



How to Grow Your Business

For Entrepreneurs

Alex Blyth

Praise for How to Grow Your Business for Entrepreneurs

'This book captures what entrepreneurs need to know to break through their own glass ceilings and to grow their businesses. Written in eminently readable style – whether you're an entrepreneur or director of a small company – you need to read this book.'

'There are so many great ideas in this book – make sure your first action plan is to read a section, implement it, then come back for more!'

DR SHAI VYAKARNAM, DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL
LEARNING, JUDGE BUSINESS SCHOOL,
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

'If you want a practical guide to making your mark and taking your business to the next level, read this book before your competitors do.'

DR SALLY ERNST, UK PRESIDENT,
ENTREPRENEURS' ORGANISATION

'This book is a toolkit for entrepreneurs. It contains so many exercises in analysis and thinking that are applicable at the different stages of growing a business. Alex Blyth clearly recognises that entrepreneurs are short of time and offers practical steps and guidelines'.

RESHMA SOHONI, CEO, SEEDCAMP

Very often we hire on experience and fire on attitude. We select someone who ticks all the boxes in terms of qualifications and experience, but soon discover that they're not well suited to the role. Perhaps they were used to working more independently than you want them to. Perhaps they flourished in a company where procedures were more clearly defined than they are in yours. There are any number of cultural and attitudinal issues that can affect whether or not someone will succeed in a role, so take some time to write down the personality traits and attitudes you believe will be essential to success in this role.

Time saver

Ask your existing staff to write descriptions of their current jobs. Not only will it provide you with a good start on job descriptions when hiring for similar positions, but it will also give you useful information on how they see their roles.



An offer they can't refuse

Once you are crystal clear about what you will gain from your new hire, and what you are looking for, you should spend some time outlining what your new hire will gain from you. At the most obvious level this is the salary and other benefits. However, top performers can get those at any company.

Think also about the less tangible benefits you can offer. Are your premises in a desirable part of town? Can you offer a pleasant working environment? How is your company viewed in the industry or local area? For advice on how to use your trade or local media to build a strong employer brand, see the public relations advice in Chapter Eight.

Think laterally about this. You probably have selling points you haven't even thought of. Ask your existing employees why they chose to work at your company. What long-term opportunities are there for staff? In Chapter Three we covered training, so can you offer career and personal development? In Chapter Five we will look at how to build a flexible package of benefits that motivates staff. Remember that you can also use these to motivate prospective staff to join your company.

You may find that this list comes easily to you. If that's the case, you've got an important head start in recruitment – just make sure you convey all these benefits in your recruitment.

The recruitment and selection process we'll cover in the rest of this chapter can only go so far. If your company is a genuinely unappealing prospect to the people you want to hire, you will still struggle. Take a look at the working environment, your reputation as an employer, the opportunities you're offering, your salary and benefits package and so on. Take steps now to improve them, no matter what they cost. Most businesses are only as good as the people who work in them.

Recruiting for free

You know the sort of person you want to hire and you've got a compelling offer in place. How do you find those people?

The best place to begin looking for new staff is always among your existing staff. Before you start spending any money on ads or any time sifting through CVs, look at your current team and ask yourself whether any of them could do this job. Not only will it save you time and money, but you already know they are a good fit with your organisation.

Danger!

Failing to consider internal candidates is usually a good way to generate resentment towards the new hire, something you should be keen to avoid.



The next best place to look is the grapevine. Ask everyone you know – clients, suppliers, former colleagues, friends, people you meet at industry events and so on – whether they know someone who might fit the bill. You could even consider offering a small incentive to your staff for a successful introduction. The chances are that their friends and family will be similar to them, so they could be ideal hires.

Consider where else you could network to get word out that you're hiring. Are there local organisations or clubs that could provide fertile

hunting grounds? Could you use online social networks? Many recruiters now use networks such as LinkedIn, which has millions of members worldwide. It's relatively easy to build a network of your contacts' contacts, and before you know it you've got hundreds of businesspeople you can ask.

There are also free websites you can use. For example, many visitors to the UK from abroad use Gumtree (www.gumtree.com), and posting a job ad there can reap rewards. You will have to wade through many CVs, but it's free to try and you might find exactly the person you're looking for.

Building links with local schools and universities can ensure a steady stream of job applicants. Get in touch with them and offer to go and speak at a careers event. Offer to take on one or two students for work experience at a time when you're less busy, and you may unearth a star performer. Try to attend graduate recruitment fairs as well.

Finally, don't forget to advertise the position on your own website. You should have a regularly updated vacancies section and you should invite speculative CVs. You may not get a huge number of visitors to your site at the moment, but later in this book we'll be looking at how to change that, and you may find your jobs page becomes more valuable than you imagined.

