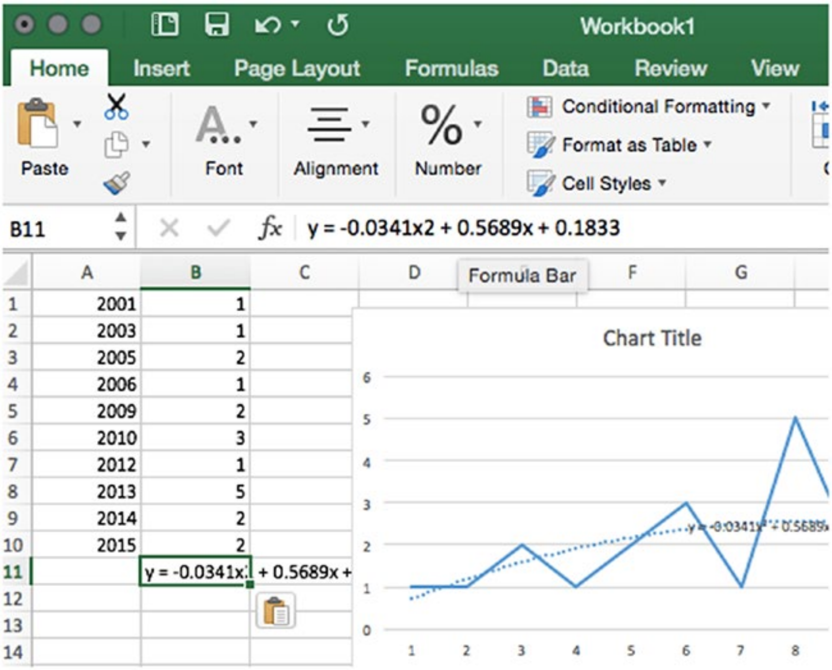

Figure D-4. *Use the formula in your data set*

This results in wrong numbers because we've got years instead of ascending numbers and we've got missing years when we didn't hire any new employees. So, we'll convert the years into a number starting with 1 and going up (where 1 is 2001, etc.), as shown in Figure D-5.

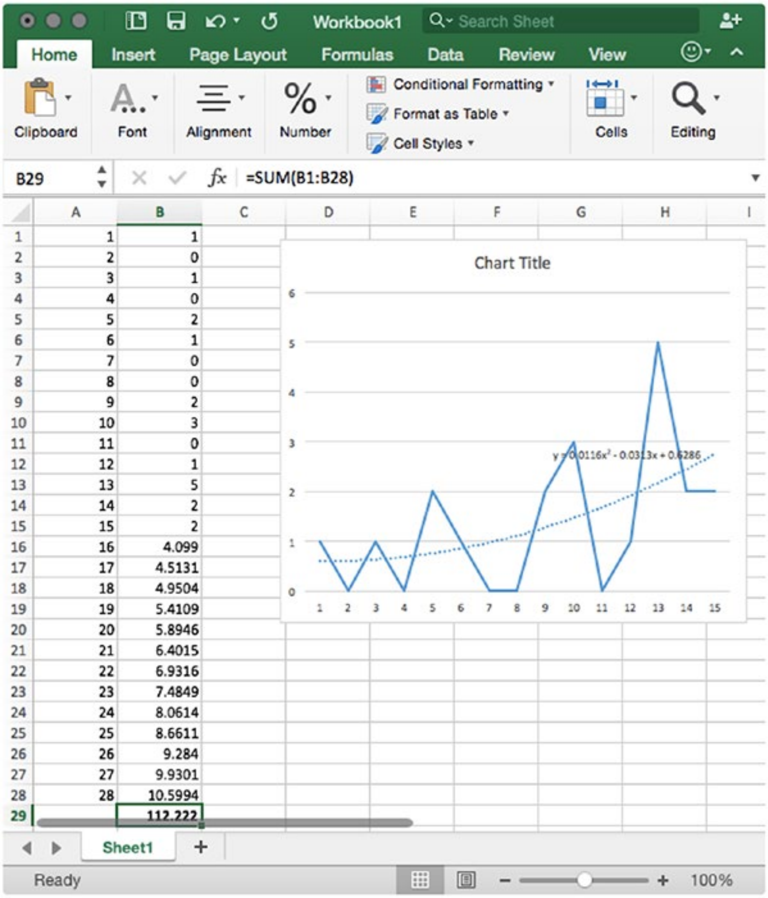

Figure D-5. *Use the formula with new serials (a.k.a. years)*

Keep adding rows and copying the formula into each new row, and you'll find how many employees you expect the company to have in 2035.

