

ACTION NOW!



**A 7 STEP PLAN TO GET
YOUR SMALL BUSINESS
FLYING - RIGHT NOW!**

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FOREWORD BY THE AUTHOR, MIKE SAID



One of the great downsides of being recognised as a speaker specialising in business turnaround strategies is that I am expected to have all the answers to all the problems associated with running a business. And while I do have many answers for you, it's only because I still ask so many questions!

That is why you'll find this book so useful. I have been where you are so often. In fact, I consider myself quite an expert (without being ex-pensive)!

I am an expert in failure, in making bad business decisions, in trusting the wrong people, at misjudging markets, at doing things the wrong way round, at letting the administrative side slide and at working hard instead of working smart.

That's why you can use the information within the following pages with confidence – the advice is relevant and I have the business scars to prove it!

However, if you are expecting a dry do-it-yourself text book, you'll be disappointed. But if you're looking for down to earth, hard-hitting solutions given with just a twist of wry humour, then read on. Let the results of my hard-earned experience give you courage and direction.....

Don't forget, though, that all the advice in the world is useless unless you are willing to make changes. What you're doing now doesn't work. So I'll show you how to change this.

Remember, a plan is NOT about what you will do some time in the future, a plan is what you will do today in light of how you would like the future to look

I'll show you how to turn your business around using 7 easy steps, each one simple and achievable. Work with me on this and you'll become the successful business owner you are meant to be!

And as I consider this book to be a 'working document', I have attached some pages at the end of the book that you can print out and keep beside you while you read. Make notes, do the exercises – it all helps you to gain perspective.....

Finally, don't forget that I am always here to help you, as are many others who have also been through the business wars and survived! My contact details are on the last page.

I wish each and every one of you the success you so richly deserve



WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THESE PAGES

That depends entirely on you. You can skim the pages, think ‘Well ok, Mike. This is all great, but I’ve heard it all before’. Or you can go through each point carefully, taking what you need immediately and filing the rest mentally under ‘I must remember that for the future’.

You’ll notice I haven’t listed a ‘Contents’ page.

One of the problems I have come across when trying to help small business owners is that they often feel there’s only one problem, one solution.

Sorry folks, but that isn’t the case!

You have embarked on a brave adventure that has many, many twists and turns, each one affecting the other. A decision you make for one problem will not be in isolation – it will influence outcomes in other areas.

So take this information as a whole. Use what you need right now and put the rest aside for later. Use this as an ongoing reference book.

The Action Now solutions are all there – but as in most action plans, you have to accept that there’s some ‘This is what can go wrong’ education first. And if you find some repetition, that’s because the point is worth repeating!

Right! That’s enough chatting.

Read on!

The first step in getting started on the road to change is to find out what's wrong with your business.

Simple - it's **YOU!** The biggest problem with small businesses is the people who own them.



If we fix **YOU**, then **YOU** can fix your business!

To do that, you'll have to start **from today** to do **something different** – you may not know what it is yet, you just know it's **something**.

It sounds so easy, and you know you've heard it all before. How your business strategy/plan is not about what you are

going to do in the future, but what you are going to do today in light of how you would like the future to look. And how you don't plan for tomorrow, you plan for today so you can change tomorrow.

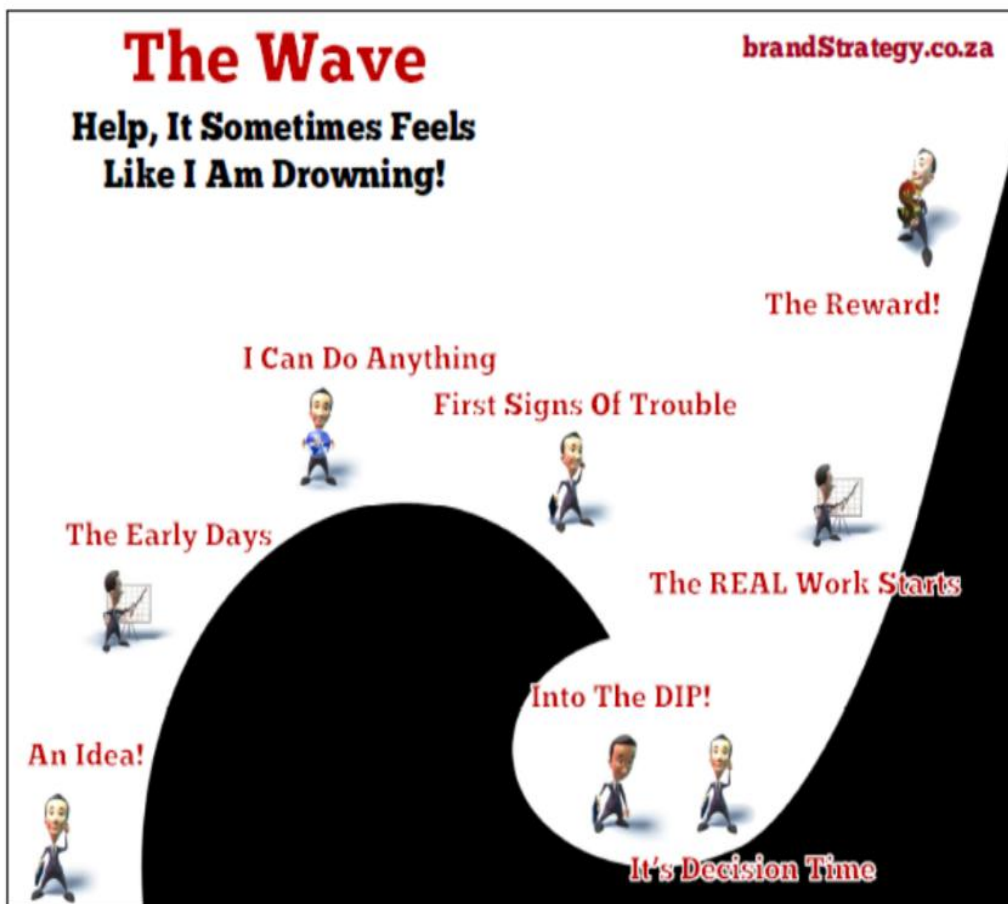
All well and good in theory, but how do you put it into practice? Before we begin to fix you and your business, I want you to look at the illustration on the next page. I call this **'Why do you always feel like you are drowning?'**