Four steps to becoming a headhunter

Headhunting is a well-known and highly effective method for recruiting senior staff. However, the problem with headhunters is that they are expensive. It is not uncommon to pay 30 per cent of the employee's first year's salary to the headhunter, and few small businesses can afford a £15,000 fee to recruit an employee who will earn £50,000. By following the four steps below, you may find that you can fill that all-important vacancy yourself and save a lot of money.

Draw up a shortlist

Start by compiling a list of the people you know who might fit your brief. Although one of the richest sources of candidates will be your competitors, they are by no means the only ones. It pays to think laterally about where you find your candidates.

By focusing on the skills required to do the job, rather than purely on the experience traditionally associated with it, you should be able to expand the field quite considerably. Think of people you've met at industry events, or those you've read about or heard speak. If you've not met anyone, read about anyone or heard anyone speak, then it might be time to get out and start networking for these leads – see Chapter Eight for advice on how to do that.

You can also use the contacts you do have. If they've not been able to persuade any of their contacts to apply for your position, give them an easier question: ask them who they think would be really good for this job. Finally, try using the internet. Join online industry forums and see who is active and impressive there.

Do your research

For many, the secret of successful headhunting is research. When good headhunters call potential candidates they already know a lot about them. So, before you pick up the phone to the people on your shortlist, dig around a little.

Find out about their current role, how long they have been in it, the highlights of their time in it, what they were doing before, what colleagues, clients and other business contacts think of them and so on.

When you make your approach you want to be able to flatter them with the effort you've gone to, and you also want to be able to develop a conversation with them. You will only achieve these goals with proper preparation.

Pick up the phone

Once you've done this, the next step is simply to call them up. Call outside of work hours, ideally on a mobile phone, and introduce yourself immediately, telling them honestly why you're calling.

You might find that some will refuse to talk to you. Some might even go straight to their employers. Don't worry too much about that. You're not doing anything wrong. The worst that can happen is that you get on the wrong side of a competitor. So what? This is business. You're not here to make friends with your competitors. Just as customers are free to shop where they like, so employees are free to work where they like – you wouldn't worry about approaching a competitor's customers, so why worry about approaching their staff?

In fact, you'll find that very few people will tell their employers about it. Most people will feel complimented and will be very happy to talk to you.

Softly, softly

Headhunters have a reputation for being aggressive. Indeed, many of them subscribe to the 'second-hand car salesman' school of thought and try at all costs to push people into unsuitable roles. It is easy to see why. Senior executives get dozens of calls every week from headhunters, most of which they dismiss. Those headhunters have to work hard to get a foot in the door and stand a chance of making their 30 per cent.

You, on the other hand, are only interested in finding the right person for the job. You will adopt the tactics of the more sophisticated headhunter and make unobtrusive, friendly calls to people. Rather than going straight in to discuss the job on the table, you will talk about how the executive is developing their career, where they see it going, what they want from their work and so on.

Most people prefer talking about themselves to listening to a salesperson talk up a job, so you will achieve a much better response this way. You may find that it takes longer and some conversations go nowhere. However, a relaxed chat over a coffee that leads nowhere now might in three years' time produce your best ever hire. Successful recruitment is a long-term game, so raise your sights beyond your immediate goal.

Recruitment advertising that works

It may well be the case that you're unable to fill your vacancies with any of these techniques. In that case you will probably need to look at recruitment advertising. There are four factors to get right with recruitment advertising:

- 1** Choosing the right media.
- 2** Getting the right deal.
- 3** Designing an effective ad.
- 4** Writing sparkling copy.

We'll now look at these in some more detail.

Choose the right media

Go into any newsagent, open any internet browser, and you'll see just how many media options you have. The quality and quantity of response your ad generates will vary greatly between different publications and websites. The simple question for you to answer is: where will the right candidates be? Find out what publications they read, which websites they visit, and that is where you should advertise.

Get the right deal

You need to invest time in this research, because choosing the wrong media can be very expensive. Online ads cost around £200–£300 and print ads can be thousands of pounds, although you should generally aim to get at least 20 per cent off the initial price you are quoted. You can usually get much better rates for repeat ads or long-term deals.

Danger!

In your negotiations make sure you know what you are paying for in terms of page positioning, ad design and copywriting.



Design an effective ad

Your ad needs to capture attention and to describe exactly what you are looking for and what you are offering. You almost certainly want to bring in a professional designer to do this for you, as paying thousands of pounds to place a poor ad is just a waste of money. You can hire a freelancer or small agency for a relatively modest investment. See Chapter Eleven on how to select the right agency and get maximum value from it.

Write sparkling copy

In the same way, what you say in your ad needs careful consideration. You might want to consider hiring a professional copywriter, but if you are confident that you can do it yourself, follow these golden rules: