

FINDING A BUSINESS IDEA

So, where do I get ideas?

There is no magic formula for coming up with great ideas, but there are several ways to recognise when opportunity knocks:

- Think in new ways. Instead of dwelling on "What is", imagine "What could be"
- Associate things that don't have an obvious link (like hiking and global satellite positioning systems)
- Recognise patterns as they are forming (e.g. the world wide web is changing rapidly - what patterns, needs or wants might emerge from this?)
- Find new uses for old things.
- Analyse why something isn't working.
- Find solutions for consumer problems.
- Identify smaller or "niche" markets within larger markets (micro breweries, for example)
- Recognise changes in consumer tastes as they evolve (such as the current preference for mountain bikes)
- Analyse the failure of others to see if they made mistakes that might mean success is still possible
- Apply new technology in new ways (someone thought of putting cellular phones and faxes on aeroplanes).

Brainstorming

These suggestions may be difficult to apply without help from others, so try brainstorming with family or friends. Get together with other people and come up with as many ideas as possible without worrying (for now) about whether the ideas are good or bad. Let your ideas build on, or combine with, the ideas of others. At this point, don't judge an idea as dumb; think of all ideas as diamonds in the rough.

Some trends to consider

When trying to figure out which ideas to run with, make note of industries with growing markets or those that can support another competitor. Just to get you started, here are some sectors to watch:

- **Information Technology:** We are in the Information Age and this sector has the growth pattern to confirm it. This includes computer services, data processing, software design, and user training.
- **Tourism:** Adventure and eco-tourism are especially important. People are looking for safe, well organised adventures such as cave exploring, biking and kayaking.
- **Environmental Industries:** As the state of our environment becomes an even greater concern, ideas which help to reduce, reuse or recycle wastes are increasingly marketable.
- **Crafts:** Locally made arts and crafts are important opportunities, especially in rural areas where home-based businesses are critical for employment.
- **Greying Population:** Baby Boomers, which represent one of the most significant consumer markets, are now reaching their 50s and have changing needs and buying habits. Many have money to spend on services that they prefer not to do, or don't have time to do themselves.

- **Health Concerns:** People are more aware of what they eat and how they exercise. There are new markets for exercise equipment, gyms, health foods and alternative healing methods.
- **Home-based Businesses:** More people now work at home and have different consumer needs.
- **Small Indulgences:** Many people work hard and under stressful situations. When they have time to relax, they value quality rewards or indulgences such as speciality coffees, fine cigars, or even therapeutic massages and facials.
- **Quality Service:** Many people are willing to pay to be treated as individuals, and prefer personalised or customised products.

GOOD IDEA?/GOOD OPPORTUNITY?

Once you have your ideas together, you must decide which ideas are simply good ideas and which are viable business opportunities. A good business idea should:

- * **Satisfy your personal goals and interests:** Remember, you'll be spending a lot of time running your business, so it should be something you really enjoy doing.
- * **Meet customer needs:** Even if you think an idea is fantastic, your business will not succeed unless you satisfy a consumer need.
- * **Meet your financial goal:** Your idea must generate enough money for you to live (pay the rent, buy food, etc). While you will never know your exact earnings until you are actually in business, you can make a fairly accurate estimate by doing a little market assessment.

Market Assessment

Once you have what you think is a pretty good idea, do some additional research without spending loads of money.

- * Set up some interviews and talk to existing business owners, you could be surprised at what you can learn. Most people love to talk about what they do. If people in your community are reluctant to talk to you (they may be worried about potential competition) consider other areas where this will not be an issue.
- * Attend trade shows relevant to your idea and talk with people in the industry.
- * Read business magazines or trade journals (check out the library or Internet).
- * Talk to an accountant, banker or lawyer (if they have worked with others in the field you are considering, they may have some valuable tips for you).
- * Talk to a former employer.
- * Ask for (and be willing to hear) honest opinions from your family and friends.
- * Conduct a survey. Send out written questionnaires, interview people by telephone, go door-to-door or organise a focus group. A focus group involves getting a random group of people together and seeking their comments and opinions about a product or service.

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