

Monthly Newswire

Welcome to our monthly newswire. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it useful.

August 2021

Strategic challenges in the new normal

As we move towards a post-pandemic recovery and the economy begins to stabilise in the next few months, businesses face new challenges and will have to adapt to a new normal.

Supply chain issues

Supply chains were disrupted as producers and manufacturers shut down during the pandemic. Some businesses are now facing difficulties in obtaining the materials or products that they need. In other cases, the price of raw materials has gone up due to scarcity caused by lack of production throughout the past 18 months or so.

Managing supply chain issues is difficult and the best thing that businesses can do is to manage the expectations of their customers. It is important to stress that supply chain challenges tend to be temporary. As the global economy recovers, manufacturing, production and shipping should eventually return to normal.

Staffing

Many businesses are struggling to fill roles. Perhaps potential candidates are unwilling to move during uncertain times, or maybe the booming tech industry has absorbed all the best talent. Either way, many businesses are struggling to hire good people.

Some businesses are adding creative perks or benefits to attract staff. Besides health care or pension contributions, some firms are attracting talent with unlimited holiday, remote working opportunities or career development through staff education programmes and sponsored learning.

Profitability issues

Businesses that have survived the pandemic may have burned up their cash reserves or taken on additional debt to finance themselves throughout the last 18 months.

Businesses should plan for a difficult trading environment for some time yet. Sales could continue to struggle, the cost of materials could be higher for some time yet and labour costs, taxation or regulatory costs could be higher. As such, businesses should try to keep costs down where possible. In addition, they should double down on their marketing efforts in order to drive sales and ultimately, revenue.

Last year, businesses had to adapt to conditions created by the pandemic. In 2021, they must adapt to the aftermath. There will be opportunities to innovate and evolve business models, introduce new products or services, etc. The businesses that adapt and create new opportunities or competitive advantages will be the most successful.

Unlimited holiday

Unlimited paid holiday allowance sounds appealing but it can be difficult to implement.

Unlimited holiday allowance is becoming an increasingly popular benefit. Such policies are particularly popular with American tech businesses such as Netflix, LinkedIn, and the like. In an increasingly competitive market where businesses are battling to attract talented employees, unlimited holiday allowance is seen by many potential employees as an incredibly attractive benefit.

On the face of it, allowing staff the freedom and flexibility to take time off as they please certainly gives your business an edge over rivals who don't offer such a benefit.

From your team's perspective, they can work and play as they want, and this can make for a happier and more productive workforce. However, implementing an unlimited holiday allowance policy is harder than it seems. People can be bad at taking holiday and may be reluctant to do handovers and pass responsibility for deadlines over to others. Instead they may choose to just keep working. Some staff may become anxious about being seen to take too much holiday and may end up taking less as a result.

In an environment that has set objectives and performance metrics, it can be hard to get people to take time off. With a fixed holiday allowance, you can encourage them to take say 25 or 30 days holiday each year. If holiday is unlimited and there is no clear expectation, management can struggle to get people to take holiday. If holiday allowance is open and completely flexible, some employees may abuse the system and leave other colleagues to pick up the slack which can lead to tension between colleagues.

If team members regularly take extended holiday, they could end up paying the price when they return to the office. They may have to work day and night to catch up. This could have a negative effect on their home life and lead to stress or burnout. Due to the ongoing pandemic, many businesses are now experimenting with flexible working arrangements in order to find what works best for their team. As such, the limitations of unlimited holiday policies could soon be more widely tested.

Stop networking and focus on connecting

Networking is about knowing more people. Connecting is about knowing people more.

We all know lots of people professionally or personally, but we are only really connected with a small percentage of those people.

When you are at a business, social or charitable event, you will likely run into many people you know. But in many cases, you will know them “socially” or “professionally”, which is a way of saying you know them, who they are, but are not deeply connected with them and have no investment in their successes or failures. A good example of this is LinkedIn. You may have 2,000 people in your LinkedIn network but if you run through that list, you may find that you are only truly connected with 50-100 of those people.

True connections make up your community. They are the people with whom you have built a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. They may send you business referrals or you may be the person they ask for advice before they make a personal decision. True connections often cross the line between business and personal. If you build a great connection with a business contact, you may, for example, end up socialising with their family and yours.

So how do you go about building more connections? Learn how to talk about yourself in a meaningful, engaging and memorable way. If we want to build a mutually beneficial relationship with a person, we have to be clear about who we are, what we're doing and how we could potentially help one another along the way. Figure out how to help and support the person that you are trying to connect with.

Focus on creating a mutual transfer of knowledge and information. Share success stories and discuss challenges that you both face. This may help you to find some common ground.



Don't reach out to a contact and ask for a favour straight away. Get to know them first, demonstrate your potential and then do something of value for them. For example, offer to make a helpful introduction to someone in your network. Once you have done that, they will be more open to doing a favour for you at some point in the future. Developing your connections may be a bit more difficult in the current environment so you may have to adapt your approach. For example - rather than meeting a contact for a drink after work, you may have to set up a virtual drink on Zoom or Skype. The key is to adapt your strategy and to give it a go. The more you try to build connections, the better you will get, over time.

Evernote

Evernote is a note taking app designed for business users.

Evernote is a free app for smartphones and computers that is designed to help you to manage and store everything from notes, to do lists, receipts, boarding passes, articles you want to read, and more.

The app works well across multiple devices and keeps everything in sync between your smartphone, tablet and computer.

It works on various platforms including Windows, Mac, iPhone / iPad and Android. The desktop PC version of Evernote is a powerful and quick tool that allows you to create, sync and update notes and clips from your desktop and then sync them to a cloud account to share your content across all of your devices.

To use Evernote, you need to download it to your chosen device and create a free account. Once you have signed up, you'll be presented with the main Evernote screen. Here you can access all of the features such as notes, notebooks, tags and your most commonly used notes (favourites).

You can also create collections of notebooks such as your Work stack or Personal stack. Evernote has an excellent search function which allows you to search for text in typed notes, images, text in PDFs and text in attached office files. Evernote also offers a wealth of tools for sorting and finding your notes in other ways such as tags and even geolocation tags.

From a business user's perspective, a particularly helpful feature is the ability to scan and digitize business cards - which works very well when using Evernote on your mobile device.

Evernote offers three tiers from Basic (which is free) to Premium and Business, which offer additional features for a monthly fee. The Basic option is quite limited with up to 60mb of new uploads per month and synchronization across 2 devices. The Premium option costs \$69.99 or just over £50 per year and offers 10GB of new uploads per month, sync across all of your devices and customer support via live chat. If you need more storage you can upgrade to the Business package which offers 20GB of new uploads per month and an additional 2GB per user.

If you would like to try Evernote before committing to it, you can sign up for the Basic (free) account on evernote.com.