

THAT'LL DO STARS 2021 BUSINESS GUIDE



Plusnet
**THAT'LL
DO STAR**
2021

INTRODUCTION

We launched That'll Do Stars 2021 after seeing a huge number of incredible businesses start in exceptional circumstances. We wanted to help and support you, as a new business owner, by offering tips and tricks for running a business in the second year. The guide covers everything from social media best practice, hacks for maintaining growth, and how to keep your brain at its best to avoid burnout. We already support small businesses with superfast, affordable business broadband packages, but want to go one step further to support our incredible lockdown heroes.

We look forward to following your journey.

Nick Silverwood
Head of Business at Plusnet



HOW TO ADD ROCKET FUEL TO YOUR BUSINESS BY BECOMING A SOCIAL MEDIA EXPERT

Social media has created the biggest shopping centre in the world and the average Brit now spends two and a half hours a day on online platforms browsing the virtual aisles, and the pandemic has only added to this online revolution. Creating a Facebook page, Instagram account or signing up to Twitter will not cost a penny and those who use the platforms to market their products effectively will see the value of their business take off.

Here, we offer straight-talking tips on how to add rocket-fuel to your social media marketing plans. No jargon, no waffle, no b*ull. That'll do.



Start Smart:

It sounds old fashioned but start by grabbing a pen and a blank piece of paper, because any social media plan kicks-off with a SMART framework. Begin by writing down the specific aim you have: are you trying to grow followers or sell lots of stuff? Or both? How long will the campaign last for? Next, decide how to measure it and then ask is it actually attainable? For example; we'd all like 170 million followers, but we're not all Justin Bieber. Ensuring your plan is relevant to your business is vital, as is setting a timely deadline so you have an end point in sight. Once your plan and timeline are nailed, you have yourself a business roadmap.

Look left and right before crossing into a digital world:

Before you start, check out the competition; visit their websites and social media pages to see what they do well. Get inspiration for what opportunities exist in your sector. Take note of the keywords they use which work, find whether they get most of their web traffic from. Look through their social and find out what other brands they partner with and how collaborations perform. What we're trying to say here is set up Google and Twitter alerts for your rivals, and watch them like a hawk.

Who Is Your Audience?

More than 4.2 billion people are now on social media - double the amount five years ago. Don't try and speak to them all, identify the key people you want to target. Who are they? What are their interests, motivations, and behaviours? Where do they go to relax? How old are they and where do they live? On knowing her audience, the fashion designer Laura Ashley once said: "We don't want to push our ideas onto customers. We simply want to make what they want."

Without knowing what makes your customer smile you are shooting in the dark. Oh, and don't fall for the myth everyone on social media rides a skateboard and is under the age of 30. Did you know adults aged over 65 are Facebook's fastest growing audience?

"If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell six friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends."

Jeff Bezos, Founder, Amazon

Choose Your Platform:

Think carefully about which social media platform you want to be on - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Pinterest are the most popular. Facebook is a great place to sell your products, Twitter will help you reach out to customers, Instagram and Pinterest allow you to tell the story of your business and LinkedIn will help to generate new leads and partnerships. Start by choosing one or two then build from there.

Build Relationships:

Just being on social media is not enough - you must work tirelessly to build relationships, rather than just obsessing about followers. You have to constantly interact with your consumers. Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple, once said: "Get closer than ever to customers. So close that you tell them what you need long before they realize it themselves."

So, how do you do this? You can start simply just by following back those who follow you. Always @mention people you reference in your social media posts and answer questions when people ask. Consider running Twitter polls or Facebook surveys to spark interactions with followers. Do not forget about hashtags (#). They can make your content more searchable in networks like Twitter and Instagram. Consider making customers brand advocates and partners in your business and publish customer ratings and reviews – highlight the ones that read authentically and would make your target audience stop their scroll and think, That'll do.

Stay Active:

Social media accounts covered in cobwebs are a no-no; keep your content up to date and relevant. This doesn't mean tweeting every second of the day, you should always focus on quality over quantity and avoid pestering customers. Take note of when people interact the most – if your users are most active at 7pm then use tools to schedule content around that time. Consider keeping a blog – not only do these give your audience more in terms of content, but they're a great tool for SEO. Constantly challenge the type of content you put out - might a podcast help your brand? Would a YouTube video help connect you to a new audience? Keep content fresh, make it short and avoid making everything into an ad.

Sell, Sell, Sell:

Remember, social media is the world's biggest shopping centre so, it is vital you are open for business. Make sure your website has a shopping cart service by using tools like Volusion, Shopify or BigCommerce. If you sell individual items, you can use eBay, Amazon or Facebook Marketplace. Once a customer buys from you follow up the sale. At least 36 per cent of people who purchase from you once will buy again if you follow up with them. Closing your first sale is the hardest, but by using back-end selling techniques to get your customer to buy again, you can reap the rewards of that sale for years to come. Catch the eyes of both new and existing customers by running online giveaways and providing links to discounts and special promotion.

