



# FIVE COMMON BUSINESS DISEASES

Just as with human beings, companies can start suffering from ailments simply because of age, growth or poor behavioural patterns. They aren't necessarily any one person's fault, they just seem to happen and can get worse over time if left untreated.



# WE-CAN-DO-EVERYTHING DISORDER

## > Symptoms:

Over time the business has changed their core make-up by adding more and more services or products to their existing offering and now aren't clear about who they really are anymore.

There is mixed (if any) sales messaging other than 'we sell everything and want to attract anyone and everyone'.

The world is their market, although they still can't clearly answer why someone should do business with them instead of their competitors.

They often have a huge pipeline but only drive very few sales.

They typically end up doing a lot of free work or only win new business by discounting prices or by sheer luck.

## > Early Signs:

You'll often hear people saying: We need to offer another service and generate more sales. We could sell that. One of our clients asked for this. No, we don't do them in red but I'm sure we can organise something.

The business tends to carry a lot of stock and the sales team creates new quotes or presentation documents on the fly. They may have a set price list but it's never enforced as everyone discounts and charges what they can to get the business. Everyone is very busy and yet there never seems to be a huge profit.

## > Underlying cause:

Complete loss of vision and focus.

## > If left untreated:

Slow & painful death.

## > Treatment:

A complete refocus of the business' core products and/or services is required. You must identify the type of projects or clients that are most profitable to the business and focus on the services/products those particular clients require. Then get rid of the rest.

A new set of testicles may be required to implement this potentially large change so get buy-in from key decision makers and ensure that staff understand why these changes are happening and why they are so important to the future of the company. Put processes in place to ensure employees follow the new directive.

# ANY-BUSINESS-IS-GOOD-BUSINESS DISEASE

## > Symptoms:

They can't spot a potentially good client from a bad one.

They'll go for any project regardless of how small or unprofitable it may be.

They'll discount prices to get the work and will say yes to almost any client request regardless of whether it can be delivered properly or on time.

They're often doing extra work for free on the premise of potential future work or for fear of losing a client.

They're always extremely busy but never running a decent profit.

They don't have a proper idea of what their profit margin is and hence under-quote for projects.

They occasionally work with nice, friendly clients but don't know why the rest always seem to be such ar\*eholes.

## > Early Signs:

Clients not paying on time/ poor cash-flow.

Directors living from hand to mouth and not taking dividends as there aren't any.

Unhappy staff atmosphere because of rude, difficult or demanding clients.

Staff being kept too busy resulting in costly mistakes or underperforming.

Projects often running late and profit margins slipping because clients are being allowed to change their minds.

## > Underlying cause:

Desperation, fear and denial.

## > If left untreated:

Loss of profit, employee churn, exhaustion and heart attack.

## > Treatment:

You MUST cut off poor clients and only go for those that will definitely benefit your business, both financially and from a work environment point of view. Ensure that the core management and sales teams are made aware of the financial impact that 'bad' clients or projects are having on the business.

Learn to say no and be firm with new clients from the start when it comes to costs. Be clear on your profit margins and make sure your sales team works to a very clear price structure. Make it good practice not to offer discounts or extras. Clients will come to expect it and you will lose out in the long term. Remember, not all business is good business and it's your choice who you wish to work with.

# THE-MARKET-DICTATES VIRUS

## > Symptoms:

The business won't break from the norm as 'being different simply isn't done in their industry'.

They do the best they can with the resources available, but tend to lose big opportunities to bigger competitors and small opportunities to smaller competitors.

They're often found giving away free advice to potential clients, suffer from long protracted sales processes and deliver massive PowerPoint slide decks to convince a new client prospect.

They often suffer physically from an aching shoulder after carrying a laptop around to hundreds of unproductive meetings.

They suffer constant frustration, which creates low moral and bad moods, which in turn affects the way they sell or interact with new client prospects.

## > Early Signs:

You'll often hear people saying; But our market is different. They want us to sharpen our pencil. They can get it cheaper down the road so we have to lower our prices. Pitching/tendering is just part of the process in our industry. A 1 in 5 win is good. I've sent them six emails and still no reply, maybe I'll call them instead.

