

*How To Create A Plan To*

# GROW YOUR SMALL BUSINESS



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FOUNDER, WHAT WORKS

# SO YOU WANT TO GROW YOUR SMALL BUSINESS?

Awesome! But... how exactly are you going to do that?

In the past, I would have tackled this from a purely marketing standpoint. I would have written about developing new relationships, growing your audience, and creating more compelling messages.

I might have added something about offer development and looking for how to better meet the needs of the people who come to your business for help. And those business development activities are valuable.

But today, my approach tends to be more on the operational side of things. I've seen for myself and for many small business owners that:

When I'm prepared for growth operationally, I'm much more likely to do what needs to be done (and in a way that's actually effective!) to fill the capacity I've created with marketing & sales.

This workbook will walk you through how I plan for growth now so that my operational capacity meets my commitment to growth. You'll make choices about your growth strategy, examine how your business needs to adapt to meet your goal, and create a project-based action plan.

*Tara McMullin*

FOUNDER, WHAT WORKS

# WHAT WORKS ABOUT US

## *Tara McMullin*

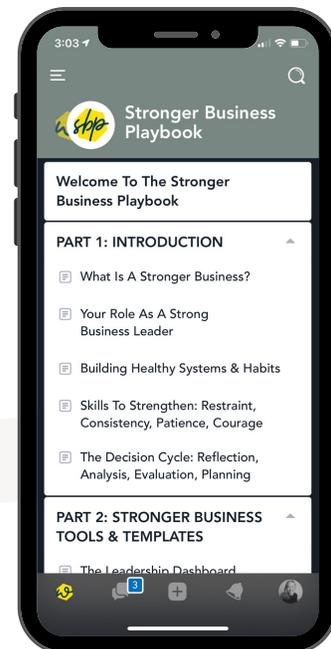
Tara is the founder & host of What Works, a platform that connects small business owners in pursuit of building stronger businesses together. She's also the co-founder of YellowHouse.Media, a full-service podcast production agency. Her podcast has been downloaded over 3 million times and her work has been featured in Fast Company, Forbes, and Inc.



## *The What Works Network*

The What Works Network is where experienced business owners come together to level up how they run their businesses. Our shared goal is to build businesses that run smoothly, cause fewer headaches, and sustainably make more money. We host weekly support events, quarterly virtual conferences, and ongoing conversations about small business in the digital age.

[Learn More](#)



*Create A Plan To Grow Your Business*

# FRAMEWORK

## *Choose your strategy*

There are only 3 ways to grow your business and, yes, you have to pick one to focus on for now

*01*

*02*

## *Do the math*

Figure out how your offers, pricing, and/or sales need to add up to hit your target

## *Plan for action*

Identify how your business needs to adapt to support your growth and create concrete projects to execute

*03*

# CHOOSE YOUR STRATEGY

The first step in creating a plan to grow your business is to decide which level you want to pull to make that growth happen.

You've probably heard before that there are only 3 ways to grow a business:

- You can sell to more (new) customers.
- You can increase the average transaction value.
- Or, you can sell to your existing customers more frequently.

Let's break those down by what they actually mean for you and your business operations.

## MORE CUSTOMERS

You can grow your business by selling to more customers—new-to-you or converting old leads. This is where most people assume they have to focus: "If I want to grow the business, I gotta go out and get more customers!"

And hence why I used to focus on growth as a marketing and offer development challenge.

But even still, selling to more customers only works if you have the capacity to handle those customers. Otherwise, you get yourself in a big ol' bind when you've taken on more work than you can handle and things start getting sloppy.

## MORE MONEY

Simply put, this means making more money for every purchase made. You can typically get there two ways:

- Raising your prices on your existing offers
- Increasing your scope of work so that people pay more

This is one of the most efficient ways to grow your business because it generally doesn't require you to make many changes at all and your business will still generate more revenue.

### QUICK TIP

*One of these strategies will look like low-hanging fruit. That's good! Pay attention to that. But also consider whether the "easy" way to grow is the way that gets you closer to your vision—or if it's just low-hanging fruit.*

However, there are limitations to this strategy. You're often constrained by the prices that the market will bear, the skills you have to deliver on a more extensive scope of work, and the type of customers you currently have access to. I say "often" because these constraints are overcome-able and many times people confuse assumptions for actual constraints.

To overcome these constraints, you typically do address operational, marketing, and offer development processes.

This is one of the most efficient ways to grow your business because it generally doesn't require you to make many changes at all and your business will still generate more revenue.

## MORE FREQUENCY

You can grow your business by increasing the frequency that customers buy from you.

There are a few ways you can accomplish selling to your existing customers more frequently.

