

A SOUL PROPRIETOR GREENPAPER SPECIAL REPORT

BACK TO
SCHOOL

Lessons for Business

www.MartyMarsh.com



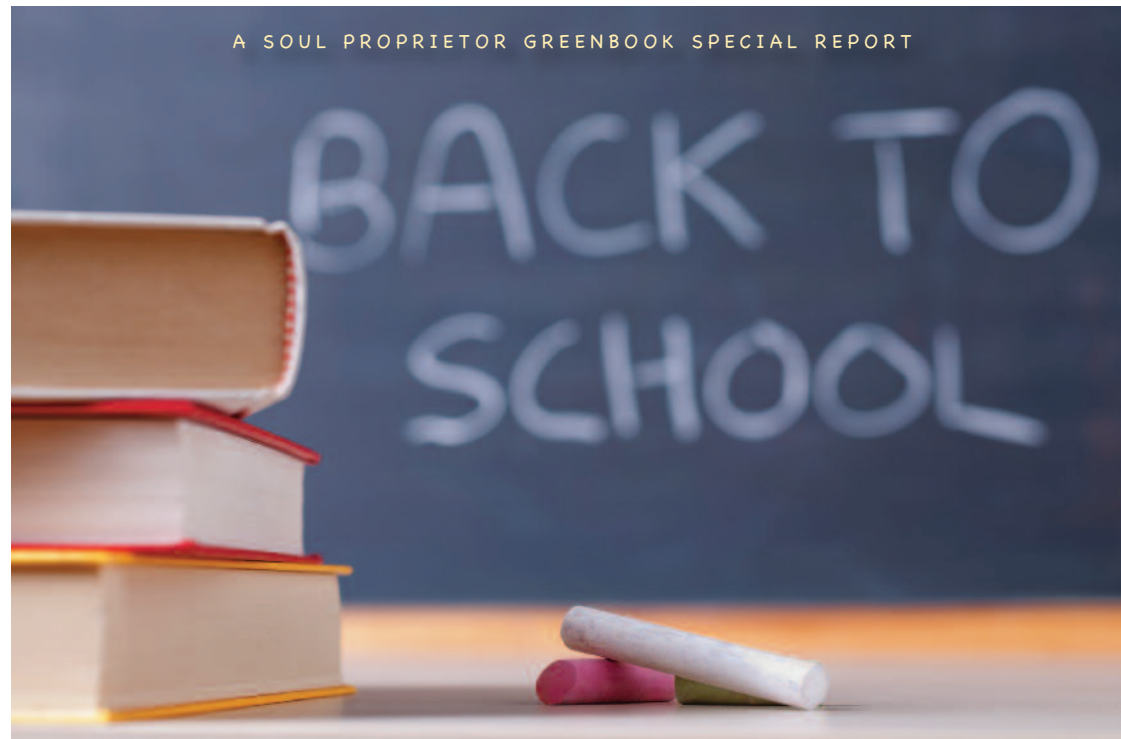
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Back to School Lessons for Business

Presented By Marty Marsh
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BACK TO SCHOOL LESSONS FOR BUSINESS



The back-to-school season is upon us, and kids across the nation are sharpening their pencils and packing their lunch boxes as they ready for the first day of classes. But preparing for the academic season isn't just for kids; business owners can take a tip from students and do their own back-to-school prep.

Whether you're a kindergarten (new business owner) or college student (established entrepreneur), the tips in this special report will help you get your business ready for a new year of success.

School's in session!

Your Marketing Professor:

Marty Marsh

Time to Buy School Supplies

Many entrepreneurs are bootstrapping their business these days, making do with as small an outlay of cash as possible. While not spending yourself into a hole is wise, refusing to invest when you need to can create problems, too.

