

NOT OUR REAL CONTRIBUTORS BUT
WE THOUGHT THEY LOOK KINDA CUTE



Our Contributors have banded together to give you
their best advice to grow your Small Business in 2018

SMALL★VILLE
FOR SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS WHO THINK BIG

SMALLVILLE FOUNDERS



Smallville has been running for just over 18 months now, and in that time our extraordinary Contributors have published close to 2000 articles, videos and MP3 recordings, making Smallville one of the richest Small Business advice resources around.

Each Contributor is a Small Business owner, so they get the trials and tribulations of doing business on a day to day basis. They aren't academics or people who just write about business without actually doing it. That's why their advice is so raw, real and relevant.

This year, we asked our Contributors three questions:

1. What is the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?
2. What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?
3. And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

These are BIG questions, and we have over 30 responses to each of them. Our advice is pretty simple, grab a big cup of coffee, find a quiet corner, read them all, take notes, think, ponder and really consider how you can use this advice to take your business to the next level.

One of the most important investments we all need to make in our business is one of time. Not just time to do what we have to do, but time to learn. We have to learn new skills daily, we have to grow by learning from the experiences of others, and we have to learn by reading, watching videos, listening to podcasts - everything.

The truly successful Small Business of the future will be the one that is always right at the edge of where new innovation is happening, and not just in technology, but in everything. We spend a lot of time researching, studying, learning and we have done so for many, many years. The reason why we do this is simple; we know that knowledge is our true competitive advantage.

Thank you for being a supporter of Smallville. We've got great plans for our site and for providing you, our valued readers, with the best Small Business advice around throughout 2018. Rest assured, there is much more to come. Please take the time to provide our Contributors with some feedback via their articles on Smallville. They really do put a lot of hard work and commitment into providing such powerful content on a regular basis for your enjoyment and education.

We are looking forward to what we know will be an extraordinary year for Smallville, and we hope 2018 is an extraordinary year for you too.

Bree James and Andrew Griffiths
Founders of Smallville





ALISON MCGRATH

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

I don't know everything. Well, I knew this, but what I learnt is the value of having a wise mentor. A person who has been in business for a considerable length of time; been there and done that.

It has been so valuable to work with my mentor who

understands the complexities and frustrations that I have faced from time to time and to have someone to bounce ideas off and discuss them with. There have been times throughout 2017 where I have doubted my business choices, having this person help with direction has been an absolute godsend. I have learnt the value of finding the right mentor, listening to their advice then make considered decisions while having the self-awareness of knowing that I always will have so much more to learn.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Do not undervalue yourself and what you offer?"

Throughout my 20 plus years in business, setting the right price has always been difficult for me. This is more so now that I don't have the large team I used to have. I thrive on the fact that my services are much more personal with added value but to then charge accordingly is what I struggle to do.

The truth is, as we know, we get what we pay for. So, if you provide a great product/service that is filled with value then value this. If you don't believe you are worth it then who will?

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Your mistakes are not mistakes but are opportunities to learn, so use every single opportunity that comes your way. Consciously strive to uncover and grow a strong and deep self-belief and learn to be focused and self-disciplined.

Establish and write your goals and truly believe them. Start with your ultimate end goal and plan backwards all the steps you need to take to get there. Paths will change, but with your self-belief, you will adapt, grow and succeed.

Don't play small and don't be afraid of thinking big. Go for it doing what makes you happy, where your energy and happiness is and relentlessly believing you can.

★ Find out more about Alison by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Alison's Smallville articles [here](#)



AMANDA FISHER

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

One of the biggest challenges as a Small Business owner is starting out having to do everything in the business. Over time as the business grows, we need to do things differently. My biggest lesson in 2017 has been to identify the work I love to do and the

work I really don't enjoy doing at all.

Once I had Identified the tasks I didn't enjoy doing, the next step was to automate or delegate the work. The key being to find someone else who loved doing that type of work and when I did, it freed up my time to do more of the work I love.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

Glen Carlson of Dent Global has a mantra

"Prolific beats perfect".

For an accountant who prides herself on solving challenging financial situations, making sure the books are balanced and correct, with perfection ingrained in my work for decades, that's a tall order.

So, whilst I continue with 'perfect' in the numbers, I'm learning to be 'prolific' with other areas of business, like my writing and marketing material (although I still pride myself on being as close to perfect as I can there too).

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

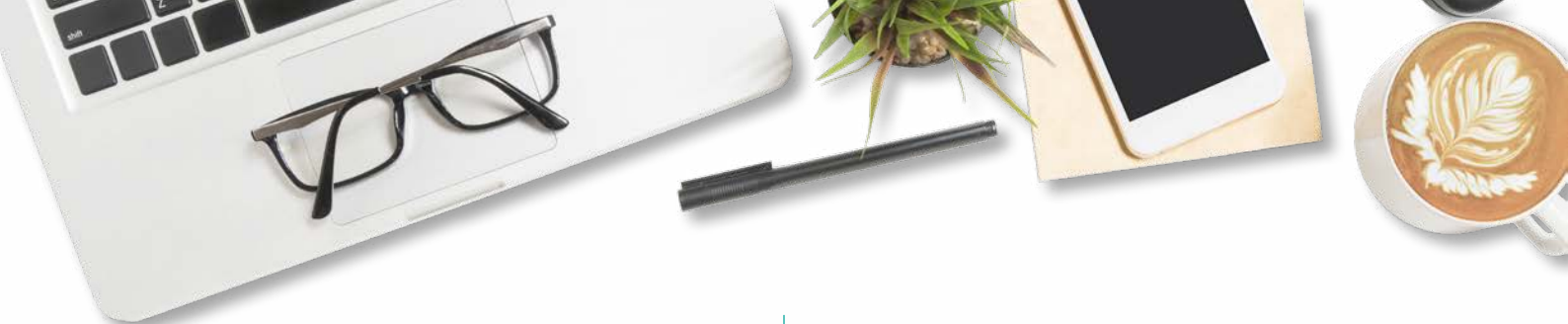
The best advice I can offer Smallville readers for 2018 is to continue to learn and grow, to watch out for new opportunities and grab them. The business world is changing fast, and your ability to quickly change direction will be paramount in 2018 and beyond.

And, of course, keep an eye on those pesky numbers. They may not be your forte, but the numbers tell a story about what's happening in your business. Understanding the stories they tell, will give you insights that you don't get elsewhere.

Above all, set goals for the year, keep an eye on how you're tracking towards your goals, do what you love, keep an eye on the areas you've delegated, and above all enjoy it.

★ Find out more about Amanda by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Amanda's Smallville articles [here](#)



ANETTA PIZAG

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

2017 turned out to be a year in search of my authenticity. Perhaps I reached a point where comparing myself to and competing with others, and trying hard to live up to others' expectations, stopped serving me. I'm making baby steps, but I've already found

that discovering and owning previously dormant parts of my personality, while somewhat unnerving, is also very exciting.

I'm also becoming a different person in business – more in tune with my purpose, more aware of my clients' needs, and perhaps also more relatable. I feel I'm building deeper work relationships, and also becoming better at saying no to 'opportunities' that just don't resonate with me.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

Among all the great business advice I've received, the piece that's most important to me right now is this:

"Be the same person on stage and off stage."
- Andrew Griffiths.

Of course, this advice reaches far beyond the context of speaking on stage, and also calls for some reflection. Interestingly, this year I kept encountering messages along similar lines wherever I looked.

"True belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world." - Brené Brown.

"It's funny but lots of those decisions we made, took ten years to see why they were good... The door is so open for us to be who we are." - Stone Gossard.

'Bent and crooked trees in a natural forest are far more beautiful than 'perfect' trees in a plantation';
paraphrased from Ajahn Brahm

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

In the age of digital relationships and artificial intelligence, it's becoming ever more important to recognise what makes us human. It's a long way before machines can look someone in the eye, listen with curiosity, and give them empathy and moral support.