One is through subscription—which is one of the reasons subscription models have gotten so popular. Each recurrence of a subscription is a transaction—so you're essentially selling to your existing customers on a regular basis. This doesn't always work out math-wise in the short-term, but over the long-term, it typically does.

Another is by developing a new offer. When you create a new offer, you're giving people who have bought from you previously something new to buy—which is an easier sale than selling to someone new.

And then finally, you can sell the same thing multiple times. I often have a mental block around this one! If you have a finite service offer or a physical product, customers often want to become repeat buyers and giving them opportunities to do that is an easy way to grow your business.

While there are obviously marketing & offer development activities that go toward selling more frequently to your existing customers, this is also an operational challenge. To create predictable repeat business, you need to have the kind of customer experience that inspires people to buy again. It's not just how useful or valuable your product is.

# CHOOSE YOUR STRATEGY

*Consider which strategy will help you build toward your vision for the business or create a satisfying experience as a business owner.*

*Answer the questions below to think through your options.*

HOW WOULD YOUR BUSINESS ADAPT  
TO ACCOMMODATE MORE CUSTOMERS?

HOW WOULD YOUR BUSINESS ADAPT TO INCREASE  
YOUR AVERAGE TRANSACTION?

HOW WOULD YOUR BUSINESS TO ADAPT TO ENCOURAGE  
YOUR CUSTOMERS TO BUY MORE FREQUENTLY?

# TIME TO CHOOSE

*At this point, you might be thinking: “I’ll do all 3!” Yeah, I’m right there with you. Doing all 3 sounds great. But it’s a recipe for an unfocused and overwhelming experience. The truth is that all 3 might happen but, to stay focused & committed, you want to choose just one.*

Choosing how you want to grow your business is the first step to choosing at least one of your Strategic Priorities for next year.

A Strategic Priority is something you choose to focus on for a period of time as a way of creating movement toward your vision.

How you want to grow might end up being your Strategic Priority or it might show you what else you need to focus on to make it happen.

*Example: At YellowHouse.Media, one of the Strategic Priorities has been building out the systems we need to consistently and efficiently deliver for our full-service production clients. Next year, we’ll build on that work by bringing on additional team members to execute those systems so that the founders can put more of our energy into our membership site. So while YHM is growing through frequency of purchase, we also know we need to expand operational capacity to get there.*

**➔ ACTION STEP: CHOOSE THE STRATEGY YOU’LL FOCUS ON TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS.**

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# DO THE MATH

If there's one thing people hate more than "choosing 1," it's "doing math!" But that is the next step. In order to really get at where you want to focus your energy strategically, you've got to do some math on what you're selling and who you're selling to.

First, consider your revenue target for next year. "Target" fits well here because, in order to "aim" your business at that target, you need to make different decisions about metaphorical force, velocity, angle, etc... In this case, those decisions about how to aim at your target about who you're serving, how you're serving them, and what kind of offers you're making.

Let's say your revenue target is \$250,000. There are lots of different ways you can get there, right? You can sell an offer for \$250 to 1,000 people. You can sell a \$2500 offer to 100 people. Or you can sell a \$25,000 offer to 10 people. The options go on and on.

But for each option, we're describing a distinctly different business. A business that sells a \$250 offer to 1,000 functions very differently than a business that sells a \$25,000 offer to 10 people. By defining your people, price point, and product, you're making clear decisions about the operations of your business.

Now, you already have an offer that you're selling (maybe a few):

- If you're thinking that you want to sell to more people, you can determine how many sales you need to make at your current price point to hit your revenue target.
- If you're thinking you want to raise your average transaction value, you can set your new price and then determine how many clients you need to serve at that new price point to hit your target.
- And if you're thinking you want to increase your purchase frequency, you can determine how many purchases you want customers to make at what price points (and whether you need a new offer to make that happen) to hit your target.

In the end, you're going to arrive at an equation that looks something like: *# of Customers \* Price point \* Frequency = Revenue Target*

## QUICK TIP

*Remember that lower price points don't automatically mean more sales. It's often easier to sell to fewer people at a dramatically higher price point. That doesn't mean it's the right option for you but it's an important consideration.*

# DO THE MATH

Use the blocks below to plan out your revenue targets for your top 3 (or fewer) revenue streams. Consider how many customers you're looking for, what price you're selling each offer for, and how often each customer is going to buy.

TOTAL REVENUE TARGET

OFFER TWO

OFFER THREE

OFFER ONE

# ADAPT FOR GROWTH

It is not enough to know how you want to grow, choose a Strategic Priority, and do the math. Those things have to lead to a plan that then leads to concrete, productive action.