Particularly in the area of technology, it's critical to have the tools you need to get the job done. Just as you can't complete your trigonometry homework without the right calculator, you can't keep things in your business flowing if you don't have the right technological stuff working for you. The main areas you want to look at are:

- hardware
- software
- business and office supplies

BACK TO SCHOOL LESSONS FOR BUSINESS

In the area of hardware, today's desktop and laptop computers have advanced to the level that you could likely run a small country from a laptop or an iPad. That's not to say that you *need* an iPad, or even a laptop. In fact, as long as you have a PC or Mac sitting on your desk, a printer, and dependable internet access, you've got the basics covered.

But you may also want to look at having a mobile phone or an iPad that will allow you to get online when you're on the road — provided that you do actually head out on the road. That means that you're out of your office taking care of

business, not necessarily living full-time in an RV and traveling about like I used to do. If you're strictly desk-bound, skip the portable devices and save the money or if needed, invest instead in the latest software to help you keep track of your business.

Software comes in a number of flavors.

For most small businesses, you'll need:

A word processing program. Microsoft Office Word is standard, but OpenOffice (available for free online) is a cost-free and versatile option and gaining favor really fast.

An accounting program. Depending on how sophisticated you need to be with your bookkeeping, you can easily keep track of your budget and spending with a simple spreadsheet. If you want more bells and whistles, try Quicken or Quickbooks. I use Freshbooks online for both invoicing and tracking expenses. Best to ask your accountant or tax professional what *they* want you to use.

A graphic design program. Even if you outsource all or most of your graphic design needs, you still will want the ability to make small adjustments (price, etc.) to your 'Buy Now' buttons, and other simple needs and you can do that easily with *Photoshop Elements*. If you want to be able to design your own pamphlets, brochures, PDFs and more, check out Apple's Pages if you're on a Mac. Microsoft Word offers some nifty templates, too, and Publisher is still kicking around for those of you still on a PC. These days we have Canva online. Canva makes it so easy for anyone to make any kind of graphics you need like social media graphics.

The good news about technology is that it's readily available and relatively inexpensive. The bad news is, the new versions come so fast and furious that no sooner have



MESSY

A ~~Clean~~ Desk Is the Sign of a Sick Mind.

you invested in the latest and greatest, than you're already obsolete! But before you plunk down your credit card to upgrade, ask yourself these questions:

- ▶ Is not having this upgrade holding me back?
- ▶ What am I hoping to do that I cannot do now?
- ▶ How much will it cost me to upgrade?
- ▶ If I make this investment, how long until it pays off?
- ▶ Do I have the cash to pay for this?

If your answers to the above questions are satisfactory, and you won't lose any sleep over it, go ahead and invest. Do your research online to find specials or the best deal, and after you make your purchase, sign up as an affiliate and tell others about your recommendations. That way you can convert your expense into a revenue stream — and get an "A" in economics!

Clean Out Your Desk

"A Clean Desk Is the Sign of a Sick Mind."

- plaque seen in a gift store

No matter what pithy plaques say to the contrary, every good teacher knows that effective learning starts with a clean slate, a clean desk, and a clean page — and the same is true for business people. According to experts, Americans waste almost 30 minutes a day — 180 hours a year — just looking for misplaced items. If your hourly wage is \$65, that's \$11,700 a year! I would wager that there are many other things you could do with an extra \$11,700 or 180 hours this year.

One of the first steps to getting organized is eliminating the clutter, and one of the first places you should tackle is your desk. Here's a six-step approach to streamlining your workspace:

1. Set aside some time. The scenario you want to avoid: getting elbow-deep in the organizing process, only to have to dump it all back in the drawers and boxes because you have to stop to finish a report, host a webinar, or pick your kids up from school. While how much time you need will depend on

BACK TO SCHOOL LESSONS FOR BUSINESS

the size of your space (and your mess), a good rule of thumb is an hour each for a desk, bookshelf, or file drawer.

2. Pull it all out. Even though it will make a gosh-awful mess, the quickest and easiest way to start your organizing process is to clear out the drawer, shelf, or desktop. Strip it down to the studs and wipe the surface free of dirt, dust, and stray paperclips. Then you'll have a fresh surface to work from. (And some extra paperclips!)

3. Sort. Sort the items you pulled out into categories such as paper, writing implements, books, manuals, etc. As you are sorting, toss out any obvious offenders, such as scraps of paper, broken items, outdated receipts, etc.

4. Decide. Choose how many of each item you need — pens, blank notebooks, etc. — and then toss, recycle, or give away the rest. Trying to decide what you need to keep? Think about what you have space for, as well as what you're likely to use in a reasonable amount of time. You may have room for seventeen replacement ink cartridges for your printer, but will you use it all before you upgrade to a new printer?

5. Organize. Replace the items in a logical manner —

printing supplies near the printer, business reference books on a single shelf, computer manuals near the computer, etc. Also, think about keeping the most frequently used items in the most accessible place, and less-frequently used items in more remote locales.

6. Maintain. Unfortunately, organizing is not a one-time event; you must set aside regular times to file paperwork, clear the counters, and take out the trash. Even just five minutes at the end of the day is sufficient to keep a handle on pile build-ups.

Organizing is a great way to start your fall. It will help you get a grip on any new needs you have, as well as remind you of tasks and projects awaiting your attention. You'll be ready to tackle whatever comes your way with a clean desk, and a clean mind.

Check Your Back-to-School Clothes

Who doesn't recall that annual excursion to the department or shoe store, searching for the perfect outfit or pair of sneakers to start off the school year? And then, on the first day of school, wearing that outfit or shoes put you in

the mindset of opening a new chapter in your life. Anything was possible with a new pair of Keds or a brand-spanking-new Le Tigre polo shirt!

When you feel more confident, you act more confident.

When you work from home, you may think that your wardrobe no longer matters.

After all, who sees you, sitting behind your keyboard? It might be true that the only person who sees you is your cat and the

UPS man, but there are still a number of reasons to upgrade your wardrobe — or at least make sure your shirt is Spaghetti-free:

1. Clothes Make the Man (or Woman). Tim Gunn knows the truth: If you look better, you feel better. It's kind of like taking the time to set a nice table, even if you're dining solo. Putting in the effort to wear clean, flattering clothes, even if you're the only one who will see them, will make you feel better about yourself. And when you feel more confident, you act more confident. That feeling will come across in your emails, your voice, and your decisions.

One accountant I know dresses in a suit and tie to go to

work in his home office every day. Even if he won't be seeing clients in person, he says dressing in those clothes puts him in a "work" frame of mind, and he is more focused. Also, when he's got his work duds on, everyone in the household knows "daddy is at work."

2. You Never Know... You might think that you won't run into anyone worth meeting at Starbucks or while out picking up a bag of dog food. But potential contacts, clients, and referrers are everywhere — even behind you in line at Petco. It's better to be prepared than to be sorry. You'll be a tad hesitant to approach someone, or respond to their overtures, if you're dressed in a stained 49ers t-shirt and a pair of too-tight jeans.

3. Put Yourself Out There. If you aren't on YouTube, you should be! And while you don't need movie star good looks, you should at least get out of your pajamas before filming a video to put forth for the world to view.

4. There Are Times... Every once in a while, you will need to enter the public eye — at an industry event, a networking get-together, or a trade show. The time to find yourself a few attractive, comfortable outfits is not the day before you get on a plane. There's an unwritten law that the more

Set aside time for the activities that will add to your bottom line.

desperately you need a new pair of pants, the less likely you are to find them.

This isn't to say you need to go out and spend thousands on a closetful of clothes. But you can head to a reasonably priced department store and find a few separates that you can claim as your new work wardrobe. You'll feel the impact immediately on your productivity and your self-confidence.

Set Your Schedule

As summer winds to its inevitable close, college students are anxiously poring over their course catalogs, figuring out what classes will fit a schedule that will allow them plenty of time to hobnob with friends, give them enough credits to allow them to graduate on time, and also not require them to get up before 8 AM on Mondays.

Entrepreneurs are attempting the same feat: How do you allow enough time for product creation, customer service, networking, continuing education and enrichment, research, and just plain goofing off? It is possible — and these hints will help:

1. Start with the most important stuff — money-making tasks. You've heard the saying, "Pay yourself first"? The same goes for setting your schedule. Start by setting aside time for the activities that will add to your bottom line. That means product creation, partnership/affiliate efforts, and marketing. Sometimes, this is the stuff you don't want to do, or that seems to be less pressing, so it falls to the bottom of the to-do list. But by slotting it in first, you will assure you don't run out of time for this critical element. (So long as you honor the commitments you make to yourself as much as you would to a client or prospect.)

2. Don't overbook yourself. We can be tempted to fill our schedule to the point where if anything goes wrong, it throws our whole day off. Build in buffers of time so you have the room to recover if things go awry. That could mean giving yourself an extra day to complete a report, or giving yourself an extra 15 minutes to get to your destination. If you

BACK TO SCHOOL LESSONS FOR BUSINESS

don't need the extra time, you can relax, catch up on reading, return phone calls, or sneak off for a milkshake.

3. Keep a running list of 15-minute tasks. Have a ready list of to-dos that take 15 minutes or less to complete, and when you find yourself between projects, knock a few of these off. They could be maintenance items — like filing papers or cleaning off your desk — or they could be research-related, like checking out a few blogs or reading an article or two.

4. Protect your time. “Time vampires” will gladly suck away all your free time, if you let them. They'll have you babysitting their chihuahua, listening to their boyfriend woes, and accompanying them to the home show to check out the latest and greatest improvements in fertilizer. The solution: Just say no! Sure, any one activity won't take up too much of your time — but soon you'll find yourself spending more time watering their plants or helping with their time sheet than you do on your own projects. Don't let it happen by cutting it off early on.

The easiest way to say “no” is to establish firm office hours and let everyone know that you take your work seriously. Post your hours on your office door if you have to, and

then when tempted to do something else, just say, “Nope, I'm working until 5:00 today. I could go after that if you're still available.”

5. Review your day. At the end of the day, go back over your previous work hours. What was time well-spent? What felt critical in the moment but ended up being completely wasted or unimportant? Figure out what went right and what went wrong, and make adjustments for the next day.

Make special note of what you DID accomplish. Too often all we can see are the things on our list that have been left undone. Give yourself a pat on the back, and then take 15-minutes or less to plan out tomorrow.

Time is your most precious asset. Setting a schedule that supports your long- and short-term goals will help ensure that you invest this precious resource wisely.

Create a Study Group

According to those who have been there before, the key to success in law or business school is getting in with the right study group. These partners not only give you bud-

BACK TO SCHOOL LESSONS FOR BUSINESS

dies to study with, they keep you accountable and on-task. If you let yourself down, you also let down the whole group.

Finding accountability partners can be key to a successful entrepreneurial venture, too. Finding a group to support your efforts, help you brainstorm problems, and keep you on schedule can mean the difference between passing and failing. Here's what to look for in your own "study group":

Variety of skills. The best groups have members with expertise in different areas. The former tax accountant, the paralegal, the sales trainer can all advise each other and provide different perspectives on the same topics. If everyone is in the same industry with the same background, you may have a lot in common, but you won't be able to brainstorm as effectively.

Similar commitment level. The most important element may very well be a common level of commitment to your goals, whatever they may be. If one member is a little lax and the others are all gung-ho, the mismatch will soon drive everyone crazy and cause bad feelings.

Regular meeting times. Whether you're meeting by

Skype, in person, on the phone, or in a chat room, make a regular — weekly or monthly — appointment, and keep it! Nothing will submarine a group faster than no-shows or constantly changing meeting times.