Perhaps it's time that we start to feel OK about, and even embrace, the eccentric parts of our personalities, our true needs, our real emotions, regardless of how appealing they are. That would be a good first step towards being able to offer what this world needs most and towards finding our way through the cultural storm ahead of us.

- ★ Find out more about Anetta by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Anetta's Smallville articles [here](#)



ANNA PERDRIAU

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Mindset is key to success and speaking. It's not just something you do once, and then you're done. It's an ongoing need to address whenever you want to continue to step up and play a bigger game. It's that important to be tuned in to

your mindset.

Whether it is the ego getting in the way or not thinking you are good enough to even reach higher, these two can stop you in your tracks. We have to be aware of our thoughts and how they may be controlling how we feel and what we do. In short, take control of your mindset each day and keep it in check!

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

To be successful in business, you need to understand the person you are helping. You need to nail your niche. So, really understand who that exact person is. Know exactly who the person is, their finer details about their demographics, as well as their personal preferences. The best way to understand them is to continue to understand them and ask questions of them. Then be the 'Panadol' for your niche, the one who can take away their pain. We need to stay relevant and engage our audience!

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

To stay relevant and ultimately make more money and be in demand as a speaker in 2018, it will be key that you are able to add value to your audience. Don't simply turn up and speak. Do what you can to find out about your audience before you speak to them. It's all about giving value and helping to solve their problem. Rather than assuming you know their problem, aim to find out more. So, you can angle the material to be valuable for them. The more you can know before you speak, the more value you can add when you speak. Because you will understand where they are at; what problem are they facing right now.

There are many ways you can reach out to your audience before you speak with them. A fantastic way of doing this now is with social media, via polls and surveys. Also, you can connect with the organiser of the event and talk to them. The key to engaging your audience and understanding their needs is to ask, ask, ask. Then, of course, make your presentation engaging and fun!

- ★ Find out more about Anna by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Anna's Smallville articles [here](#)



What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Going into a business venture alone is a really hard way to develop an idea and get it to grow. If at all possible, start your business (or take it to the next level) with one or more co-founders or partners, who each bring a different and complimentary skillset to the

table. This is how boards of directors are constructed, and it is no different when creating a business on a smaller scale.

Sure, it can sometimes be challenging to work closely with others, but it is a skill that can be learned (if you're willing to consider other people's perspectives). Not only will you have more sets of hands getting things done but you'll have someone to share the journey with. If you don't believe me, ask any solopreneur about their experience, and you will almost certainly find out that it can be a miserable, long and lonely process at times.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Learn to understand the problems of your target market."

When you really know what their issues are, you can create a remarkable solution for them. This will also help you understand whether your business is truly offering your clients a service that meets their needs. There are lots of different templates available on the internet that can be used to map out the top 100 problems of your target market. Try downloading one and placing yourself in their shoes.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Set yourself a hard task with a deadline in 2018, something that can't be dropped easily. A big, hairy, audacious goal (BHAG), if you will. Think about creating an event in your industry and inviting all your suppliers and potential customers along. Make it a value-add for your existing and potential customers. Collaborate with partners and suppliers to provide an amazing experience, and you will find that you create some amazing connections in the process.

You will feel uncomfortable, and you will feel the pressure, but you will achieve growth.

- ★ Find out more about Bronwyn by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Bronwyn's Smallville articles [here](#)



What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Get your invoices out the door, fast and always! You would think that I wouldn't have to learn this lesson again, given that the book I released this year has an entire chapter on exactly this topic. Towards the end of 2017, I overcommitted myself; getting my book

finished for its launch in October at a conference that I was also organising (in my capacity as a Not for Profit Board member).

Coincidentally, our business experienced an influx of new projects that had to be resourced and executed; not a bad thing. Suddenly, 24 hours in a day wasn't enough, and I found myself just dealing with the next urgent issue that landed on my desk. The whole team was fully immersed in delivery and invoicing slipped behind on our normally very strict schedule. The result was inevitable; our cash flow started to look sick, and given that some of our big customers pay on go-day terms, it has taken a couple of months to get back on track.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

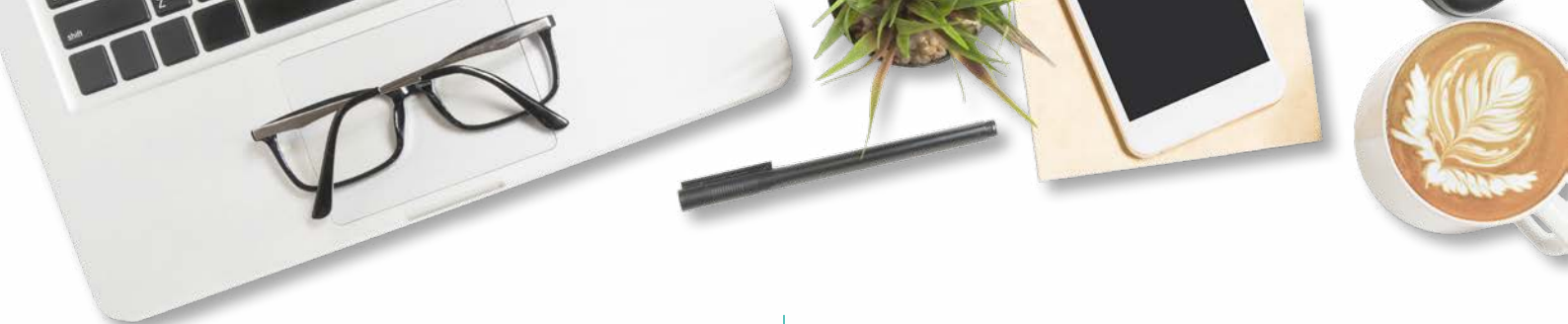
My Grandad would say to us, *"You're no better than anyone else, but you're no worse either."* I often remind myself of his advice when I'm trying to deal with someone from a large company who has a less-than-positive attitude to Small Business Contractors.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Keep learning and adapting. The external environment of our businesses is changing so rapidly that it sometimes seems impossible to keep up. But we have to. Last month I attended a 'Technology in Agriculture' conference. What's in front of us is extremely exciting in terms of food production and environmental sustainability, but also a little bit daunting. That pace of change is mirrored in almost every industry.

Jack Welch, the former Chairman of GE once said, *"If there is more change happening outside your business than inside your business, the end is near."*

- ★ Find out more about Bronwyn by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Bronwyn's Smallville articles [here](#)



CATE SCHRECK

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

It's worth it. All the late nights and early mornings, the relentless learning and income uncertainty, the nagging feelings of doubt and the constant juggling of life. All the hot leads that went cold and the cold shoulders that left you feeling burned,

it's all worth it.

If you are genuinely passionate about your business succeeding and your products/services solve the problems of your customers, then keep the faith because when it all comes together – it's great. Actually, it's bloody fantastic!

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Get your customers to test your new ideas."

I'm a self-confessed perfectionist which is a trait highly valued by my customers **but**, when it comes to creating new products/services, I feared that sharing my imperfect ideas would reflect poorly on me and my business. This thinking slowed down my business and saw me waste time and money on development of things that never see the light of day. Get it out to your target market in test form, collate the feedback and if it's what they would pay for, then you can make it perfect or let it go.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Make it a daily priority to speak directly with at least one of your customers. Pick up the phone, walk out from behind the counter, catch up at an event. Whatever you do, do it with the aim to sell nothing but your genuine interest in that one person, and by the end of 2018, you will have created a tribe of customers who speak highly of you and refer business to you. Stand out by giving your customers the one thing your competition can't beat; you.

★ Find out more about Cate by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Cate's Smallville articles [here](#)



CATHRYN WARBURTON

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Sharing more of my life stories that led me to where I am is important. Clients want to know why they should trust me with their intellectual property and legal needs. They don't care about my qualifications or experience. They want to know **why**

I take their work so personally. Sharing that is a gift to them because they will know right away if we are the right fit.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Select a business mentor whose style and experience is very different from your own, to give you a fresh perspective."

They do not necessarily have to be more successful in the traditional sense.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

My best advice to business owners is, firstly, you do yourself a disservice if you take professional advice from strangers on social media. I see so many well-meaning business owners and coaches giving accounting and legal advice, which is simply wrong, and I worry for Small Business owners who take it as gospel. Secondly, business owners need to become intellectual property savvy.

The reason I'm so passionate about this is best explained by stories of two of my clients.

1. Sally, a female tradie, was naïve and trusting:

A competitor registered Sally's business name as a trademark, and then threaten to sue Sally for trademark infringement (a registered trademark gives stronger rights, so Sally's registered business name didn't help her). Sally could not afford the \$100 000 plus legal fees to fight the business bully, and instead changed her business name and URL, lost about 80% of her business which came directly from her website, and paid about \$25 000 for costs associated with the name change, including signage, changing websites, changing online listings etc. (Of course, before she changed her name, I made sure she had a registered trademark for her new name.)

2. Tony, a business coach, had previously had his intellectual property stolen and was a bit more experienced:

Tony registered his trademark, 'Coach Curl'. He became aware of someone using that name for services that he had it trademarked for. After just a couple of letters, the alleged infringer changed her domain name, social media names, and agreed not to use the name again in the future.

This is the power of the registered trademark.

★ Find out more about Cathryn by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Cathryn's Smallville articles [here](#)



CHRIS NAIRN

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

The power and leverage that writing your own book provides. I was fortunate to have my first book, *Freedom Assets: The Entrepreneur's Roadmap to Financial Freedom*, published this year.

What an amazing difference it has made to the conversations

I have with both existing and prospective clients. Not only has it allowed me to have conversations with people I may not have been able to have without a book, but it is how people view you when you say you have written a book, that is the icing on the cake.

It has also allowed me to use it to explain what we do for our clients. Rather than spending hours trying to convince a prospective client of the value and end result of our work, I simply say, "It's all in my book."

If you haven't written a book or are sitting on a partly complete manuscript, my advice is to just get it done. It will change your business for the better in 2018.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Life and business is a marathon, not a sprint."

Too often we get caught up in the whirlpool of the day to day activities in the business. We worry and stress about cash flow, team, clients, invoices etc., etc. Dan Sullivan of Strategic Coach says, "There is a gap between your ideal (where you want to go) and where you are now. Problem is, sometimes in business we don't look backwards to see how far we have come and become disenchanted with our progress."

Remember, as long as you are moving forward, one step after the other, little achievement by little achievement towards your end goal that is all that matters. Just like in a marathon; the best things in business and in life take time.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Keep talking to your target customers/clients, ask great questions about their biggest problems and listen to what they say. Speak to as many of them as you can, and keep researching their biggest problems. Then take their answers and build a product that they want, not what you think they need.

People will pay for what they want, not what they need. You will do well finding out what your target customers/clients want in 2018, what their problems are, then building a product/solution to solve this problem that they want solved. All the best for 2018.

★ Find out more about Chris by visiting his [website](#)

★ Read all of Chris's Smallville articles [here](#)



DEBRA ANDERSON

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

This year I saw my years of hard work of nurturing business relationships really come to fruition. Over the years I have spent a considerable amount of my time and energy giving. Giving to my community, my profession and Small

Business. This year I was fortunate to be made the brand ambassador for the Institute of Public Accountants, who like me, are focused on Small Businesses.

In addition to this, the ATO also did a series of videos with me to educate their internal staff about tax practitioners and Small Businesses and to give a face and a real person for them to relate to. Neither of these great 'profile' opportunities would have been possible had I not put the effort into humanising and nurturing my relationships with people I work with.

I've always been a firm believer that people do business with people they like, but this year I really learnt how important it is to connect with everyone authentically.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

The best piece of advice I ever received was from Simon Sinek, *"People don't buy what you do. They buy why you do it."*

If you are honestly passionate about what you do and have a purpose greater than just making money, then people will feel that and will want to work with you.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

My advice for making more money in 2018 is to not focus on making money. I know it's not a very Accountant thing to say but although you absolutely must keep your eye on the money you need to focus on **why you do what you do**, and the money will follow. I promise.

Money will not get you through the tough days. Money will not give you intrinsic satisfaction. Money will not fulfil you... Money will only pay the bills and life is a lot more than just paying bills.

★ Find out more about Debra by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Debra's Smallville articles [here](#)



DREW BROWNE

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

My mother grew up a teenager in London during World War II spending her Christmas' nights hiding in underground air raid shelters. There wasn't room to take anything with you other than a teddy bear and the hope your home above, would survive

another night of shelling.

She later developed a near phobia about buying anything new or receiving gifts bigger than a teddy bear. She would ask the same defensive rhetorical question, "... but where am I going to put it?" It wasn't long before life became unnecessarily dry and stale; the joy of growth and discovery rationed and swapped for the pragmatic defence of a mindset that had kept her safe thus far.

This is often the similar approach people take towards feedback.

People sometimes mistake their apprehension about feedback as fear of the opinion of others, but in my experience, that's not the case. It's more about knowing what to do with it when it arrives. For many, the unspoken question is "... but what am I going to do with it?"

Deciding ahead of time if and where feedback might help, will help avoid the 'baby and the bathwater' problem. Does it mean all your work to date is wrong and needs to change? No. Here's the process I follow. Firstly, decide if the feedback is about a core issue (a key decision) or a satellite issue (colour of a logo).

Then have a plan on how to deal with real-life comments like, "Your logo doesn't explain what your business does", "Nobody likes the colour red, it hurts your eyes", and "The arrow pointing down makes me feel like I'm being dominated".

I ask myself these feedback questions:

1. Does it really matter to me?
2. Should it really matter to me?
3. What's my plan for the feedback?

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Relax, everything looks like failure in the middle, so just get on with it."

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

So, my advice for a business owner this year is this. Like all journeys to new places, there are always things you must leave behind. Maybe it's the safety of keeping silent in the face of conflict, maybe it's keeping your ideas to yourself, maybe it's resisting seeking feedback. Whatever you need to leave behind, find out, and leave it.

- ★ Find out more about Drew by visiting his [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Drew's Smallville articles [here](#)



ELIZABETH CAMPBELL

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Look after yourself first. You are no good to your business, your team, your clients or your followers and fans if you are sick and tired. If you have a recurring illness that just won't let up. If you exhaust yourself. If you don't take time out for you.

The last 18 months have been the most amazing, yet the toughest, I've had in business. Not from a financial point of view. Not from a client point of view. Completely the opposite. You see I started running workshops and events. I have pushed myself beyond what I thought I was capable of and I've pushed my body too. You give so much of yourself in your business at the best of times, but giving yourself in events is a whole new ball game.

This year, I've done more than 100 events. And that's when I learned my biggest lesson in business to date. You can't give so much of yourself with giving back to yourself. Put yourself first. Always. Then everything around you will grow and prosper.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

The best piece of advice I've learned from someone about doing business came from my 'Mumentor'. My mum said, *"Always remember that you are successful and brave. It takes a special type of person to leave a full-time job and start a business. It's courageous. Not everyone in business succeeds. You made the choice to have a better life. You could have stayed in your full-time job unhappy and miserable, but you chose a different path. Remember the choice you made and just know that you are already successful and you are extremely brave to do this thing they call business."*

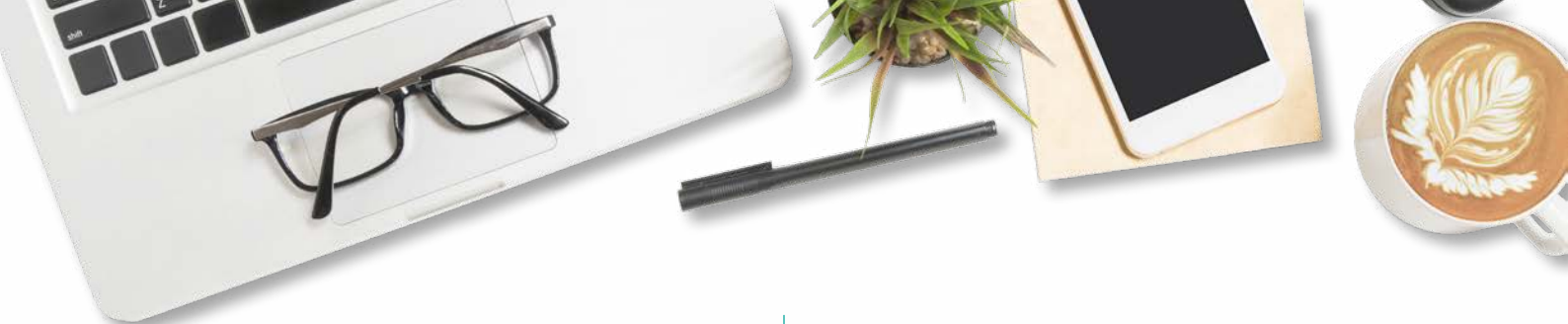
And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Rather than advice, I have this question for you: What risk are you going to take this year to stay relevant in 2018?

My best advice is to take a change on that 'wow' idea that will help people and monetise it. Too often we sit back and don't take a risk because we are too scared that we will fail. What if you succeed and create something so impressive that it becomes a world first or it could help 1 million people all because you took a chance.

Do it. Take the risk and make a change to keep your business moving in the direction that your people want.

- ★ Find out more about Elizabeth by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Elizabeth's Smallville articles [here](#)



GEOFF ANDERSON

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Networking. I'd forgotten that most of my business comes from people who know, like and trust me. Getting out and about and networking sparks more conversations and opens up more opportunities.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received

from someone about doing business?

"Nothing happens until you sell something."

It's easy to keep busy but being in business is about making money. At some point, you have to be making sales.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

It's very tempting to set your goals based on the next 12 months. 12 months is a long way away, but it comes by very quickly. I recently listened to a book, *The 12 Week Year*. Instead of setting 12-month goals, plan out 12-week goals. Condense your year to 12 weeks. Condense a month to a week. Every day is like a week.

This methodology brings everything into sharp focus. Your time becomes more valuable, and your goals are reached more quickly, and more is achieved. By reviewing your progress each week, you will be more aware of the key activities that will bring you closer to your goals.

When you review your successes over the last twelve months, you will probably notice some specific key actions or moments that moved you closer to your goals. It is rarely a combination of a lot of small actions and those things that keep us busy. It more likely due to that phone call you made or the meeting you arranged or that networking event you attended.

When you have brought your activities into focus, you will know what you need to do to get the results quicker. You will be able to jettison those distractive tasks and prioritise the important actions that generate results.

Planning a year 12 months in advance gives us permission to delay. It gives us excuses for putting things off for tomorrow or the next week or the next month. A 12-week year plan doesn't allow for such procrastination. There is urgency in what needs to be achieved and a desire to achieve it.

Simply by giving yourself short deadlines, your targets are much more front of mind. As opportunities arise, you are more ready to pounce on them. You are more active in creating the opportunities, and you can tick off your goals more quickly.

So, as you set your sights on a big 2018, think of shorter timeframes for achieving your goals and plan for a bigger result in a much shorter time.

★ Find out more about Geoff by visiting his [website](#)

★ Read all of Geoff's Smallville articles [here](#)



GEOFF HETHERINGTON

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

That I have been indulging in what I call 'Just in Case' (JIC) learning (Hmmm, I better learn how to code a file transfer protocol (FTP) in case I ever have to), and that this does not necessarily translate into actions that bring me closer to achieving my goals.

In fact, because I love feeding my head; in challenging times like the last 18 months JIC learning provided an easy to justify haven and distraction that enabled me to procrastinate and put off doing some of the hard yards and tough stuff.

So, I have culled my email lists, reduced followed blogs and drawn up a plan of what I need to do, what I need to outsource and what needs to get done without diversions in 2018 to get my business scaled and happening without distraction.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"That we need to figure out how to be of service to other folks."

If you solve a problem or take away some pain, you are both doing good, using your skills and being valuable to the larger community.

To break this down into something usable: If you are going to succeed and make a difference you must understand what the problem is you are skilled enough to solve, who will you solve it for, how you deliver this solution and whether there is enough demand for it to support you and your personal goals.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Sprint; don't try to run marathons. Set a single large annual goal. Break it into three or four smaller sequential goals and separately work them in 90-day blocks. Other things will naturally come up, but in a sprint, you can keep focus, energy and attention on the main game. Plus, you get a feeling of accomplishment each step along the way.

Attention, energy and focus are all scarce and inconstant. Aiming too far away will mean a loss of all three and no result.

Lastly be pragmatic. Look for the low hanging fruit and harvest it, so you grow your resources and from there can build your business. Forget about making a 'dent in the universe' until you have your business and your life outside humming along.

★ Find out more about Geoff by visiting his [website](#)

★ Read all of Geoff's Smallville articles [here](#)



GEORGIA THOMAS

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Don't be afraid to change direction. If your business doesn't keep you energised, struggles to meet your commitments or can't grow beyond a certain point to give you the life you want then don't be afraid to pull it apart, reassess the components and

put it back together in a completely different arrangement.

For eight years I ran a legal practice that prioritised child protection work and took on Small Business advice if and when I had time available. My business appeared to be a lovely vehicle for my passion to educate, and challenge cultural norms that put children at risk, but the three conditions I've listed above were ever present.

In 2016, I wrote a book about inspiring change, which prompted me to revisit my personal goals. The biggest shift in my thinking was that although businesses can be a brilliant way to pursue your passion, they're not always the **best** way, and are certainly not the **only** way.

I had been trying to structure a business around work that had significant personal value, but limited commercial viability. A common problem for people with philanthropic intentions. So, this year, I set about implementing the changes required to align my business, with this new approach.

I prioritised the work I did with creatives and Small Business owners and shifted my child protection work to the background. It's still something I do quite a lot of, but I don't lead with that. My marketing and content creation have all had to change, and I now connect with a very different target market. One that enables my business to grow; one that energises me and allows me to play to my strength, which is educating.

By changing my focus, I now have a much stronger business model and exactly the same opportunities to pursue my personal interests.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

Simon Sinek's words are a great guide, *"What good is an idea if it remains an idea? Try. Experiment. Iterate. Fail. Try again. Change the world."*

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Change can be daunting, particularly when you've already invested so much of yourself. But seriously, what's the point of continuing along a difficult path, when the journey isn't particularly enjoyable, and the destination isn't really where you want to be anyway!

Give some careful thought to what's working and what's not in your business and don't be afraid to change direction in 2018.

- ★ Find out more about Georgia by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Georgia's Smallville articles [here](#)



HUNTER LEONARD

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

This year has been one of the most productive in our business's history and the biggest lesson I've learned this year is that a real-life connection between humans has incredible value particularly in Small Business.

We are hearing a lot about the advancement of technology in business today; how robots and tech are taking over the world and fueling the disruption of market segments from insurance and banking, to taxis and hotel rooms. However, the more I hear about technology, and the more I help our clients connect with their customers, the more I'm convinced that technology will continue to be secondary to human connection.

Over 10 000 customers of our clients all rated service, responsiveness to enquiries and being able to talk to someone when they need help as higher than website access or price. They are more likely to refer our service clients over direct online providers of similar but cheaper products. Meaning, people's willingness to put their reputation on the line recommending a business is higher when they deal with a person, rather than a faceless corporation. Corporations are ditching overseas call centres and are putting in more human connection points such as personal coaches for banking clients as customers are voting with their feet that they want this.

The fact is technology costs money to develop and implement; often these costs are upfront and accessible only to larger corporations. Small Business has one trump card up their sleeve though; the ability to provide personal and close attention to each customer. And this personal attention can be translated, if you're good enough, into a higher price and higher margin, which Small Business generally needs to survive.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Stay close to your customers."

The bigger business gets, the further away it often gets from its customers, and this is dangerous. Stay close, and you'll understand their needs, you'll know if you are delivering value and you'll keep them for a long time.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Don't ignore technology in your Small Business, but put it into play where it frees up your time and that of your staff, to get closer to your customers because I believe the human connection will continue to be highly valued by your customer.

Humans first, technology second is where I believe Small Business can gain and keep an edge. And that's my advice and learnings for 2017. Best wishes for prosperity and success in 2018.

- ★ Find out more about Hunter by visiting his [website](#)
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JILL BRENNAN

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

You know how when you're told not to do something or there is something that you absolutely want to avoid, and then that becomes all you can think about? Like, if I said, "Don't think of an elephant." Chances are the first image that popped into your head

was an elephant, right?

I learnt that it's like that with business too. This year I spent too much time thinking about what I didn't want and not enough time focusing on what I wanted to achieve. I was trying to avoid common pitfalls like not getting paid or attracting clients that aren't well matched to what I offer, and I ended up attracting exactly that. It's a painful lesson but I think I've got it now and I'm ready to start planning and focusing on what I do want.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Your customer is your compass."

Everything you do should revolve around what your customers are trying to achieve. Your business, whether you provide products or services, exists because of the needs of your customers. This is even if your customers can't fully articulate what those needs and wants are.

For example, I recently bought a shower cap that I didn't know I needed or wanted because the company selling a new innovative version was able, to sum up, my poor experiences with a regular one. They did this in such a way that I bought within 15 minutes of first seeing their ad on Facebook. The ad and landing page demonstrated that this company knew what they were talking about and I felt understood. It was a short trip from feeling acknowledged to going through checkout and eagerly anticipating the arrival of this ingenious solution.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

There are five key building blocks when it comes to marketing your business: strategy, branding, collateral, awareness and reporting. Many business owners focus on raising awareness and 'getting the word out'. They often do this while ignoring or paying lip service to the other aspects, particularly strategy.

If this is you, it begs the question: What are you raising awareness of? If you don't have the other key elements in place, then your efforts are likely to fall flat, and you won't get the results you hoped for.

★ Find out more about Jill by visiting her [website](#)

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KAREN MCDERMOTT

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

This year has seen huge growth in my business and personal brand. The biggest lesson that I will take away from 2017 is that I have had to maintain a mindset that grows alongside my business. Being selective when acting upon the opportunities that

align with my vision moving forward has been the key to achieving success this year.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Just because you can, doesn't mean you should."

I have gained a lot of momentum this year, but that takes time, commitment and investment to service, so prioritising what I commit my energy to, is very important. This requires a totally different mindset to that of when I started out five years ago, which was to seek out as many opportunities as possible. I have learned the value of saying, "No, thank you, that is not for me right now."

This year I have spent time preparing for 2018 by building a team of professionals around me who have strengths where I have weaknesses. This allows me to focus on my genius and that is so much more fun than doing every aspect of business myself. This has been a progressional transition for me, and it has taken time to collect the team of people I have on my team, who I have known professionally for some time.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

My best piece of business advice for 2018 is to begin the year re-aligned with your vision. A business vision can quickly evolve so it is important to revisit it at least annually and update it from where you are at in your business and personal life so that the ultimate balance can be achieved. Evolve with your business.

★ Find out more about Karen by visiting her [website](#)

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KERRY GRACE

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

If there is trouble, go to the source. Gossip, innuendo, white-anting, unresolved tensions and assumptions can ruin business and personal relationships. Even though very few people enjoy difficult conversations, taking just a little time to talk

through real or potential issues, with the source of the issue, is a solid step towards a healthy, long-term relationship.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Slow down."

Like many entrepreneurs, I have so much passion for my work that I often find it difficult to sit still. While jumping from one thing to another enables high levels of productivity, it also presents numerous risks. Burning out, losing customers and other stakeholders, and losing team members. Learning how to slow down is another lesson in itself.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Do business with good people. From your suppliers to staff, partners to customers. Even when it seems you may need to take on a particular piece of work to keep the cash coming in, ultimately, if you can't create a respectful, positive and maybe an even enjoyable relationship with the person, don't go there. It may not seem like it right now, but there are many, many people out there that you could choose to do business with, don't waste your time on the difficult ones.

★ Find out more about Kerry by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Kerry's Smallville articles [here](#)



KEVIN GAMMIE

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

The customer isn't always right, but, it's never their fault. When prospects don't get you, it's not their job too. Just like when I first met my partner, Melissa; she didn't get me at the time, she thought I was aloof and arrogant (maybe I was). If we were

ever going to have a relationship, she needed to see me differently. The only person who was responsible for that was me. If your prospects are seeing the whole you; it's up to you to try something different.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"It's better to get 1% of 100 peoples' efforts than 100% of just one."

Opinions are like backsides; everybody's got one. This year seems to be a year where there was no shortage of advice; some great, some challenging and some uninvited. One clear message stood out above all others; seek opportunities to leverage. Stop being a control freak and start to realise that done is better than perfection.

Even when you're flying solo, there are ways to leverage your efforts. Being curious about how you can do this, will always trump the status quo. Too often we get comfortable (maybe even a little stuck) in the routine of things. Shaking it up and letting people help you can make a huge impact.

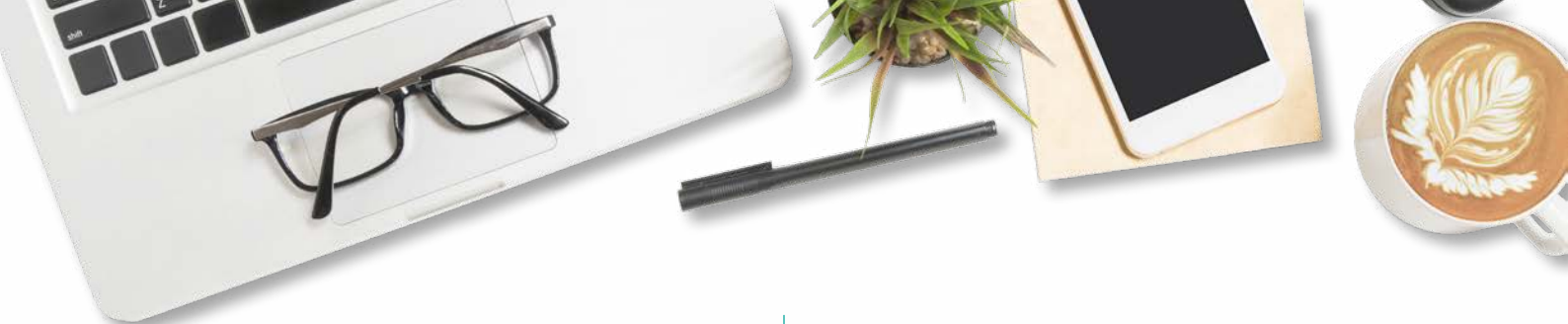
And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Work your niche:

1. Whatever you do, when you try to be all things to all people, everybody thinks you'll be great for someone else.
2. Finding a niche can be confronting. What if we miss out on an opportunity? Inversely, by trying to generalise, we miss everyone who wants a specialist (and specialists bill more).
3. Developing a clear ideal client helps not only you to see them, but others to refer them.
4. The tighter the niche, the more they have in common, the more you can start to talk just to them. The more they see you're talking to them.
5. Be prepared to listen, and change - "Most men fail not because they didn't have a plan, but because they failed to replace a plan that was failing."

★ Find out more about Kevin by visiting his [website](#)

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LAURA MOORE

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Fail to plan, plan to fail. Having learned the power of outsourcing, I have now learned the power of creating and implementing strategies. The impact of not doing this has been time and money wasted, due to a distinct lack of clarity and direction with

my team. I was making a lot of short-sighted decisions and consequently changing my mind a lot, which was extremely inefficient. Once I took a step back and defined what we ultimately want to achieve in the business, and all the elements that needed to happen to get that, I was able to align the team and streamline all the processes which brought back a lot of time and got much better results.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Relationships first, business second."