The question that I like to ask to figure that out is simply: ***How does my business need to adapt to accommodate the customers and buying habits that are key to reaching my target?***

That's one of the fundamental questions that all strategic planning and operational growth is based on.

Selling to more customers might mean hiring & training a customer support point-person. Selling at a higher price point might mean investing in more elegant customer experience solutions. Increasing your average transaction value might mean building a new offer. Selling more frequently might mean developing more sophisticated email automations.

Almost all of these changes require reassessing your operational capacity (i.e. how much work your business can handle without undue strain) and then building on it. You won't grow your business if you don't address its needs first.

So let's get specific:

- How does your business need to adapt in terms of your offer and how it's delivered?
- How does your business need to adapt in terms of your team and how you manage?
- How does your business need to adapt in terms of your systems and workflow?
- How does your business need to adapt in terms of your scheduling and time management?
- How does your business need to adapt in terms of your technology?
- How does your business need to adapt in terms of support and collaboration?

Then, consider what's most likely to "break" if the adaptation isn't made but your business grows anyhow. What's most likely to cause a catastrophic (or even just really unpleasant) problem first in terms of your wellness, your customers' experience, and the health of the business overall?

- Will you have more work than you can do in a day?
- Will your systems not be able to deliver consistent results?
- Will your team feel completely overwhelmed and unsupported?

The goal here isn't actually to find your worst-case scenario. It's just to examine where you anticipate there being a problem so you can address that first.

# ADAPT FOR GROWTH

*Use the questions on the previous page to get specific about how your business needs to adapt to accommodate the grow you have planned. Consider what will break first if your business grows before increasing its capacity.*

*How will my business adapt to accommodate its growth?*

# ADAPT FOR GROWTH

## *Example: YellowHouse.Media*

*How does the business need to adapt to accommodate 100 podcasters inside Standout Podcast Club at \$99/month?*

- I need to have sufficient time (5-8 hours per week) to answer questions and create content.
- I also need sufficient time to execute our SEO strategy (2 hours per week).
- Sean needs to be able to step away from project management more often.
- We need to be able to trust our team members to be more self-guided on larger parts of each show we manage and our team members need to trust themselves.
- We need to adopt new technology (Clickup) to manage the multi-faceted project management we do.
- We need to keep our existing clients happy and taken care of while we devote significant resources to another area of the business.

There are 2 places where we see this breaking first: my time and our technology (which frees up Sean's time).

### NOTES

# MAKE THE PLAN

Now you've decided how your business is going to grow, what that looks like in terms of real numbers, how your business needs to adapt, and what the top priorities are.

You finally have the raw data you need to make a plan you can execute. From here, I take the pressing items—the adaptations I need to make because they're most likely to break—and turn them into projects I'll complete first. A project is specific and actionable, takes 4-8 weeks to complete, and serves both your Strategic Priorities and the larger Vision you have for your business.

Once I've identified the projects I need to complete, I complete a Project Brief for each one. The Brief answers these questions:

- How will I know when this project complete? How will I measure the results?
- How long will the project take to complete?
- Why does this project matter to our Strategic Priorities & Vision?
- How can the team lend support? How can colleagues or peers lend support?
- What resources are we devoting to this project?
- What are the high-level tasks required to complete this project?

Now that I know what's involved in the project and I've gotten a better handle on how it fits into my capacity, I can put it into my plan. Typically, I assign 3 projects per quarter (essentially, 1 per month—but it never quite works out that way!).

Once I've taken care of the pressing things, I can move on to other projects that serve my strategy and how my business is adapting to growth throughout the rest of the year.

Finally, remember that the goal isn't to *stick to the plan*. Making your plan and working your plan are 2 components of an exciting learning process. You might learn that there are other projects that need to take priority. You might learn that your business has more operational capacity than you realized. You might learn that your timeframe for growth needs to expand or that you can speed it up!

As you go, what you learn should lead you to adjust the plan. Changing your plan isn't a sign of failure, it's a sign of learning and growth in and of itself.

# PROJECT LIST

What projects will you complete so that your business can accommodate the growth you're working toward? How does your business need to adapt? Remember that your projects should have a clear scope and desired outcome.

*Example: "Post on social media more" isn't a clear scope nor is a good way to structure a project. "Post on Instagram 3 times per week for 30 days" is a clear scope. From there, you can track whether your audience grows or you convert more buyers from social media as you execute that project.*

## PROJECTS

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*Make The Plan*

# CALENDAR

*Schedule your top-priority projects for the next 6 months. Remember, projects should take 4-8 weeks to complete and you still have to get all of the other stuff done too! Carefully consider your real capacity and don't overschedule yourself.*

**1**

MONTH

**2**

MONTH

**3**

MONTH

**4**

MONTH

**5**

MONTH

**6**

MONTH

# PROJECT BRIEF

PROJECT

WHEN WILL THIS PROJECT BE COMPLETE?  
WHAT RESULTS ARE WE MEASURING?

