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how to choose a Home Business

(with a better than average chance of success)

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Whoever said, "Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life," may have had home businesses in mind. A home business should be chosen on a personal level, something you will love doing, something you might even do if you didn't make any money at it.

So ditch that fancy, detailed business plan!

In most articles and books on the subject of starting a home business, the authors recommend that the FIRST thing the prospective business owner must do is to make a business plan. The object of this exercise is to make one decide on goals and the processes by which they will be reached, what the costs will be, what income can be expected, what the time lines are, etc. In short, every business detail is included.

I disagree for two reasons:

First: While having well formulated goals is a good idea, the format for most business plans is so complicated and detailed they are overwhelming. And, to be told that the business plan is the first "requirement" to starting a business of their own creates a stumbling block that many are not able to overcome. "Required" to plan ahead for a business they have no experience with, they cannot do it. They are blocked before they even begin.

Second: More than simply untrue, it's backward. Obviously, a business plan is necessary before hitting the bank up for a loan, but most home businesses do not start out that way.

In the beginning, most are very small. They have evolved, the natural outgrowth of a hobby, of something the business owner has been employed to do, something they love to do, or something they have a talent for, an idea or an inspiration. In other words, most home businesses grow out of something personal, something the owners are familiar with, have experience with, already know how to do.

"Business" is not a word you'd associate with what they are doing. It doesn't become a business until they start making money at it. The choice to "make money" is the mechanism by which their personal talents, interests, hobbies and ventures evolve into home businesses, but it was never their primary goal.

If the business shows potential and needs to expand, having a business plan is an absolute requirement for borrowing money. By this time, however, they are thoroughly familiar with it and know exactly what should go into the plan. It is no longer a struggle.

How do you get started?

Although you may not love it, one of the easiest ways to choose a home business is to do what you have been employed to do but on a free lance, self-employed basis. You are familiar with it, and comfortable. You know what you are doing. You have experience in that field and will have made contacts. Also, and most importantly, you will be able to supply recommendations. Because, believe it or not, being self-employed is just like being employed. Someone has to hire you and, if you don't already have experience, contacts and recommendations, you will have to acquire them in order to sell your services.

Selling your services, or your product, is the name of the game. Whatever your home business, your success will depend on your sales ability. The best services, or the best product, in the world won't bring you a dime unless you can sell it. As everyone isn't strong on sales ability, the "Make \$5,000 a day" type ads target those people who want a home business where they do not have to sell; that is, a business that will succeed without it. As this simply doesn't happen, most of the "opportunities" are scams. Realistically, if you found a business that would bring in \$5,000 a day, would you tell anyone about it? Not hardly! You'd have trouble enough trying to keep some copy-cat from stealing it.

Minimize your need for sales ability

Within the framework of what you want to do, look for products or services that customers are willing to buy. Unless someone wants what you have to sell, they won't buy it regardless of how good it might be or how well you can sell it. It may be an ego-buster to say "No one wants what I am offering" but your business will depend upon recognizing that fact and looking for something else they do want! It would be a mistake, however, to choose a home business for its money-making potential alone. If you hate doing it, chances are you simply won't. And, if it's a success, you may be trapped into doing something you hate.

I have been told that "selling" is a talent, just like musical ability, writing or painting. Obviously, everyone doesn't have that talent and, for some of us, sales ability will never come naturally, if at all. If you have that limi-

tation, getting the right kind of help will be the key to your success. You can hire, or trade services with, someone who IS good at selling. Or, better yet, you can find someone, or something, that will tell YOU exactly what to do and how to do it.

Be realistic

When it is a sales claim that a business is a proven winner, be wary. If it is really that good, everybody else is already doing it, and you will be wasting your time. And, times have changed. What was once a good business may not be a good business any more. Unless you have an extraordinary service or product, you cannot make a single dime trying to sell what someone else is giving away for free on the internet. A case in point: what do you suppose all the free content on the Internet has done to information publishing businesses? Another case in point: with PCs in every office and most homes complete with software almost everyone can use to do (for themselves) whatever they need done, providers of typing and other traditional business services are finding themselves out of business. Not a good idea unless you have technical skill and expertise in some particular field, and even there, you will have to be computer literate. The internet, for instance, has spawned new businesses servicing other internet providers.

Some franchises and multi-level marketing companies are promoted on the basis that someone else, the team, will do the selling. Some are legitimate, some are not. Before choosing one, it is recommended you research them carefully. Ask these questions: If they are a company you do not personally know, check their credit, the Better Business Bureau, the state Attorney General's office. Find several others who are actually operating the business and ask them about it. (Be extremely wary of recommendations provided by the company.) If you get into the business and things don't look right, get out fast. Don't wait. Your instincts are probably right.

Research

All research is not equal. Reading "How to Start a Business" written by an author who has published a hundred or more books on a hundred or more different businesses should tell you that the author is a writer of "general" information who does not have personal experience with any of the businesses. The books will be almost generic, goals, business plan, accounting, taxes, licenses, office equipment, etc. that apply to every business. There will be virtually nothing there that applies to the business you are interested in. I can guarantee you that publications on starting an accounting business will tell you absolutely nothing about accounting. Nor will books on starting a photography business tell you how to take good pic-

tures. If you want to understand a business, buy books written by authors who have personal experience in the business they are writing about. If an author, for example, has published only two books, both of which are on operating restaurants, it is a pretty safe bet the author has personal experience in the restaurant business. (On any of the book sites on the net, "start a business" will bring up hundreds of books. When you locate the type business you are interested in, click on the author's name and a listing of their publications will appear. And on some sites, you can read the index and excerpts from the book.)

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