

Survival Basics

As you build your business look for ways to apply the principles listed below. Even better, for every effort that you make, try to apply as many of these principles as possible.

Build a team

You are not alone. Your business requires a team.

At the very least you will need an accountant and a lawyer. Other key players include printing service and shipping vendors; the bank and insurance providers; and special skills services like graphic designers, Flash programmers, editors, etc.

You will also want to line up other technical communicators to help out when you get overwhelmed with work.

Plan for all outcomes

Plan for multiple levels of failure – project through customer through business levels (Hope for success, but plan this part any way – you are trying to survive). Build your savings up. Know your monthly living budget and your business operating budget. How far can you go without losing your home or car?

Use slow and downtimes to build your skills and learn.

More importantly, plan for success. Know your business and development processes before you land a project. Have your team ready to step in and help as needed, etc.

Know your client

Learn everything you can about your clientele. Where do they make money? Where do they lose money? Who do they compete against? How would you run their business? How much money do they earn?

Once you know your client, start looking for ways to help them improve their business and sell those ideas to the client.

Build relationships

Start with your team. Get to know individuals. Learn how to make life easier for them, so they will be more inclined to help you out during a crisis.

Get involved with people with the client's organization. Learn their individual pain points and their job goals. Listen every chance you get.

Connect with others in each of your communities – professional and personal. Communities can include STC (Chapters and SIGS), your local Chamber of Commerce, your neighborhood, your children's school, etc.

Build multiple relationships within each group – team, clients, and communities.

Most importantly, build relationships with people you like and trust.

Involve your client

Make your client see the total effort that goes into your products and services; they will better appreciate where their money is going.

The best method is to bring in decision makers (as well as SMEs) as reviewers, and offer multiple deliverables that lead up to a final deliverable. Project proposals, topic outlines, audience matrices, content layout, and advanced drafts are all good products for involvement.

Another upside to involving your client is that they are more likely to be happy with your end product.

Remain flexible

Adapt yourself to your client's needs. Look for opportunities to help your client. You are selling a service rather than just end products; look for and be open to different ways to help your client.

Avoid getting locked into a particular way of doing things. You may not always be the best answer for a particular client; recognize this before them, and help them find the right solution.

Most importantly, be on a constant search for different ways to apply your skills and strengths to earn money or build your business.

Own your business

Take a deep breath. Let it out slowly. Your professional focus is no longer technical communication. You are now an entrepreneur with a gazillion job functions.

Make rules to operate by, and stick to them.

Value your services and products properly. Do not waste time on underpaying activities; you will lose money.

Stay above client and team politics.

Your most important job function is making good decisions in a timely fashion.

Resources

A list of supporting materials may be found at www.dan-charles.com/resources .