I remember being given this advice while I sat in my car outside my business crying my eyes out, freaking out that I didn't have enough clients. I wanted results, and I wanted them quick, and in my mind, building relationships first was just going to take too long. Luckily my very wise business coach managed to convince me that slow is indeed fast, and while it would mean that in the short-term I wouldn't get as many results, I would most definitely reap the reward in the long-term.

And what do you know, it worked! Now I'm at the point where almost all of my business is generated through referrals, which has a massive impact on the bottom line. Happy days.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Start with you. Whenever something isn't working in the business, or we are struggling to take it to the next level, we often blame external sources. I used to be the master at this; the marketing plan isn't strong enough, it's not the right time of year, there's just no-one out there good enough to employ.

The truth is, I was actually just procrastinating because I was terrified of failing and getting it wrong. Ironically, however, this was actually making me fail in an even greater way because the business wasn't moving forward and I was running myself into the ground. It wasn't until I addressed these issues, that my business really began to flourish.

As a business owner you are your business, so you need to be able to look at yourself and work on yourself in order to create a solid backbone and positive driving force that allows you to be successful both in business and in life.

- ★ Find out more about Laura by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Laura's Smallville articles [here](#)



LAUREN CLEMETT

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

English novelist (and part-time New Zealander) Samuel Butler once wrote, "Look before you leap, for as you sow, ye are like to reap."

This is possibly the best lesson I've learned this year. After a number of failed business partnerships in the past I was

wary of entering into one in February; however, it has become a massive success, and I put that down to gut instinct.

Samuel Butler also said, "Every man's work, whether it be literature, or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself" and this is the epitome of personal branding.

Ensure you are surrounding yourself with the right people. Before you leap into anything, especially business partnerships or affiliations, look into your core values and purpose before you make up your mind. It might look like an awesome opportunity, but if it's incongruent with your personal brand, it won't add value for you or anyone else involved. If your brands align, your gut will tell you it's right.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"It doesn't need to be right; it needs to be done."

Fear of failure or making mistakes can paralyse a business. Worrying about what others will think or looking for validation or analysing an idea to death can be fatal. If you can test something while you are doing it, you will not only get real-world results and be able to measure what works and what doesn't, you will also get credible case studies to share.

This year I started a group coaching program where I was writing the content as we went, making notes and formulating the program for the future. Sure, there were some moments when things didn't work great, and I changed the order of training quite a lot. Now I've made it happen real-time I can automate ongoing delivery. If I had tried to perfect the training, writing and automating the delivery, it would probably still be in vitro.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Get focused on what you do best and be 100% authentically you so you can share your natural gifts and talents with as many people as possible; giving value because you do something with ease is not selling, it is helping, and it attracts the right people.

Confucius said, "You can't chase two rabbits" and he was right! Trying to please everyone waters down your credibility. It's far better to focus on your expertise and become wanted.

- ★ Find out more about Lauren by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Lauren's Smallville articles [here](#)



LEE MCCAFFREY

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

You have to believe in yourself and your business, especially in tough times. Believe that everything is going to work out the way you planned. If you've read any of my articles, you'll know we had a tough year in business. It was so tough that this time last year we thought

we were going to lose everything. The sheer belief that we could turn it around and that it was all going to be ok was what kept us going. It got us out of bed, pushed us to work every day and kept us from giving up.

Heading into Christmas this year, we're in the best position we've ever been in business and are looking forward to a well-deserved family holiday!

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Don't be afraid to ask for advice."

But, be very choosy about whose advice you take on board!

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Investigate ways to make a connection with your customers. I think consumers have moved away from faceless brands and are seeking something deeper than just a transaction. Whether you do that by social media, blogging or just in the way you do day to day business make 2018 about giving your brand a personality.

- ★ Find out more about Lee by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Lee's Smallville articles [here](#)



LINDA WILSON

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

As a Small Business owner, I know much of my time was taken up maintaining the status quo. This often led to all kinds of weird and whacked out tactics to ensure all stayed calm on the income front. It also meant I was bored, disengaged and appallingly

uncreative. So, in 2017, I learned to take (calculated) risks and stay open to any outcome. Taking risks in my business led to 'a whole new world, a dazzling place I never knew' (sorry, Aladdin moment). The benefits were many and magnificent, and they keep coming.

I now know when I take a risk I re-energise, re-engage, and re-focus and what comes from that is a massive contribution.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"If no one initially buys your product/service it doesn't automatically mean it is no good so stop with the self-flagellation."

What it might mean is that you are not speaking to your customers-to-be in a language that woos them. Before throwing the baby out with the bath water get some advice or do some beta testing about how to pitch/brand/design it differently. Get your internal and external language right, and you will fly (love that magic carpet).

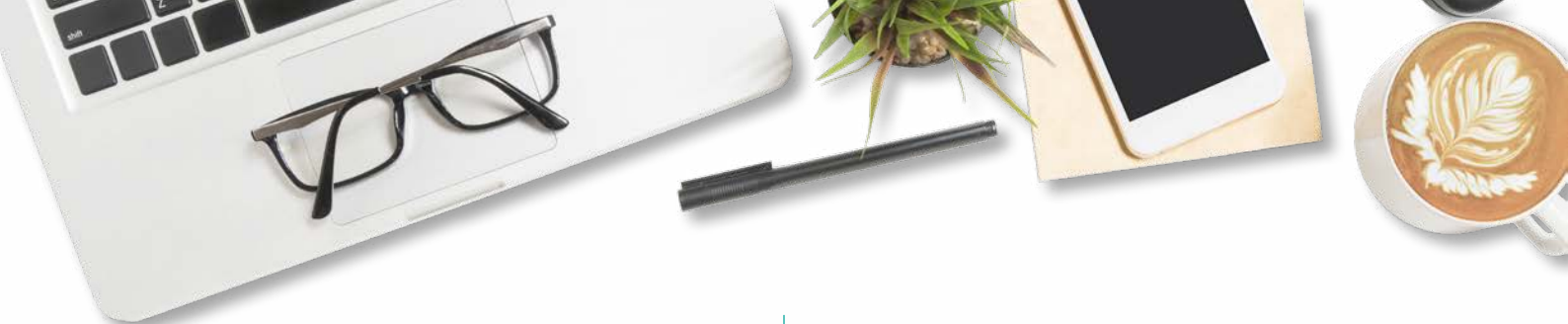
Value stipulation: Don't blow your integrity or your customer's trust by selling a sub-standard product or service. Make the choice that you will only ever contribute real value. You deserve to be valued, so value your own reputation.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

For you to grow personally and professionally, you need to maintain your energy, engagement and focus. Sometimes this is very difficult as a Small Business owner; fatigue is real. I encourage you to keep asking of yourself and the business, "What else is possible?" and "What else could I be creating today that is positive for me, my business and my customers?" Staying in question rather than conclusion keeps you open to opportunity, widens your perspective and allows for anything and everything to show up.

Sometimes this may not be in the form you expect so don't place boundaries on how the things you are asking for have to 'look'. For example, you might ask "How can \$5 000 show up for me this week?" Be open to the \$5 000 being from extra customers, a great referral, a tax break or an old debt being paid. Stay open to curiosity and wonder, and I hope you get your Aladdin moment.

- ★ Find out more about Linda by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Linda's Smallville articles [here](#)



MICHAEL HANRAHAN

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

The biggest lesson we learnt in 2017 is when to say, "No." In 2016, we got involved in a number of projects that weren't in our area of expertise. We knew we could do them well, but they weren't in the area we were trying to focus on and develop our

business. As such, the projects took more of our time than other projects, and they didn't help us develop our business or our client base.

So, in 2017 we learned when to say, "No." If you just want printing, we'll refer you direct to our printer. If you just want editing, we're not the right people for you. We specialise in self-publishing packages for Small Business people, so that's where we should be spending our time. This helps us to develop great products for our clients and provide awesome service, and we're not spending time on projects that are not a good fit for us.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"If you're a manager, your team isn't there to support you. You're there to support them."