Finally, keep in mind that you need data to build good trend lines. The more data points you have, the more accurate the projects. Also keep in mind that anomalies happen, but changing behaviors can alter the course of trend lines!

APPENDIX E

Common Job Titles

Having trouble coming up with a job title for a position you plan on opening? Here are some of the ones I've hired, interacted with, or even applied for over the years:

- Application Developer
- Application Support Analyst
- Applications Engineer
- Associate Developer
- Automation Engineer
- Chief Information Officer (CIO)
- Chief Technology Officer (CTO)
- Cloud Architect
- Cloud Consultant
- Cloud Product and Project Manager
- Cloud Services Developer
- Cloud Software and Network Engineer
- Cloud System Administrator
- Cloud System Engineer

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- Computer and Information Research Scientist
- Computer and Information Systems Manager
- Computer Network Architect
- Computer Programmer
- Computer Systems Analyst
- Computer Systems Manager
- Customer Support Administrator
- Customer Support Specialist
- Data Center Support Specialist
- Data Quality Manager
- Database Analyst
- Database Programmer
- Desktop Support Manager
- Desktop Support Specialist
- Developer
- Devops Engineer
- Director of Technology
- Front-End Developer
- Graphic Designer
- Help Desk Specialist
- Help Desk Technician
- IT Analyst
- IT Coordinator

- IT Director
- IT Manager
- IT Support Manager
- IT Support Specialist
- IT Systems Administrator
- Java Developer
- Junior Software Engineer
- Management Information Systems Director
- .NET Developer
- Network Administrator
- Network Architect
- Network and Computer Systems Administrator
- Network Engineer
- Network Systems Administrator
- Professional Services Engineer
- Programmer
- Programmer Analyst
- QA Engineer
- Security Specialist
- Senior Applications Engineer
- Senior Database Administrator
- Senior Network Architect
- Senior Network Engineer

- Senior Network System Administrator
- Senior Programmer
- Senior Programmer Analyst
- Senior Security Specialist
- Senior Software Engineer
- Senior Support Specialist
- Senior System Administrator
- Senior System Analyst
- Senior System Architect
- Senior System Designer
- Senior Systems Analyst
- Senior Systems Software Engineer
- Senior Web Administrator
- Senior Web Developer
- Software Architect
- Software Developer
- Software Engineer
- Software Quality Assurance Analyst
- Support Specialist
- System Architect
- Systems Administrator
- Systems Analyst
- Systems Designer

- Systems Engineer
- Systems Software Engineer
- Technical Operations Officer
- Technical Specialist
- Technical Support Engineer
- Technical Support Specialist
- User Experience Programmer
- Web Administrator
- Web Developer
- Webmaster

APPENDIX F

Device Scorecard

Apple devices can act as a first-class citizen on any network. This scorecard provides a snapshot into the technology stack required by most organizations as well as the attributes of each in a simple dashboard that executives can understand. Many of the technologies indicated might not be required by an organization at the time the scorecard is created, but are likely to be required at some point in the future if not already.

Access to the Organization's Network

- Network Access Controls
- 802.1x access
- Captive portal management
- Proxy access and PAC file distribution
- Centralized certificate, CA, and SCEP management
- Printer distribution and management
- Centralized font management
- VPN management and access

C. Edge, *Build, Run, and Sell Your Apple Consulting Practice*,
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Access to Organizational Resources

- License tracking and reporting
- All applications are available to Apple devices
- Centralized collaboration suite access based on device state
- All file servers and content management
- Virtualization for any applications not available for the Mac, per job function

Cradle-to-Grave Device Management

- A seamless unboxing and deployment experience (including imaging for legacy devices)
- Devices can be centrally managed
- Automated application deployment
- Standardized application packaging
- Automated QA and User Acceptability Testing for patches and application updates
- Dashboard that shows standard KPIs for the fleet

Directory Services

- Leveraging directory services for single sign-on (whether there's a trusted bind in the transaction or not)
- Integrated Identity Management with SSO and SAML providers

Endpoint Protection

- Antivirus
- Endpoint backup
- Centralized Encryption Management
- Centrally managed and audit-able policies following NIST guidelines (e.g., password aging and complexity)
- Log analysis
- Application access controls (whitelisting)
- Threat management and mitigation
- Forensic snapshotting and anti-theft
- Legal hold

World Class Support

- Zero touch assets that cover the most common tasks necessary to get your job done
- Support staff trained on managing devices
- Centralized audit-able remote access
- Service desk software that is integrated with management platform
- User-controlled software deployment with automated approvals from management where needed
- Device state management
- Help menu providing easy access to tickets and standard support tools
- Automated proactive maintenance

APPENDIX G

Additional Reading

At the end of each chapter, there are a number of books on that topic. But there are other books that might not fit in perfectly with any given topic—books that have helped shape my world view and therefore impacted how I perceive various business topics or books that contribute to your overall business acumen. In some cases, these have been about how not to do business. In some cases, textbooks that can teach more than a book with one or two pages on that topic could ever teach. Here are some that I hope you find interesting and insightful.

- The Art of Virtue, Benjamin Franklin, https://www.amazon.com/Benjamin-Franklins-Art-Virtue-Successful/dp/0938399101
- Steve Jobs, Walter Isaacson, https://www.amazon.com/Steve-Jobs-Walter-Isaacson/dp/1451648537
- The IBM Way, Buck Rodgers, https://www.amazon.com/IBM-Way-Successful-Marketing-Organization/dp/0060155221
- Talking Straight, Lee Iacocca, https://www.amazon.com/Talking-Straight-Lee-Iacocca/dp/0553052705
- Fundamentals of Corporate Finance, Ross Westerfield, Jordan, https://www.amazon.com/Fundamentals-Corporate-Modigliani-Professor-Financial/dp/0077861701

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- Managerial Economics and Organizational Architecture, James Brickley, Jerold Zimmerman, Clifford W. Smith, Jr, https://www.amazon.com/Managerial-Economics-Organizational-Architecture-Brickley/dp/0073375829
- The Road Ahead, Bill Gates, https://www.amazon.com/Road-Ahead-Bill-Gates/dp/0453009212
- Breaking Windows: How Bill Gates Fumbled the Future of Microsoft, David Bank, https://www.amazon.com/Breaking-Windows-Fumbled-Future-Microsoft/dp/0743203151
- Business @ the Speed of Thought: Succeeding in the Digital Economy, Bill Gates, https://www.amazon.com/Business-Speed-Thought-Succeeding-Digital/dp/0446525685
- Bill Gates: The Life, Lessons, And Rules for Success, https://www.amazon.com/Bill-Gates-Lessons-Rules-Success/dp/1522018557/
- Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future, Ashlee Vance, https://www.amazon.com/Elon-Musk-SpaceX-Fantastic-Future/dp/0062301233
- Internet of Things: Digitize or Die: Transform your organization. Embrace the digital evolution. Rise above the competition, Nicolas Windpassinger, https://www.amazon.com/dp/B074PTXB2H
- Cyberselfish: A Critical Romp Through the Terribly Libertarian Culture of High-Tech, Paulina Borsook, https://www.amazon.com/Cyberselfish-Critical-Through-World-High-tech/dp/0316847712

- Strategic Management Theory, Charles W. L. Hill, Melissa A. Schilling, Gareth R. Jones, https://www.amazon.com/Strategic-Management-Theory-Integrated-Approach/dp/1305502337
- Muddy Boots Leadership, John Chapman, https://www.amazon.com/Muddy-Boots-Leadership-Personal-Unexpected-ebook/dp/B001GIPF0A
- What is Six Sigma Process Management? Rowland Hayler and Michael Nichols, https://www.amazon.com/What-Six-Sigma-Process-Management/dp/0071453415
- ITILv3 Foundations, Jason Dion, https://www.amazon.com/ITIL-v3-Foundations-Time-Compressed-Foundation-ebook/dp/B074D6J1Q5/
- ITIL: ITIL Tutorial for Beginners, Dennis Hutten, https://www.amazon.com/ITIL-Tutorial-Beginners-Dennis-Hutten-ebook/dp/B079QKR42D
- ITSM QuickStart Guide, Clydebank Technology, https://www.amazon.com/ITSM-QuickStart-Simplified-Beginners-Management/dp/1945051086
- Ruling the Waves, Debora L. Spar, https://www.amazon.com/Ruling-Waves-Internet-Business-Technological/dp/015602702X
- The Wealth of Nations, Adam Smith, https://www.amazon.com/Wealth-Nations-Adam-Smith/dp/1505577128
- The Road to Character, David Brooks, https://www.amazon.com/Road-Character-David-Brooks/dp/0812983416

- They Made IT! Ph.D. Angelika Blendstrup, https://www.amazon.com/They-Made-Chinese-entrepreneurs-contributed-ebook/dp/B0026MS2QY
- John Chambers and the Cisco Way, John K. Waters, https://www.amazon.com/John-Chambers-Cisco-Way-Navigating/dp/0471008338

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