In the beginning, you wake up with a **brilliant idea**. You've had enough of working for a boss; you want to start your own business. (By the way, want to know the worst thing about working for yourself? If you think the last guy you worked for was an idiot, he's **nothing** like the guy you're going to work for now – he doesn't pay you, doesn't give you leave, doesn't understand sickness, doesn't accept excuses). Chances are you were not **VERY** busy at this moment in your life, busy people seldom find the time to come up with great ideas, but that, my friends, is a topic for a whole other book

The early days – it's exciting, you can't stop talking about your idea, and you'll tell anyone who'll listen all about it. (You may find people beginning to avoid you at this stage). Life seems so incredible, business is walking in the door and money is starting to build up in your

account... You have made the right decision! You open your business, things go well, and then you reach the

.....**I can do anything stage**. You think you can replicate what you're doing in Johannesburg successfully in Pretoria, then Cape Town. What you're doing for CDs you can also do for books. And so on. We think we can do anything, we think we can walk on water. I call this **the PAYE stage** – **P**lanes, **A**utomobiles, **Y**acht, **E**tc. – everything that you shouldn't be buying!



Then one day you wake up to the **first signs of trouble** – an order gets cancelled, you're taken to the CCMA by a staff member, you can't get money into your account. There is that sudden realisation that this is not SO easy and

suddenly you find yourself sitting and languishing in

..... **the dip of the wave**. Most small business in South Africa is there right now. It's debilitating, demotivating and seems to drain your energy and enthusiasm. Personally I go through a dip every April without fail –come April I think 'Apply for a job', but somehow, things always begin to turn around at the point called Decision Time.

Decision Time is when you decide you don't want your business to struggle any more, you want to do something better. You may even decide to give up. Or you'll carry on, but you

realise you have to do things differently, do it better. For many of you that moment is now and it is for that very reason that you find yourself reading this book.

Once the decision has been made, that's when **the real work starts** – you start to do all the things you should have done in the beginning. You register for VAT and you actually pay it over, you get those licenses and agreements in place. You get yourself a decent invoicing and accounting system and most importantly you stop procrastinating! Then – the wonderful, exciting, it-was-all-worth it **Reward!** But don't forget - this is a **wave**. It keeps coming back, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. Successful small business owners realise they're sliding down the wave into the dip, but through experience they manage to get out of it in plenty of time.



THE 7 MISTAKES THAT ALL SMALL BUSINESSES MAKE!

Einstein's Theory of Insanity goes like this:

“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.”

I'm sure there are days when you feel you must have been **insane** to voluntarily give up the security of your steady job, with all its benefits, set daily hours and free weekends! Well – let's not get into those strait jackets just yet.....

Remember, ***you are not alone!*** Almost all the business owners I know have made most of these mistakes, including me. If you aren't in business yet, try to avoid at least some of them!

Let's look at the 7 mistakes that all small businesses make, and ***do something different!***

1. 'I'm not very good at marketing'.

Small business owners often try a bit of marketing - perhaps a flyer or brochure at busy robots, or a small ad in the Yellow Pages or the local Caxton paper, or maybe banners on a website. However, precious resources are wasted often on marketing that doesn't work.

(A tip to save yourself money on 'wrong' marketing: when printing your marketing material,



be it flyers, ads or banners, add different extension numbers to your telephone number on each marketing item – e.g. put extension 1 on your flyer, '2' on the banner, '3' on the Yellow Pages insert and '4' on the Caxton ad. When the calls come in, the caller will ask for the extension shown on the relevant marketing item – let's take extension 1 as an example. Your reply will be "I'm afraid that extension is busy, may I help you?" Then tick off extension 1 on your 'Where I spent my money

on marketing' list. You'll then see easily which marketing method works for you and therefore where to spend more/less money).

2. Going in without a business plan.

Experts are divided on this issue.

Many of the best business plans are carried around in heads, but obviously you cannot go to a bank or funding source without a detailed strategy covering your marketing, sales and financial forward planning. And there are many excellent templates available either at the financial institutions or online to assist you with this. However, if you aren't applying for finance, rather write one yourself in a format that suits you.

In fact, I think a **Marketing Plan** is far more important. There's too much emphasis on the 'Cash Flow' in many business plans, and while healthy finances are obviously crucial, you need to have a strong emphasis on **how** you are going to get lots of money in the bank.

When travelling around the country to see small businesses, I so often sit down in front of a business owner and ask 'What is the problem?' The answer is 'I have a cashflow problem'. I take a look at the Financials and see that the REAL problem is that **there is no cash to flow!** These owners actually have Marketing & Sales problems. If Marketing and Sales plans are firmly in place, there'll be some cash and **then** you can complain about your cashflow!