Reality Check:

According to a Plusnet poll, almost a quarter (22%) of Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) owners said they “wished they’d known more about social media marketing” when launching their business – half the reason we pulled together this guide!

Oh, and Facebook is the most popular platform used by UK SMEs to connect with customers - accounting for almost half (43%) (heads up, it’s worth learning all you can about Facebook Ads, you’re going to need them!).

Plusnet also found 33% of small business owners say they’ve moved the “majority” of their business online, and half of which said this is where their customers discover their business. This surge in online usage probably accounts for the 52% of SME decision makers who now rely on tech in their business more than they did before Covid.

Nearly half of small firms - 43% - have needed help with Internet and broadband, so now feels like a pretty good place to mention Plusnet has several super-fast, super affordable broadband packages for businesses. Prices starts at £22 per month for 24-month contract. That’ll do.

Track, Trace, Refine:

Be prepared to be wrong and constantly review what you are doing. Question what works and what doesn’t. Use analytical tools to see how traffic to your website is being impacted and don’t be afraid to change course from the original plans you set out. Social media is constantly evolving - so your strategy needs to move with it.

Join The Dots:

Make sure your website is connected to your social media pages. Don’t have a website? Create one via services like Squarespace, Wordpress and OnePager. Don’t worry if it looks a bit rough around the edges at first, you can improve it later. Ensure you’ve added social media buttons to your website and email signature so that people can easily share content. Also, if you have a team of staff get them engaged too and make sure they know the campaign inside out.

Pay Attention To Trends:

The American financier Bernard Baruch once said: “Most of the successful people I’ve known are the ones who do more listening than talking.” Listen and look around as you build your marketing plan. Keep your eyes open and ears tuned to news stories relating to your product. Read blogs. Check forums and message boards. Capture every bit of data you can. Build off the buzz, comment widely and showcase expertise. It attracts followers and boosts brands.

Keep It Real:

Social media may exist online but that doesn’t stop you from showing a human side. Avoid anonymity. Like Natalie Massanet, the founder of Net-A-Porter, once said: “If you want success, be unique.” So be authentic. Use real photos, show your face, be open about your background. Say what you are proud of and what your company stands for.

Mix It Up:

Everyone is shouting to be heard on social media. To stand out, never parrot content everyone else posts and instead offer something valuable. Aim for 80% of your content to inform, educate, or entertain and use the other 20% to promote your brand or sell your products. Mix things up with your content - photo and video content are incredibly popular right now, but have you considered other ways to use them? Lighten things up too; whatever your niche, you can share a joke now and then. A funny image or video will go down well with your followers.

HACKS TO GET THROUGH YEAR TWO

If you set up shop in 2020 and made it through year one, give yourself a pat on the back. You launched a business during a global pandemic and are still trading. This is an exciting time! You got over your first set of hurdles and obstacles, but now it's time to buckle up and get ready for more.

You might be surprised to learn the market has never been so competitive. Data shows a record 835,000 new businesses launched in 2020 - up 40 per cent on the year before. That'll do!

Some people set up businesses after being made redundant, others used lockdown to get their big idea off the ground while many turned what started as a side-hustle into a business. In your first year of operation you are just getting going, pushing along, and trying to make it work. You are learning and making mistakes that are recoverable. In year two, you may have more time to dig into details, assess where you are lacking, and make a real business plan that spurs you forward. So how do you turn a lockdown success story into a business for life? Start by reading our Business Guide's hacks for avoiding the second-year blues.



“If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time”

Steve Jobs

Swot up:

No, we're not talking about getting rid of flies, we're talking about SWOT analysis. Carrying out a SWOT analysis will give your business the wings to grow. Note down your company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as these will help create a roadmap for your second year. Also take time to reflect on the wins and losses of year one and ask customers what they like and dislike about your brand. Develop a thick skin and use their advice to improve.

Get funding:

Is now the time to increase investment into your business? Start-up capital can come from various means. You might want to consider a business loan or a business grant or pitch for an injection of cash from an investor. Alternatively, you may want to go down the crowdfund route - an increasingly popular tool businesses use to secure the funding they need to take them to the next level. Remember to pay close attention to your cash flow to make sure you don't overstretch yourself!

Build your team:

You might have spent the last year making, selling and delivering your product all on your own, but this can't carry on forever – particularly if you want to continue growing, fast. As Microsoft Founder Bill Gates, once said: “The key for us, number one, has been hiring very smart people.” To take your business to the next level you will eventually need to hire a great team. So, ask yourself; Is now the time to do so?