They tend to do the same as they have always done but keep on getting worse and worse results, although the odd win means they think the process is still working. And they've often employed a 23 year old marketing director because he/she knows all about that 'social media stuff' so must be qualified and our clients will love her.

## > Underlying cause:

No leadership.

## > If left untreated:

Stagnation.

## > Treatment:

A complete refocus of sales structures and key messaging. The company requires a total change in mindset and serious leadership is required right from the top. You must understand that the market doesn't dictate how your business operates or what it charges, you do. You don't have to change your prices, you just need to tell the market more clearly why they should be paying them.

Remember, there are millions of potential clients and only a few of you. So you are the limited resource and therefore you dictate to the market, not the other way around.

# MAYBE-WHEN-I'M-NOT-SO-BUSYITIS

## > Symptoms:

They're always keeping very busy doing things that aren't vital.

They want to maintain total control of every minor aspect of the business rather than delegate.

They constantly work IN the business as an employee, rather than ON it as a manager/director.

They never want to spend money and work to a very low-risk business strategy.

They're always working late or on weekends. They're constantly on the phone or checking emails, even on holiday.

## > Early Signs:

The business is relatively stable but it has never moved forward.

If at all investing in the business, they always go for the cheapest supplier but then complain about mediocre service or results.

Always prefers to be doing project work or dealing with clients rather than deal with managerial tasks.

## > Underlying cause:

Procrastination, lack of drive and no clear vision for the business as a whole.

## > If left untreated:

No real change, just more of the same.

## > Treatment:

A quick course of Wake-Up-And-Smell-The-Coffee Pills, to be taken twice daily. A new company vision is required urgently to stimulate growth, unless the business is simply there to provide/maintain a certain lifestyle for the owner. (If this is the case, they need to work out whether this is likely to change in the future and what steps need to be undertaken to facilitate that change.)

They must learn to understand that quality, external advice or help costs money and cheap isn't necessarily the best option for the business. They need to identify their comfort zones and summon the strength to challenge and overcome them.

They must learn to understand that business is not about getting their emotional needs met, but about going to the bank. This may call for outside help, at least at the beginning, to help them realise where the main issues lie and what can be done to fix them.

# YES-BUT-WE-REALY-ARE-DIFFERENT SYNDROME

## > Symptoms:

They end up trying the same formula over and over again and getting spasmodic results.

No clear message or product differentiators (thinks the product or service IS the difference).

They have lots of management meetings discussing how to change things but then never do and end up going round and round in circles.

They know there's something wrong with the business but they can't quite put their finger on it.

## > Early Signs:

You'll often hear people saying: Our people are our difference. We're really friendly, no seriously, we really are. We win all our clients through referral. Our clients love us. Etc.

They always blame bigger or cheaper competitors for losing out on a client/project.

They produce lots of lengthy presentations to try and win business.

Most new business comes through referrals or via existing clients and not through pitches or other marketing initiatives.

## > Underlying cause:

Madness.

## > If left untreated:

Overdraft, debt or bankruptcy. A very slow, chaotic-growth or lifestyle business is the best scenario.

## > Treatment:

Inhale, exhale and repeat: "We are delusional and need help!"  
The business desperately needs to create a brand and a clear message to market, a clear differentiator to attract new clients.

It's vital to be honest about the business. You aren't different from any other competitor out there unless you can create a structure, process or offering that IS different. Get professional help!

# IN CASE OF EMERGENCY.

Over the past 15 years we have worked with hundreds of businesses of various different shapes, sizes and verticals and during this time we have found that these afflictions seem to show up again and again.

The good news is that for every business disease there is a cure, although as with most problems the sooner they are diagnosed and dealt with the easier they become to fix.

Here again we have spotted some common denominators that can greatly help with a speedy recovery:

- > The willingness to listen and learn.
- > The ability to be honest about situations and a willingness to accept change.
- > Making decisions to act quickly.

Without these characteristics unfortunately there is little anyone can do to help so make sure you can get the right people in the right mindset!

If you think you may be suffering from one of these diseases and would like to talk to us about improving your brand & business initiatives, then please get in touch for a no obligation chat!

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