3. **Doing things the wrong way round.**

Unless you are Jensen Button you do **not** need a fancy, fast car. You will no doubt need a car, office equipment such as a computer and a good printer, and you may even need an office, but these don't have to be fancy – don't spend money unnecessarily. **Make the money first, spend it later.**



4. **Thinking it's all about you.**

That because we think it's a good idea, everyone else will think it's a good idea. I recently travelled through Alexander Township with my good friend Boetie and noticed a remarkable business opportunity... There was not one single shop that sold swimming pool chemicals and swimming pool equipment - what a fantastic business opportunity! When I mentioned this to Boetie he almost wet himself laughing. "There are no swimming pools in Alex" he roared. Well, just goes to show, a little 'local knowledge' goes a long way. It's not about what you want or like, it's about what your market wants and likes.

5. **The worst number in the world.**

For small businesses, it's number **1**: one person, one idea, one source of income, one client. If any of these fall by the wayside, you're in real trouble. Every small business owner dreams about landing that big government contract – until you get that big government contract! After a hefty dose of dealing with one – possibly high-maintenance – client, you'll be sitting dreaming about lots of little private contracts, because they pay. So – it's not one idea, one person, one client!

6. **Ingratitude.**

When we finally get it right, we forget to thank the people around us.

We forget to thank our spouses and our children, who stood by us and went for weeks without Life's small luxuries; we forget to thank the people who gave us money; and we forget to thank our clients.

We think we have arrived and it was all due to us. We give ourselves a pat on the back and we move on.

Great entrepreneurs have one great skill that no-one else has: when things go really well, they have the ability to look out of the window and see who they can thank: when things go wrong they look in the mirror and know exactly who to blame. Other people do it the other way around – when things are going wrong, they look out the window for someone to blame and when things go well they look in the mirror.

So ask yourself – which of those are you?

7. **Following the herd.**

Most of us tend to do this. Just because somebody else is doing something, we think we must also do it. Want to be seen to be apart from the herd? Don't worry about finding an original idea – rather find something original about **your** idea. Work on that, expand on it, sell it – make people sit up and take notice.

NOW we get to down to the part you've been waiting for – how to start doing things differently and get your business back on its feet!

ACTION NOW!!!

(Or rather, Let's Get This Thing Back on the Road Already!!!)

There are 7 Action Steps you can start TODAY!

1. Writing your Elevator Pitch
2. Making yourself Professional
3. Getting Sociable with Social Media
4. Seeking Help Fast!
5. The 'Not to Do' list
6. Keep your Feet on the Ground
7. ***GET STARTED NOW!***



1. **The Elevator Pitch.**

You had an idea, you opened your business, but can you tell me in 60 seconds what is it you do, or what you can do for me?

For example: I walk up to this woman and say 'Good morning, my name is Mike Said' and she gives me this nice smile but in her head she says 'Soooooooooo'?

I say 'You know what, I've got a business called brandStrategy' and she says (silently, I hope) 'So what?'

'I have clients all over the country and I think I'm wonderful' say I.

Again, a lifting of the eyebrow and the polite smile that yells out 'So what?'

Then I say, 'Give me 15 minutes of your time and let me tell you how I can turn your whole business around'.

Suddenly the smile is genuine, and the invitation is given to 'Sit down'.

First of all I have to tell her **what I can do for her** before I tell her **who** I am, how **important** I am.

So how can you tell your clients what problems they have that you can solve for them? It's simple.



You start off by writing what is called your **Elevator Pitch**, also known as a **Brand Positioning Statement**, which:.

- Establishes what the brand stands for and how well it will compete
- Identifies the way we want consumers to think about the brand in the context of other similar products
- Creates an enduring, sustainable competitive advantage based on (perceived) quality
- Strategies and tactics to the market must be consistent with the positioning of the brand

As an example, we'll use Jonathan, who teaches people to speak in public.

First of all I ask him – **who is your target market?** He tells me that it's people who need to speak in public or at work.



(This is a vital point – it's really important, as this is where you'll spend most of your money. It's tempting to be 'all things to all people', but rather concentrate on the one group of companies/individuals that will help you reach your financial goal the quickest).

Then I ask – **what is it that people are seeking?** He answers that it's to improve their speaking and presentation skills.

(A lot of money can be made by small businesses solving other people's problems. So write out what your target market is seeking. Once you've done that, write out what it is you can offer).

My next question is - **What do you offer?** – Jonathan's response is 'A professional assessment and ongoing skills training'.

(Explain to the client the service you will be offering to satisfy their need).

Finally – **Why should they choose you or your company? What is their reason to believe?** Jonathan tells us he has over 10 years' experience in coaching and the mentoring of speakers.

If you can put this down on paper, it will change everything. Wake up every morning and read it and you'll gain a deep understanding of your target market, your offering and how you will compete.

2. **Making 'You' Professional - LOOKS COUNT!**

Your appearance, the standard of your marketing tools, the answering message on your 'phone – all of these should give the message 'I take myself and my business seriously, and so should you'. For example, your email address should not be one of the 'freebies' – if it's Yahoo, or Gmail, or 'I'm Too Cheap for my Own Domain address', it's no go! You can't give someone a card with a free domain address on it and a cellphone number and think they'll give you their money. They won't.

(A tip about small business telephones – if you work from home, try and get a spare line for your business, particularly if you have small children. A two-year old answering an important call from a prospective client doesn't exactly add to your hard-earned image!)

(Another tip – if you are asked where your office is situated and you're among the growing number of home-based businesses, answer that you 'work from an office close to home'. No-one needs to know that at the moment it's in the corner of your dining room.