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Related to the above, stick to what you're good at. It's so easy to say, "Yes", to anything and everything, as all work is good work... Right? Wrong. Vital to business success is not just attracting customers but attracting the right customers for your business.

Your ideal customers will pay reasonable rates to get the job done properly; they will work with you as a partner rather than just a service provider, they will be interested in developing a long-term relationship with you, and will have a genuine interest in your business. If you do well, they do well, and vice versa.

Customers who are not an ideal fit for your business will make decisions based solely on price (not value); they will expect you to do extra work at no extra charge, they will have unrealistic timeframes, they will not hold up their end of an agreement but will still expect you to. Generally, they will add much hassle and frustration to your day.

★ Find out more about Michael by visiting his [website](#)

★ Read all of Michael's Smallville articles [here](#)



MIKE DOWSETT

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Play to your strengths and understand your limitations! Building a great business is so much about developing an effective team and leveraging the different skills, resources and experience of a range of people. We can't all be brilliant at everything, plus there's

only so much time available for us to be effective on specific tasks.

Work out what you're really good at, what you like to do and where you can have the most impact on your business and then just do that! Get other people to do the things in your business that aren't one of your strengths or an effective use of your resources.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

Glen Carlson of Dent Global and the Key Person of Influence program says, *"People don't care about you or your product - all they care about is themselves."*

This was great advice for me because it made me focus and put myself in the shoes of my customers. Fall in love with your customer; your product or service exists to serve them, not you. No matter how great you think your product is or how attached you are to your service offering, if it doesn't serve the needs of the market, then you shouldn't be doing it.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

No business is immune to the challenges of the future. Future shock is coming; whole industries have already been wiped out and even more are under threat. Is your business a target?

There are massive shifts coming in the world economies including factors such as globalisation, ageing societies, rapid urbanisation, population growth, shifts in the balance of economic power, rapid technological change, the share economy and the sustainability movement.

It's vital for you to be aware of what's coming, follow the trends and don't make the mistake of assuming it's 'business as usual' and that your business will be the same as it always has been because clearly, it will not. Change is coming, and you'd better be prepared for it!

Take stock of your current position and prepare yourself for the future. Really take the time to work out where you are right now, where you want to be in the future and develop a plan for how you're going to get your business from here to there.

★ Find out more about Mike by visiting his [website](#)

★ Read all of Mike's Smallville articles [here](#)



What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

My biggest lesson (or reinforcement) in 2017 was the power of delivering value to clients. It's never just the product or service or the price; to be successful, you need to provide great value.

Why do I say this? In 2016 a client asked me to revise their

performance management process and policy. The work was completed and paid for, and all went smoothly. In 2017, I followed up regarding their experience with the new process. Interestingly the client had experienced some operational pressures that prevented full implementation of the new process and I was engaged for another few days to sit with them while they implemented the new process.

By following up, and the way that I did it, I clearly demonstrated value and care for my client. The reason this lesson is so powerful is that while completing the side by side implementation, my client introduced me to another company who has since come on board as well.

By delivering great value and showing that I care, my client not only referred me but has become a champion of mine and the value that I add.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

Best advice ever award goes to David who said to me, *"Always know your financials."*

Even if you are not financially minded, you must be able to read your monthly and quarterly accounts and understand your position. Knowing your finances is more than looking at your cash on hand, without getting into the details of cash versus accrual accounting, the truth of your position is your profit and loss.

- Be on top of your debtors.
- Manage cash flow.
- Forecast cash and expenses.
- Plan and manage activity from a financial point.
- Review your pricing every year, or more often if you have suppliers especially if they are overseas.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

My best advice to grow, stay relevant and make more money is to always deliver great value. There is so much value to be gained from having a good understanding of your customers and being able to adapt and move with them.

In a world where we are technologically connected yet starved of human interaction, the relationship is going to become increasingly important. Even for larger businesses and their brand, it becomes the reputation of the brand that will make or break consumer connection.

- ★ Find out more about Pam by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Pam's Smallville articles [here](#)



What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

2017 has been the most challenging year of my life. I started out expecting one thing, and it turned into something totally different. Along the way, I learned a lesson I wish had discovered 30 years earlier.

If your vision in business is not bigger than yourself, you are cheating you and everyone around you. You can rise above the mundane and be extraordinary. I believe I have to inspire people, create amazing products and services, connect and lift people up and provide hope and an opportunity for a better life.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

Two things, *"If you have to eat an elephant, eat one spoonful at a time"* and *"You can choose to do little things or big things with your life. Both take the same amount of life."*

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

To grow your business, you need to help others. Increasing value in someone else's life is the only worthwhile aim in business. Whichever way you do that, you need to focus on adding value for others.

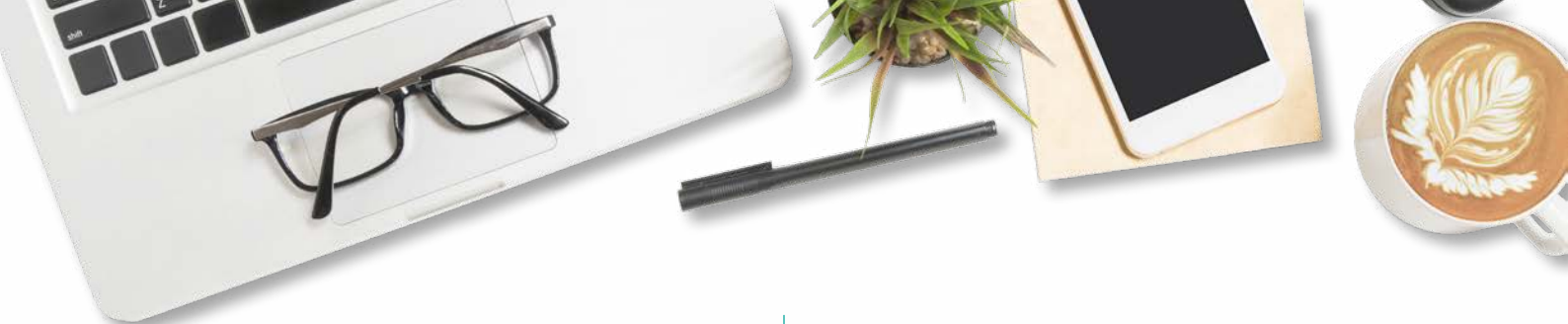
We live in a digital, connected world, always in contact with family, friends and strangers. We share our opinions and thoughts with every like and share. In turn, we consume massive amounts of information daily yet we allow most of it to have no effect on us nor consider how our thoughts and opinions affect others.

However, if you test and measure the effect your comments and opinions have on others, then you transform from consumer to creator. You become relevant; your message becomes sought after by those seeking knowledge. In becoming a giver, you take the opportunity to engage the multitude of consumers.

When you deliver value, and engage in strategic connection with people you can begin to seek remuneration for delivering value to others' lives. People will flock to your stores and beat down your doors.

To be an influencer, you must be relevant and engage. A candle, under a cover, casts no light. Take off the covers... Be seen and be heard.

- ★ Find out more about Paul by visiting his [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Paul's Smallville articles [here](#)



RENEE HASSELDINE

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

It's a lesson I've learned many times over, but I'm experiencing a great reminder as 2017 draws to a close... What you say no to is as important as what you say yes to.

With weekly articles in Smallville and Huff Post,

a weekly blog, a daily social media presence, a weekly podcast and a TV show, monthly networking events, 'get stuff done' days (online and offline), half-day workshops and two-day intensives, I'm spinning way too many plates. And it's only a matter of time before one or more of them come crashing down.

So, I'm being reminded to focus on my top three priorities.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Just be you."

I left the corporate world 17 years ago because it felt like a cage. Unfortunately, I took the cage with me. For me, that looked like hiding behind a business brand instead of embracing my personal brand, modifying my language and behaviour so that I would appear 'professional' and living up to other people's expectations. It was exhausting, ineffective and unfulfilling.

Realising that I could just be me was such a relief. As soon as I gave myself permission to just be me, exactly as I am, I finally escaped that cage for good. Business and life is so much easier when showing up is as simple as being yourself.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Having your own unique intellectual property in a tangible form makes selling what you do so much easier. It suddenly shifts the focus from you selling yourself, to you selling your proven system. They can also give your clients a powerful structure to know the process ahead. And it means that answering that, "What do you do?" question becomes so much easier.

- ★ Find out more about Renee by visiting her [website](#)
- ★ Read all of Renee's Smallville articles [here](#)



ROSEMARY SHAPIRO-LIU

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

This year I learnt the power of setting a timely, appropriate and powerful 'Theme for the Year'. I chose the word 'collaboration'. The idea emerged from my *Retreat for One*, an annual time of reflection and intention.

Having a 'Theme for the Year'

helped me measure every decision and action against whether it offered an opportunity for collaboration.

The focus brought in opportunities that were based on my best skills and the best skills of others, with the whole being better than the sum of its parts. Not only did I learn that setting a theme is a powerful exercise, but that the theme itself (collaboration) creates excellent new opportunities and new ways of seeing opportunity.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Don't worry about whether you will be enough, have enough, or provide enough. Just focus on solving problems, and the rest will fall into place."

Taking this piece of advice and marrying it to the concept of 'collaboration' is a great way to ensure that you offer the very best in a focused way.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Creating networks of skills and collaborative solutions, you can increase the visibility of your business and the businesses around you. Collaborating with your clients, the geographical communities you operate in and your communities of interest strengthens the impact of your work. I like to think of this as a Triple Win – a win for you, those around you and the world. It's an ethical way to work and one that considers the needs of those around you, while almost always giving you a better business outcome.

Whether you think of it as collaborating, partnering, connecting, community-building or co-promotion, the outcome will be the same. Your good intent and your focus on creating the best for everyone can only offer benefits well beyond those you imagined. I challenge you to set yourself a theme for 2018 and record the changes in your feelings about your business and your business outcomes.

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TAMARA SIMON

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Saying yes to projects which I'm capable of doing but are not really in my true wheelhouse. I agreed to a market research project for clients whom I wanted to help because I believed in the altruistic vision of their business. But it proved to be a frustrating project because

they really wanted more than what was agreed. Result: Lots of toing and froing to finalise an acceptable outcome.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

My marketing mentor is Paul McCarthy, and his favourite phrase is *"For what purpose?"*

It's a great phrase which always challenges me and keeps me focused on anything I develop for my business; be it marketing material, new products and services, systems and even my articles. Because if we're not clear on the purpose of doing something, then the chance of success is greatly diminished.

When I work with clients or challenge delegates in my conference presentations, my version of this phrase is simply, "Why?" Because I'm all for challenging the status quo. Why this process? Why this type of client? Why this product or service? Etc. Sometimes though this phrase needs to be, "Why not?"

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

Systems are the key to your business success. Make the decision to start documenting the knowledge that's in your head and your teams' heads. Commit to spending at least 15 minutes a day on developing, streamlining and simplifying what you do in every function of your business so:

- You have more time doing what you love.
- Your team knows what they're doing and love coming to work.
- Clients gain a consistent experience every single time.
- The business still operates seamlessly when anyone is away.
- If you choose to sell, your business valuation multiple is increased.

Systems mightn't be sexy or as exciting as marketing or sales, but they are essential to business success. You need them to build, manage and grow your business and there's a simple system in everything you do, you just have to find it.

If you can allocate more time, great! But as priorities for our time are being pulled in more and more directions, one hour a week, working on your business systems, should be an achievable goal for anyone serious about wanting to build a simple, profitable business they actually love.

★ Find out more about Tamara by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Tamara's Smallville articles [here](#)



TANYA WILLIAMS

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

Niche, niche, niche!
You cannot be all things to all people, so stop trying. Being niched and targeted allows you to have a clear voice and actually saves you time and money wasted by trying to reach everyone.

Doing things such as a 'like for like' campaigns is all about quantity, and you should be focused on quality and reaching the right audience, not just as many people as you can.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Listen to your gut."

Instinct is everything, and although you will do the necessary analysis, you need to walk away from a client or deal that doesn't feel like it is right for you. I always believe what is meant to be, will be and I think that rings true in business also.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

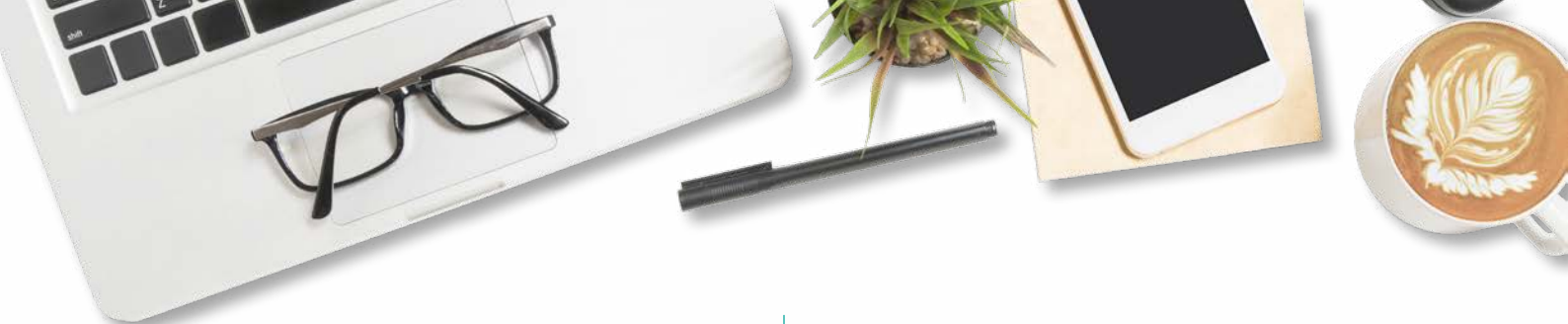
Social media is a great innovation; however, the one thing that many businesses forget is that they don't own those audiences. You are simply renting your audience from these social giants. At any time, the rules can change, and you will have to pay for access to your followers. In fact, it is happening already with organic reach being less than 5%.

As a business, you want to have full control over your marketing messages and platforms so if you want to own and not rent your audience you need to move people from your social media channels to your 'owned' channels. This refers to the channels you fully control, like your website, blog or email list.

You still want to engage, start conversations and build your fan base on social media but then you need to encourage them to connect on your own channels. Not all real estate is created equal.

★ Find out more about Tanya by visiting her [website](#)

★ Read all of Tanya's Smallville articles [here](#)



TRACY SHEEN

What's the single biggest lesson you've learned this year in your business?

I'm a card-carrying member of the 'bright shiny object' team, so over the years, I've learned to put the blinkers on and stick to the things earning the money and bringing in the clients. This year though, I learned that not all 'bright shiny ideas' are to be ignored.

If a concept continues to pester you, maybe it's worth putting a little time and energy towards testing what it could look like within your business. With a few small steps and some sanity checks with clients along the way, you'll soon know whether an idea has legs or whether to stick to what you're currently doing.

The key learning for me in 2017 has been: Stick to what you're passionate about but if you're leaving money on the table with a service or product that can add value to your existing clients - don't discount the idea off hand.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received from someone about doing business?

"Get it on paper."

I learned the hard way not everyone shares the same values and ethics. Simply agreeing to something over the phone or by a handshake can leave you exposed down the track.

Whenever you're starting anything new with a client or supplier, send a quick email outlining everything discussed and agreed too. It dramatically reduces the scope for creeps to try the 'I never agreed to that' conversation. In the long run, it makes for far happier relationships and smoother business dealings.

And what's the best piece of advice you would like to offer the readers to help them grow their business and stay relevant with their customers?

To quote the very wise Ferris Bueller, "Life moves pretty fast, if you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

We are living in an age where things are obsolete the moment they hit the market. How you attract and work with your clients needs to be agile. Adopting and adapting new technologies as they arise will keep you at the leading edge of your industry and making sure you're adding value to your business and your clients.

★ Find out more about Tracy by visiting her [website](#)

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