“Don't define “success” as the outcome, define it as having the courage to start the process, and everything the process gives you.”

Steven Barlett

Advertise:

Word of mouth and a top social media campaign will only take you so far. Eventually, to reach a larger audience, and to get in front of the customers you really want to attract you may need to advertise. As well as your local newspaper or radio station consider setting aside cash to invest in Google ads and Facebook marketing. It could reap rewards down the line.

Scale Up:

Building on a successful year one is vital. Is now the time right to expand your levels of production? Might you think about purchasing new tech to develop your product or brand? Is this the right moment to increase your prices so you can take on less work while making the same amount? As the Founder and CEO of a start-up – you constantly need to ask yourself ‘how’. How can you be better? How can you develop? How can you grow?

“Grab all opportunities”

Kanya King

Set New Goals:

Basketball legend Michael Jordan once said: “Obstacles don’t have to stop you if you run into a wall. Don’t turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through or work around it.” Couldn’t have said it better ourselves, setting goals are vital! Why? Because they make you think bigger and bolder and give you something to work towards. Back in the day, we set ourselves the goal of being the best value-for-money, straight-talking, broadband provider going. That’ll do.

Where will you work from?

Covid 19 has transformed the way we work and many businesses are now asking employees to carry on Zooming in from home (here’s looking at you, Google) while others plan to combine remote working with time in the office. Think carefully about the kind of premises you need - would your team work better under one roof? Yes? You need to get an office. If you think they can work well, if not better remotely and you can save on the cost of office rent, do they have the right kit to perform what is required from their home?

“Every problem is a gift — without problems we would not grow.”

Anthony Robbins, US Author and Life-Coach

Am I protected?:

This may seem like an odd question, but insurance and security are easy to overlook during your first year of business. Year two is when you need to make sure every detail is addressed which includes keeping your business protected from a number of potential dangers, both online and offline. So, we’re asking you - is your business currently insured? No? Well it may pay to know that nearly all businesses benefit from some level of liability insurance. Next, consider the security of your office – especially if you work from home. For businesses that hold a lot of data and personal information, you need to ensure it is kept safe from the growing number of cyber-criminals who have emerged during lockdown. Oh, and it’s a good time to make sure any terms and condition on your website and contract with suppliers are legally soundproof.

“I never dreamed about success. I worked for it.”

Estée Lauder

Network:

In year two you may need to rely on your network now more than ever. Now is the time to assess who is in your corner and where you need guidance, support, or another set of hands. Make networking a priority but be targeted with your approach. As top US businesswoman and influencer Sallie Krawcheck once said: “Networking is the number one unwritten rule of success in business.”

If you are feeling stuck in your business, then it’s a great time to network with people who run a similar business to yours. These industry professionals are likely to have been where you are and can provide invaluable insight into getting over your current obstacle or reaching the next level.

Have a plan B:

Even with your best efforts, you won’t reach every goal and knowing this allows for some variation in your plans. Make sure, when mapping your goals or plans that you also come up with alternatives that address unexpected challenges or opportunities that are beyond your control. Most importantly, don’t beat yourself up on every small mistake you make. You have launched a new business – it’s going to be a sea of mistakes and trip-ups for you to navigate. Be kind to yourself and learn to reward yourself when you do something well! As the great football manager Sir Alex Ferguson once said: “As long as there are games to play it is not over.”

“What I know is, is that if you do work that you love, and the work fulfills you, the rest will come”

Oprah Winfrey

Reality Check:

According to a recent Plusnet poll, 84% of SMEs feel optimistic about the ability to grow their business in the next 12 months. That is despite 49% admitting they did fear the pandemic would lead to the closure of their business. On the objectives of running a business, SME owners said that having happy customers (51%) was the most important factor in terms of their business outlook.

BEAT THE BURN OUT

A brilliant social media plan and a roadmap to get through your second year will count for nothing if you are too exhausted to run your business. Since 2015 online searches for the term ‘occupational burnout’ increased by more than 2,500% and, according to the 2020 Global Culture Report, 79% of adults now suffer from mild, moderate, or extreme symptoms of burnout.

Signs that burnout is kicking in include losing sight of what’s important, talking about ‘jacking it all in’ and regularly making mistakes, dancing to someone else’s tune, feeling like you are running on empty, and suffering from anxiety are other indicators that you need to slow down. Thankfully, help is at hand. Here, we share tips on how to beat the burn out, stay on track and remain as healthy as the business you are growing.



Make A “To Don’t” List:

We all know that feeling. You start the day writing down a long list of tasks you think you MUST complete and inevitably, don't get through them all. While writing things down is a great habit to have, try switching this round by highlighting the things you are unlikely to achieve. This not only relieves the pressure and helps you prioritise, but it also creates a more realistic and manageable to-do list.