When you meet with the clients, either go to their offices or take them for coffee somewhere mutually convenient. The excuse of 'I'll be coming straight from another meeting in your area' sounds good, and people often enjoy a break from their office routine. If you are choosing the venue, ensure that it's a select, subdued atmosphere. Get there early, take out your laptop and look busy, even if you're just writing an email to your friend. When your guest arrives, close your laptop and say 'Sorry about that. I thought I'd just put together some notes on my last meeting while they were fresh in my mind)'.

I know that there's often a shortage of 'real money' when you start your business – it's amazing how quickly your hard-earned savings disappear! But getting a professional look need not cost a bomb.

There is so much you can get done for just a few hundred Rand... contact me with your design web and social media requirements and I will put you in touch with companies and individuals who can assist you

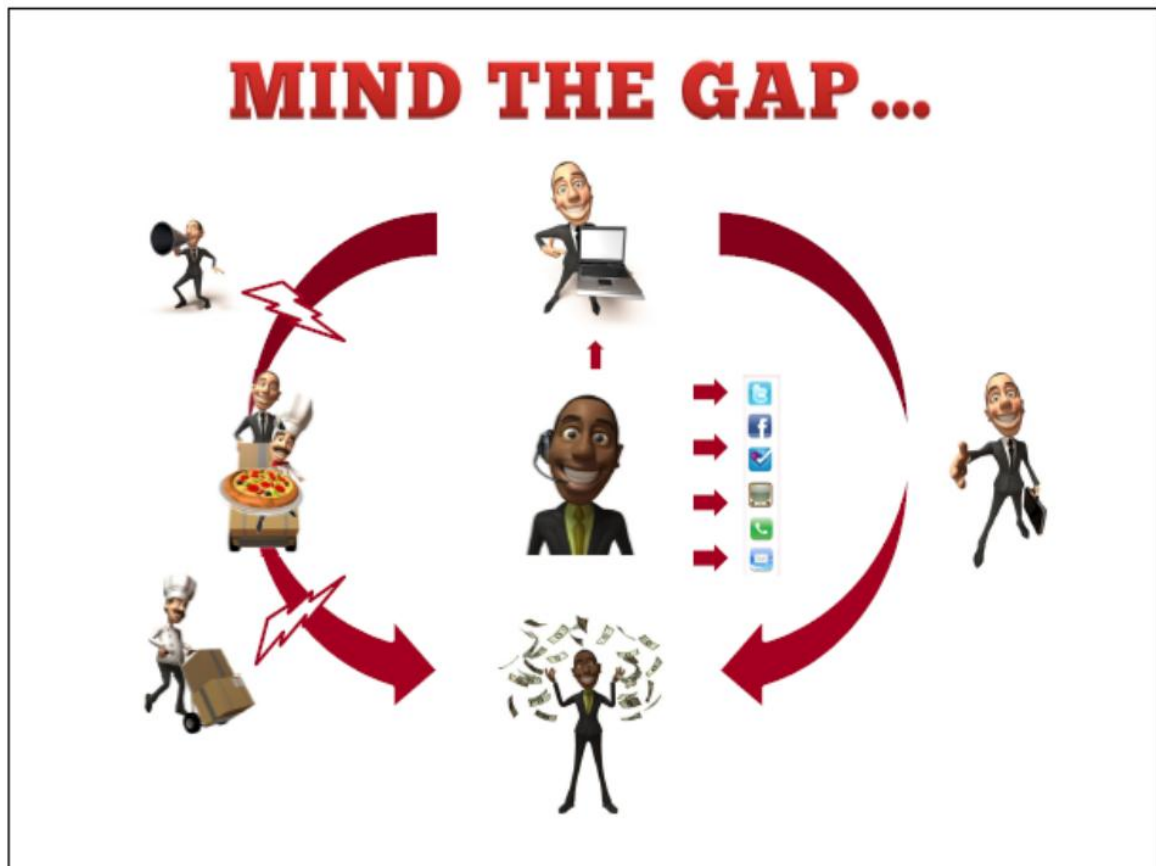
It's all about Looking Professional!

- Ensure everything you write has **neither spelling nor grammatical errors**. READ THIS CAREFULLY – Do NOT make a mistake in the spelling of the name of the person to whom you are sending a business proposal – it will go straight into the bin! You'd be surprised at how often this happens!
- **Act professionally**. Turn up to appointments in time (preferably 5 minutes early) fully prepared, with all the required paperwork in a neat folder. And I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news – **THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS AFRICAN TIME!** Make sure you know the address of the meeting ahead of time, find out how many attendees there'll be and have copies at hand of what you would like to leave with them. And mean exactly what you say, with clarity and with no room for misrepresentation. For example, don't leave clients 'hanging'. How would you

translate the words “I would like to take you to lunch” uttered by someone meeting with you at an 11am appointment? I bet you’d already be working out ways to put your next appointment forward, or asking someone to pick up the kids from school. Now imagine that same person at the conclusion of the meeting packing up his papers, putting them into his briefcase, saying his farewells and walking out the door to his car. You’d feel a bit flummoxed to say the least. However, he didn’t say **when** he would like to take you out for lunch.....

It’s like this current habit of saying ‘Chat to you later’. That could mean in an hour, a day, a week – or in some cases, a couple of years. Be specific and unambiguous in your business dealings.

- **Brand Promise** – In the following illustration **MIND THE GAP** you have a business, you offer a service, you have a product, and therefore you have something you want to sell to someone. At the bottom you have prospective clients, the people who’ll pay.



