

The SWOT kit for growing businesses

From four boxes to a plan that works. Made for owner-led businesses, not boardrooms.

Before you start

A SWOT looks at your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Done well, it takes half a day and gives you three things to act on.

1

Block out half a day

Not twenty minutes at the end of a busy one. A rushed SWOT only tells you what you already think.

2

Bring a challenger

A business partner, mentor or adviser who will keep asking "why?" If you work alone, page 3 shows you how to challenge yourself.

3

Gather the evidence

Last year's figures, your top ten clients and what they spend, recent feedback, and what competitors charge.

4

Keep it short

Four or five points a box, each specific enough to act on. If everything is a priority, nothing is.

The owner test

In an owner-led business, your biggest strength and your biggest risk are often the same thing: you. Your knowledge and relationships are why clients come to you, and why the business can't yet grow beyond you.

As you fill in each box, tick the **"Depends on me?"** box ☐ next to anything that relies on you personally. If most of your strengths are ticked, that is your first weakness too.

What's inside

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Your SWOT, with questions written for growing businesses

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Five chairs: test your SWOT from five points of view

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The TOWS matrix: pair the boxes to find actions

Page 4

Your top three actions, sized to your budget

STEP 1

Your SWOT

Business: _____ Date: _____

INSIDE THE BUSINESS: HELPFUL

Strengths

- What do clients thank you for?
- Why do clients choose you over a bigger firm?
- What could you do tomorrow that a competitor couldn't?

Depends on me?

☐☐☐☐☐

INSIDE THE BUSINESS: HARMFUL

Weaknesses

- What would happen if you were off for a month?
- Where does work pile up waiting for you?
- What do you keep meaning to sort out: systems, pricing, website?

Depends on me?

☐☐☐☐☐

OUTSIDE THE BUSINESS: HELPFUL

Opportunities

- Which clients or sectors are asking for more?
- What is changing locally, in law or in technology that you could use?
- Who could you partner with, or refer work to and from?

Depends on me?

☐☐☐☐☐

OUTSIDE THE BUSINESS: HARMFUL

Threats

- Which client would hurt most to lose, and what share of income are they?
- What could rising costs, new rules or a new competitor do to you?
- What is outside your control that keeps you up at night?

Depends on me?

☐☐☐☐☐

☐ Tick "Depends on me?" if the point relies on you personally. Then ask "so what?" of every line: if you can't say why it matters, cross it out.

STEP 2

Five chairs around the table

No board? Borrow one. Read your SWOT back from each of these five points of view, or ask five people to play them. It is the quickest way to find what you have missed, and what you have been too kind to yourself about.

1 Your best client

"Is that really why I buy from you?"

Would they agree with your strengths? What would they add, and what frustrates them?

Notes

2 Your bookkeeper

"Show me the numbers."

Which points can you prove with figures? Which client or service actually makes you money?

Notes

3 Your toughest competitor

"That's the weak spot I'd go after."

Which weakness would they target first? Which of your strengths could they copy within a year?

Notes

4 The newcomer

"Why do you do it that way?"

Ask the obvious questions. What would someone starting in your business tomorrow find odd, slow or risky?

Notes

5 You, three years from now

"I wish I'd started that sooner."

Which of these points will matter most by then? Which threat will have grown? What will you be glad you dealt with this year?

Notes

Working alone? A Get Ahead Regional Director, a mentor or a trusted adviser can take any chair. Sometimes the most useful thing is simply someone who will ask the questions you haven't thought to ask yourself.

STEP 3

Turn it into actions: the TOWS matrix

Pair the boxes. Each pairing suggests a different kind of action. Write one or two ideas in each.

Strengths + Opportunities

How can we use what we're good at to take this opportunity?

For example: a strong local reputation, and a new business park opening nearby. Introduce yourself to the tenants.

Weaknesses + Opportunities

What do we need to fix before we can take it?

For example: clients want to book online, and you take bookings by phone. Set up online booking before the busy season.

Strengths + Threats

How can our strengths protect us?

For example: a cheaper competitor arrives. Lean on service and relationships, not price.

Weaknesses + Threats

Where could a threat exploit a weak spot?

For example: two clients make up most of your income. Win three new ones before either contract is up for renewal.

Your top three actions

Choose no more than three, in order. Give each an owner and a date, and a version that fits a lean month, because when cash is tight the plan still needs to move.

	Action	Who	By when	Lean-month version
1				
2				
3				

Book a review three to six months from now: _____

Want a fresh pair of eyes on your SWOT?

Talk to your local Regional Director: getaheadva.com/regions

0330 223 7580

Was this kit useful? Anything you'd add or change? We'd love to hear from you.

Email us your thoughts



About Get Ahead. Get Ahead is a UK-wide virtual business support agency, founded by Rebecca Newenham in 2010. Our Regional Directors connect growing and owner-led businesses with more than 90 UK-trained Virtual Experts, from admin and marketing to finance, HR and websites, with no minimum hours and no long-term tie-ins. Find out more at getaheadva.com.