“Don’t confuse having a career with having a life.”

Hilary Clinton, US Politician

Stop and Think:

Albert Einstein once said: “If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.” In other words, the key to unlocking productivity is to invest time in thinking rather than jumping in feet first. Taking ten mindful minutes out to think every day will not only boost your wellbeing – it will help you solve problems more effectively.

Be more like your mobile:

You know how twitchy you get when your mobile is on 1%? But how are you making sure your energy levels don't sink to zero? According to a global survey by LinkedIn, the average employee had 14 days of unused holiday last year, so it's little wonder then that burnout is soaring. Make time for downtime and if you employ staff, check they are doing the same.

You Can Do Anything, But Not Everything:

According to Richard Branson “if you really want to grow as an entrepreneur, you've got to learn to delegate.” The first step towards avoiding burn out is admitting you can't do everything on your own. Look around you and ask for support because delegation doesn't only free up your time it shows you have faith in the people around you.

Get Organised:

An overflowing in-box and a cluttered desk triggers anxiety the moment you arrive at work. Set aside time to get through the backlog and establish better ways to keep on top of emails and other tasks.

Sleep Well, Eat Well and Just Move:

An obvious one but looking after your body and mind means good sleep hygiene and eating a healthy, varied diet. Going to bed and waking up at the same time can reinforce the circadian rhythm. This can help your bodily functions and cycles operate efficiently, keeping you energised throughout the day. Daily movement of some kind whether that's in the gym or just a walk in fresh air is one of the best things you can do for overall health.

“Don't count the days, make the days count.”

Muhammad Ali, The Greatest

Be A Workplace Champion:

Howard Schultz, the chairman and CEO of Starbucks, once said: “Success is best when it's shared.” Employers will run faster and harder for bosses who go the extra mile for them. Think about offering regular online fitness or yoga classes to reduce burnout or boost morale via virtual group games like bingo or quizzes.

“Out Of Office” Is Not Just For Holidays:

For many, the Out Of Office message is something they frantically click on before clocking off for a holiday, but it is also a tool that can help fix burnout and promote stress-free working. Use it more like a hotel 'Do Not Disturb' sign; put it on to tell people you aren't available to talk or that you are taking some time out of the office - even if it's just for an hour or two. You will quickly find yourself taking more control of your own working day.

“There's no reason to be the richest man in the cemetery, you can't do business there...”

Colonel Sanders, Founder KFC

Set Time Boundaries:

Nobody can be available 24/7, so tell people the hours you are working and stick to them. There are simple, effective ways of communicating your working hours to your colleagues such as adding them to your email signature or telling people when you'll be finishing for the day. Respecting other people's time boundaries is also key. Avoid sending emails at 11pm saying: 'Don't worry about this until the morning' as you might forget about it but the person receiving it is unlikely to.

Take 15:

Make one hour Zoom meetings a thing of the past - switch them to 45 minutes and use the other 15 to go for a walk, grab a coffee or take some time out for yourself. It could spark your most productive moment of the day! That'll do.

Take Back Control:

How annoying - and exhausting - would it be to answer the doorbell 65 times each day? Yet that is the daily average number of notifications a person gets on their mobile or tablet. Never ending notifications can often feel as though you are playing virtual whack-a-mole at work and you can soon end up feeling overwhelmed and sidetracked. Avoid it by designating times during the working day when you are going to check messages and make use of the snooze button which exists on most email platforms.

Get That Friday Feeling:

When was the last time you hummed that tune from the Crunchie Advert? (Hint: its Excited by the Pointer Sisters). We're pretty sure a select few SME owners leave work on a Friday thinking about clocking off and winding down, because, we know most of you work weekends. However, it's important to remember that by working smarter you can reinject that Friday Feeling into your life and that of your team.

Aim to create time at the end of the week with no external demands or interruptions or make Fridays Zoom-free and ban meetings. Could you turn Friday mornings into team bonding or switch up your afternoons to work on strategy or socialising? Blocking Fridays out can often help ensure you start Mondays with a spring in your step and work a lot smarter in the week ahead.

Reality Check:

In a recent Plusnet poll over half (56%) of SME owners said they felt more productive if they take at least a 45-minute break, 48% felt more productive when they take at least 5 weeks holiday and 45% said they are more productive if they spend six or more hours away from the screen.

WELL, THAT'S A WRAP

Well, that's a wrap on our That'll Do Stars Business Guide! Plusnet is proud to support small businesses, not only through our Business Broadband, but through celebrating the lockdown start-ups that carried out the best service for their communities and the economy during the pandemic.

You went above and beyond and gave us all, more than we bargained for. That'll do.