- And as small businesses, you want their money! In our eagerness to hook those clients, however, we have to be very, very careful about **what** we promise we'll deliver and **when**.

An example is a plumber who advertises **a 24 hour service**. I've seen those brand promises. Sounds great, doesn't it? But what happens if I want him to come to my house at 3am on New Year's Day, after a very drunk guest has broken the toilet? Absolutely nothing - at 3am, he's not even answering his 'phone!

So **that's a broken brand promise**.

Another example: you walk into a **1 hour photo shop** & they tell you to come back in an hour and a half..... that's **another broken brand promise**.

My **absolute favourite** is when I go to a **fast food outlet**, look at the appetising pictures on the board printed above the kitchen and I choose No. 3. They deliver the food to me, I open it up and I try to match it up to the illustration on the board – there's no comparison! **That's a broken brand promise**.

Menus are a brand promise, as are websites.

You therefore **make a brand promise** and choose whether or not you are going to keep that promise. It's as simple as that. When you don't, customers will call you and tell you they are very unhappy. Or, even worse, they can now not bother even contacting you, but go straight to Facebook or Twitter or YouTube, or on a website such as Hellopeter.com.

That is when you look at your brand promise and make a decision – I must either **change my promise or change my delivery**, but I **can't stay the same**. For example, should I employ someone to answer my calls from 12 midnight to 6am, or should I change my business to '18 hours' plumbers'? **Your biggest mistake would be to not do anything at all.**

(**A tip** from my years of experience here.....When a client asks you how long a particular task will take, add on a couple of days/weeks, depending on the size of the job. THEN deliver 'early'! This gives *such* a good impression!)

When you have **employees**, something completely different happens to that **brand promise**. Look at the illustration again.

Smack bang in the middle, you put a staff member.

This creates 2 situations:

1. **The communication gap between you and your staff members:**

As a boss your perception is that the biggest problem is not the communication gap, but delivery. “The Fools that I employ... when I deliver marketing information, I have to write on the outside of the box ‘Please open this box’ and inside I have to have a note ‘Please empty this box completely before you call me and complain’



2. **The delivery gap between your staff and the public. As an employee**, you're not too concerned about the delivery gap, but the communication gap is a problem. For example, ‘The first I heard about the Special was when a customer brought in the advertisement. How can I deliver a service when this is the way I get treated?’ You'd be surprised at how often this situation occurs, and in large organisations that have dedicated communication departments!

The bottom line is **both gaps exist**. As a business owner, you have to concentrate all your efforts on the communication gap, with your staff and your customers.

Communicate, communicate and communicate!

This builds trust on all sides, but most important of all, you'll be perceived as an expert in the minds of your customers. You're the person on whom they can rely, to whom they can talk openly.

- **Being a professional client yourself.** I see you raise your eyebrows. ‘Isn't that part and parcel of the previous ‘Act professionally’ point? Yes and no. The expression ‘Do unto others as you would have done unto you’ holds true here, as does the ‘Communicate, communicate, communicate’ instruction. Small business owners are under huge pressure 100% of the time. Deadlines, money restrictions (especially when there isn't any!), and keeping clients happy while trying to manage a balancing act with the family are enough to drive even the

strongest character screaming into the distance..
When I hear us compared to **Superman**, I have to laugh. All **he** had to do was save the world! I mean, that's just **ONE** task!!



We tend to forget, though, that to our suppliers we are **also** a client!

So **be** the sort of client you'd like to **have**. And remember, there's no such thing as a **bad** client. If you have problems with someone, it's usually because your communication lines got crossed. So if your suppliers have labelled you as a bad client, make a point of finding that level of mutual need and understanding. Interestingly enough, I've often found that the clients I considered 'difficult' initially have become the best clients ever!

Be a good client!

3. **Getting Sociable with Social Media**

Many think of social media as a fad that can't be of much use in business. **WRONG!!**

Action Now
**Let's Get This Thing Back On
The Road Already!**



**“What about ‘Social
Media Marketing’?”**

**“You need to know where
to start and what to do...
But don't worry it is not as
complicated at it first
appears.”**



In my lectures I show a well-known video on the social media statistics. I then say that if the attendees would like to see the video again, they must go to my **brandStrategy website**. I don't give them the link – just as you'll notice I haven't given **you** the name or the www address of the video! I have driven the attendees and you, dear reader, to my website!

I am a small business, I want you to see my clients and my services, and most of all I want you to 'phone me and give me your money!!! That's how it works – that's how you market.

Everyone can use Social Media in some way. Imagine the impact when a tiling company takes before and after photos of the tiling job and posts them on their website. Filthy carpets versus sparkling new tiles!



The **email** marketing option is under-utilised, and can be highly effective in keeping you uppermost in the eyes of your clients and your prospective target market. Put together a good, short, informative monthly newsletter, for example. No spelling or grammatical errors!!! And don't forget to add an 'Opt Out' option. Our new Consumer Protection Act (or CPA) is very strong on unsolicited communication of any type. That also goes for any **sms** campaign.

Now we get to **your website**. You have paid –to design an attractive, informative website for you, and now you want it to work for you! When a prospective client wants the services you offer, Google must be able to find you when it does a search. You **HAVE** to be on the first page. This is known as being **Search Engine Optimised**. Speak to me or to someone else in the know on how to do that – there are various methods and you can choose the one that suits you most.

(Did you know that 12 people have walked on the Moon, which is more than the number of people who have seen the second page of a Google search?)

Keep updating your website by writing **Blogs** – Google loves fresh content.

Sign on to **LinkedIn**, which - although not very big in South Africa - is growing fast.

Build your company and personal CVs. Take photos, ask for references, and add any articles you've written.... I use as much information as I can to market myself and my company. You'll see me all over the social media streams!

Twitter is not designed as a marketing tool, but if used correctly can be highly effective. It's like being at a cocktail party –you give out a couple of cards, tell a couple of (funny!!) one-liner jokes. Some people like what they hear, some people put them in their pockets for later and others pass them on.

I use Twitter – I'm a real Tweet!! For example, every single day when I present a talk I tweet where I'm going to be. This not only keeps my wife from being suspicious of my early departure from home, it also shows people that I'm speaking all over country, so next time they have a speaking event they'll remember me. (Follow me @mike_said_what)

Want an excellent speaker? **Call Mike Said!**



Facebook gives the inside-look at your company, the softer side. A warning, however - keep your personal and business pages separate. Use the business Facebook page to show photos of events, functions etc.

Foursquare is location-based and you can get on it by registering on Foursquare.com. You can offer specials to anyone who wants to know what's in your area (e.g. takeaway shop offering free coke with certain meals). Foursquare is linked to Facebook and Twitter, so make sure your information is correct and eye-catching. Log on and have a look.

There is so much writing on the subject, so much you can learn and so much you can use. Take some time to read and research and choose your channels carefully and purposefully.

The Three Rs of Social Media are Relevant, Regular and Remarkable!

4. **Seek Help Fast.**

One day you'll wake up & realise that you're really lonely and you need some support.

The **best thing** about working for yourself is that you don't have a partner – the **worst thing** about working for yourself is that you don't have a partner!

In a small business, Xmas parties can be very, very small.....a single-person affair! Now *that's* lonely. But of course paying out those 'end of year' bonuses, only to **you**, can be a whole lot of fun!

At some stage you'll realise you need help, and small businesses are rated as successful by how quickly they ask for help.



If you want **money**, go straight to the bank – it's the best place. Do **not** borrow from family; one of the problems with doing that is that if something unexpected happens and they need their money back, you have to take drastic action. And it's true that borrowing or lending money can ruin relationships, whether within the family or with friendships.

(Speaking of money, one area in which you should **definitely** take advice if '**finance is not your thing**' is in the legalities required by the government. Pay your VAT, give the government their taxes, don't use your small business account as a personal one, and you'll find you sleep much better at night!)

For **expertise**, go to the library, source articles online, or subscribe to magazines (most popular industry magazines are now online). Google, Google and Google – everything you need is there. (By the way, how good is Google's marketing? Do you ever hear anyone say – 'Well, I'll just Yahoo it'?)

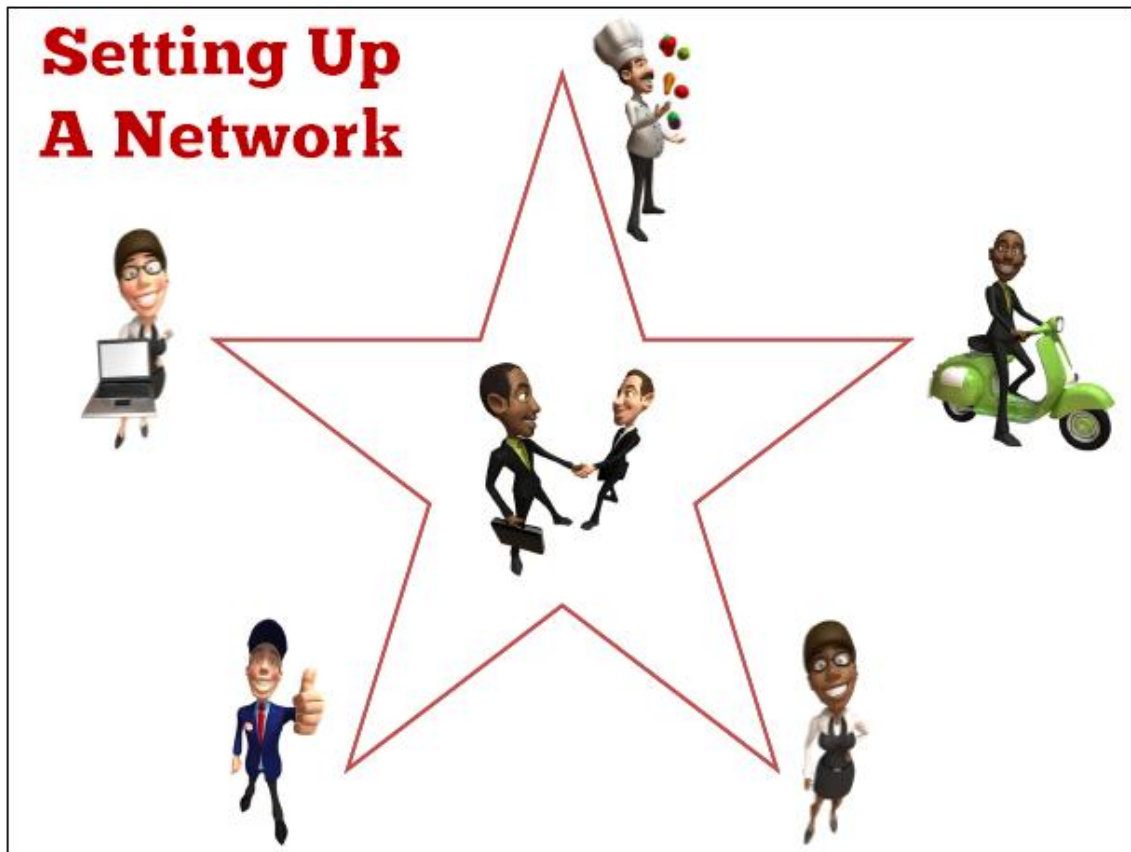
If you have difficulty getting the assistance you need as a result of your own efforts, then – if the worst comes to the worst – you may have to call in a consultant, commonly known as 'an expert' (because they're ex-pensive!).