HOW LONG WILL THIS PROJECT TAKE?  
WHAT RESOURCES ARE WE DEVOTING TO IT?

WHY DOES THIS PROJECT MATTER TO  
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & VISION?

HOW CAN THE TEAM LEND SUPPORT? HOW CAN  
COLLEAGUES OR PEERS LEND SUPPORT?

# PROJECT BRIEF

## HIGH-LEVEL TASKS



## QUESTIONS TO RESEARCH

TIMEFRAME

MARK AS COMPLETE



# LET'S RECAP

If you want to grow your small business in 2021, start by determining which of 3 strategies you want to focus on: more customers, a higher average transaction, or more frequency of purchases.

Then, translate that strategy into numbers. Determine how many customers you need, paying what price point, purchasing how many times to reach your revenue target.

From there, consider how your business needs to adapt to accommodate those numbers. Finally, turn the adaptations you need to make into projects you can put into your plan for the year.

I'll leave you with this: I've tried to make this process as straightforward as I can. And truly, I believe the planning process is more straightforward than most people expect it to be. But that doesn't mean that it's easy or that you're going to feel 100% confident in the plan you create. You might be making (more or less) educated guesses about what you want, how you'll get it, and how your business needs to adapt.

*Making a guess and creating a plan based on your guesses is going to be more helpful than winging it. Always.*

Just remember that your plan is a hypothesis. Your plan can and should evolve based on new information, new conditions, and new ideas. You don't want it to go whichever way the wind is blowing but you don't want to be rigid about it either.

Having a plan gives you something to work from and helps you find focus when things get wobbly. And that, ultimately, will help you create growth for your small business in 2021.

# THE WHAT WORKS NETWORK

The What Works Network makes it easy to make your business stronger —one day at a time.

We know it can be a challenge to find the time (let alone support) to work on your business. The What Works Network gives you a jumpstart on that important work.

Have a question about how a tactic, piece of software, or system works? Just ask!

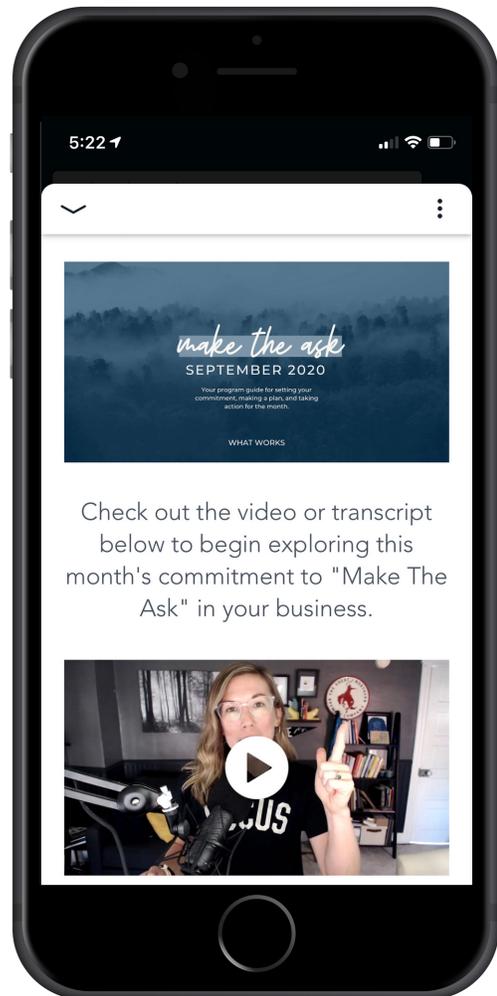
Need help reworking a process or rebuilding a component of your business? There's a tool for that!

Crave the camaraderie of people who "get it?" We're there for you!

You'll save time, money, and hassle as you run & grow your business because you'll have one place to go for support, tools, and resources.

The What Works Network is your comprehensive support system for building a more resilient and sustainable business.

[Learn More](#)



Check out the video or transcript below to begin exploring this month's commitment to "Make The Ask" in your business.

## THE WHAT WORKS PODCAST

The What Works Podcast is free, in-depth content that takes you behind the scenes to discover how small business owners are building stronger businesses. Each month, we tackle a different topic and explore the unique ways entrepreneurs manage it. Listen on your favorite podcast app!