If you need **company**, buy a dog – you don't take on a partner for company! Join a business community, such as your local Chamber of Commerce – network, share ideas and experiences.

If you need all three (**help, money and company**), then **get a partner**, but do so by building a **network** of small business 'partners' that complement what your business offers and do not compete.

I'm a website designer (together with everything else I do!) and I could use a graphic designer, a small hosting company, sales, or an accounting company that works with small businesses.

Apart from offering invaluable support, this partnership network spreads your chances of picking up **new clients**, as each 'partner' can approach clients offering your services in addition to theirs. So instead of marketing to 10 customers, by choosing the correct partners you suddenly have 80 or 100 potential clients. **Don't try and make all the money yourself** – spread it around and it'll grow, and the workload will be shared.



(A word of caution here: there's a danger in using your network **too** closely. For example, it's a good idea to use a book-keeper or accountant recommended by another small business owner, but don't get together with your network and appoint someone to do everyone's books. This can be catastrophic, as another colleague of mine discovered. There's an accountant sitting on a tropical island somewhere feasting off the hard-earned money from 10 small businesses).

And **keep in regular touch with your network partners**, or you could find yourself dealing with difficult situations!

A friend of mine had a corporate gift company for 20 years and built strong, positive relationships with her supplier network through early payment, and keeping in touch on birthdays etc. The network became close and used to send each other cakes or little gifts with deliveries. She told me a funny story the other day about a driver who took advantage of this network of 'supplier goodwill'. She was having problems delivering some of the bigger orders as her finances at that stage didn't allow for buying a large truck, so one of her network offered to do that for her at an incredibly good price. 'John' (not his real name) was the designated driver supplied by Sandy's network friend and he became such a part of the team that he would also offer to do extra jobs like fetch items that needed printing from Sandy and deliver them for her. After a while, Sandy noticed she wasn't getting many sweet

things, and that a couple of her suppliers started sending their own drivers across. Eventually, someone spilt the beans. **‘John’ had a terrible habit of taking bites out of the cakes and putting them back in the box before delivering them, or licking the icing off the top of cupcakes!** Packets of biscuits arrived with only half of their contents. But the network loved ‘John’ so much – and they knew how much he needed the job – that they didn’t say anything – they just stopped the ‘benefits’.

Stay in touch with your network (and quietly check on the culinary habits of their drivers!)

5. The Not To Do List.



*My list of lots
and lots of
things to do!*



Every small business works with a ‘To Do’ list. I used to. **Theoretically**, it should work – by writing down and prioritising 10 items at the start of each day, and working solidly and methodically through them; it should mean that important tasks get completed fully and timeously. But in **practice**, how’s it working for you?

Let’s rather make it ‘real’ by compiling a shorter, more achievable ‘NOT To Do List. Write down 3 or 4 actions you’re going to **stop** doing – things like ‘stop giving staff loans’, ‘stop procrastinating’.

(At this point I must share with you the Mike Said Theory – why put off to tomorrow what you can put off to the next day....).

One colleague in my network, Iain, has always had problems with ‘To Do’ lists – one of which is spending too much time writing them and not enough time actioning them! So he decided to rather try the Not To Do List – or, as he calls it, **the Curse List**. It’s shorter, so takes less time – and it’s immediately actionable! His list could be used as a **template for yours**.....

To turn your business around, make **your own Not To Do List** – or Curse List. How about Do Not – spend so much time on social media, too much time in front of the PC, put off making enough constructive cold calls etc.?

Iain's Story

The Not To Do List!

Curse Number One!

Giving away too much time!

Curse Number Two!

Not sending out invoices on time!

Curse Number Three!

Not following up on outstanding money!

Curse Number Four!

Procrastination!



6. **Keep your feet on the ground.**

Remember, this is a Marathon, not a sprint. It takes time. You may want to rush down this road on a Ducati – you'll get there quicker, but I'm willing to bet you'll have to do a U-turn and start again. Rather make the journey on a scooter and buy the Ducati at the Finish Line!

To make the journey richer, **invest in yourself**. Read and read and read some more. Download books and listen to them in the car. Subscribe to industry magazines; get those motivational DVDs.

Invest in your business: get a better website, improve the look of your business card.

Invest in your staff. Ask them for their career paths; ensure they get training that is relevant to your business and their development. But - how often have you thought 'What if I train them and then they leave?' But hey, what if they **don't**?



I had the privilege of being trained under the wise leadership of the **founder of Mugg & Bean, Ben Filmater**, who invested time and money in Mike Said. I'd like to think that he watches my development through the media and is proud that he helped Mike Said to achieve, to get to that level.

(By the way, if you'd like to see South African entrepreneurship at its best, have a look at the origins of the Mugg and Bean franchise. I think its appeal to the consumer is that although it originated in 1996 in this country, it has that "American" coffee shop look and feel. With over 96 outlets here, the franchise is now in the UK, the United Arab Emirates - where all that oil money is just there for the taking! - and in Kuwait. Now THERE is a small business success story – and if Ben can do it, so can we! I always remind myself that once upon a time there was only ONE Starbucks, ONE McDonalds and ONE brandStrategy!).

Be proud of your staff, train them and encourage them to develop their skills.

Invest in your family. Your spouse and your children need you – the role you play in their lives is more important than the role you play in your business, although it may not be clear during your “Dip” (remember the **Wave?**). They need your time and your support. You need to make a conscious decision to communicate with your spouse. The business may be in your name, but your whole family has a stake in it.

I often hear business owners say “what our children need is more QUALITY time with their parents”. Sorry, what a load of bull... what our children need is more **quantity** time with their parents. Make the time for your children and your family!

OK – you've spent some time reading and making notes – from here on its **ACTION NOW!!!**

7. And last but certainly not least, Get Started Now!!!

The best time to start your changes in behaviour was last year, but you have a second chance – the second best time to make those decisions is **today!** Be proactive in your behaviour. Learn good habits, keep on learning.

Make a wish list, keep a journal. When you get home, write down the experiences of the day – how did my client visit go, what questions were asked, did they ask anything for which I wasn't prepared? **Walk around with a smaller journal** and make a habit of jotting down

everything that impresses you. (Guys – I don't mean gorgeous ladies with their 'phone numbers!)

You never know when you could use that information! Don't forget, **you want to be the best at whatever you do**, and embellishing already proven ideas is a good way to stay ahead of the competition.

Keep redoing the exercises in this book. Situations change, you become more experienced (in the bad as well as the good!), but the principles will always be the same. It's just the information you have that changes.

Let me repeat the important information, the '7s'.

The 7 Mistakes All Small Business Makes

1. 'I am not good at marketing'
2. Going in without a business plan
3. Doing things the wrong way round
4. Thinking it's all about YOU
5. The worst number in the world
6. Ingratitude
7. Following the herd

The 7 Action Steps You Can Start Today!

1. Write your Elevator Pitch
2. Make Yourself Professional
3. Get Sociable with Social Media
4. Seek Help Fast
5. The 'Not To Do' List
6. Keep Your Feet on the Ground
7. GET STARTED NOW!!!

There is so much more I could have covered for you, but you can get ongoing information from my website, and if you want to drop me an email I'll definitely answer it. Please make me part of your 'network' and I'll share my contacts with you – people who can advise you on logo design, who will help you keep on the right side of the law, or who can help you with your communication skills, for example. I wish you the very best in your endeavour: congratulations for having the courage and the staying power to start your business empire! You are special. Now GET STARTED!!!

ABOUT MIKE SAID

Michael Said often refers to himself as “Just a Waiter Who Got Lucky!” After 22 years in the hospitality industry including 3 years as the marketing manager of Mugg & Bean, Mike brings his own brand of humour and understanding to the weird and wonderful world of marketing and hospitality.

After joining the industry in 1988, he worked his way up through the ranks until leaving Johannesburg to open a restaurant in George, where in a few short years he took Reel ‘n Rustic to the top of the pile and into Wine Magazine’s Top 100 restaurants. During this time he assisted in the formation of the Garden Route Restaurant Association and acted as chairman for two years.

He then sold his restaurants in George and returned to Johannesburg in 2001. From 2002 until 2004, Mike was marketing manager for Mugg & Bean and in 2003, was instrumental in winning “The Brand Builder of the Year” at the FASA awards with Mugg & Bean.

Michael Said is the strategist for brandStrategy.co.za, a strategy and branding company that assists numerous in developing brand strategies and integrated marketing plans. This includes both internal and external marketing policies as well as the overseeing of all above and below the line campaigns. brandStrategy also offers specialised development and implementation social media strategy services.

His company works within all industry segments, advising them on branding strategy, market development and customer service.

Mike’s ability to impart his knowledge in a humorous and down to earth manner has made him a sought after speaker at corporate functions and conferences, both locally and overseas.

He lives in Johannesburg with his wife and two daughters.

You can visit Mike’s website at www.brandstrategy.co.za and follow him on twitter at [mike_said_what](#)

EXERCISE 1: Write down what you consider where you think your business needs help. Then write down where you think YOU need help!

EXERCISE 2: Look carefully at the WAVE diagram. Where are you in this process? Are you drowning?

EXERCISE 3: Read through the list of the Seven Mistakes that all Small Businesses Make. How many of these have you made?

EXERCISE 4: You've had this **WONDERFUL** idea and you may be planning to start a business based on this idea, or you may already be 'in the Wave' somewhere. Imagine someone has asked you about your idea. Can you write down in fewer than 60 seconds what it is that you do? And more importantly, what you can do for **ME**?

EXERCISE 5: Write your own Elevator Pitch! Use Jonathan's example to guide you.

EXERCISE 6: What does your 'Appearance' say about you? Does your logo stand out? Is your marketing documentation professional-looking? Do you have a website? Write down where you are now and where you feel you SHOULD be.

EXERCISE 7: Define Integrity. Write your Brand Promise. Now list ways in which you can keep to this promise. Are they realistic? Are they achievable?

EXERCISE 8: How good is your understanding of Social Media? If you are behind the pack as far as this goes, do some research and list the following:

- Sites that describe Social Media in easy layman's language
- Websites that you find attractive

EXERCISE 9: If you were to build a network of 'partners' around you, what type of support services do you feel you would need?
How are you going to source these partners?

EXERCISE 10: Write down your Curse List (Not To Do List). Use Iain's example to guide you.

EXERCISE 11: Write down ways in which you can invest in yourself, in your business and in your family.

EXERCISE 12: Now that you have all this information clearly written down, put together a Marketing Plan that takes all that into consideration. There are templates available; choose one that suits you best. Keep revisiting that Marketing Plan, particularly when the market changes.