Accountability process. There needs to be some carrot or stick to ensure that members stick to their goals. If there's no reward or pain associated with the goals, the likelihood of following up will decrease.

Structured meeting. The meeting doesn't have to be scripted down to the last minute with a pre-released agenda, but at least having a time limit on each member will ensure no one hogs the whole time — or never shares his or her progress at all.

Resource-sharing. One of the most valuable roles an accountability group can play is providing recommendations and referrals. Looking for a great graphic designer, book-keeper, or Wordpress expert? Your 'study group' should be your first stop.

One final thing to keep in mind is that accountability groups, like friendships, are created differently. Some will last

a season as you launch your business; some may last only a few weeks or months. Be ready to let your group go if it's no longer fitting your needs. It will be hard, but if it's not helping you further your goal, it may be time to move up and on.

Finish Your Summer Reading

Reading, writing, and arithmetic — the three basics of a traditional education. As an entrepreneur, you already know how important the writing and arithmetic are. But reading is just as important, and the end of summer is a perfect time to start (or finish!) a few business-related books hanging around your nightstand.

Some of my favorite books:

The Slight Edge by Jeff Olson

The Big Leap by Gay Hendricks

Divine Compensation by Marianne Williamson

Be Who You Want, Have What You Want
by Chris Prentiss

Making a Living Without a Job
by Barbara Winter

Of course, actually reading is tougher than resolving to do so. Use this problem-solving guide to help you on your way to a more complete education:

If you think you don't need to read: The average adult reads fewer than two books a year. If you read a book a month, you are automatically in the top 5% of the population when it comes to educating yourself. Reading informational, educational, or inspirational books is one of the easiest, least expensive ways to give yourself a competitive edge.

If you think you don't have time to read: Think you've got no free time to crack open a book? I have one word for you: AUDIO. Books on CD, books on tape, books downloaded from places like audible.com, podcasts... you have a plethora of choices for listening to books. Even your Kindle will read to you. Borrow a few from the library, download a book from the Internet, and load up your MP3 player. Listen away while you're mowing the lawn, exercising, taking a walk, watching the kids' soccer practice, or driving around town. (This is one time that multi-tasking is a good thing!)

If you don't know what to read: If you don't know where to start, choose one area you'd like to improve upon, whether

it's public speaking, networking, technical skills, or time management. Then head over to the *Soul Proprietor Bookstore* — <http://astore.amazon.com/martymarshcom-20> — and look at top-sellers in the area you choose, or put out a call for suggestions on your Twitter stream, Facebook page, or blog. Pick one and go.

If you forget what you read: Even the most dedicated readers can burn through books, then move on to the next, only to forget what you read in the first volume. While knowledge is great for knowledge's sake, it really only becomes wisdom when you put it to use. By reflecting on what you read and choosing one or two lessons to implement in your own life, you will convert your knowledge to wisdom and improve your business. Think about joining a business book club where you read a business-related book a month or quarter, and discuss what you're learning. That will also help the lessons sink in.

There's a famous quote often attributed to illustrious folks like Earl Nightingale and Jim Rohn that says that "a year from now, you'll be exactly the same as you are now, except for the people you meet and the books you read." Start now on your path to a bigger and better you.

Take Placement Tests

At the beginning of every school year, students from kindergarten through college spend the first few weeks of school getting adjusted and finding the right classes. Key to that process is the placement test. Teachers evaluate their pupils for reading, math level, and overall socialization. These tests not only ensure that students end up in a class that's paced properly and is challenging enough, they also provide an important benchmark to measure progress over the ensuing year.

Businesses could do well by taking the same approach. Figuring out where you are now not only lets you appreciate how far you've come, it also helps identify areas where you may be lagging behind your aspirations.

Here are few of the metrics you can look at to evaluate your business:

1. Web statistics. If you own an online business, web stats are the backbone of your check-up. How many people visit your site, how long they stay, what pages they visit, and knowing whether they return will all help you figure out what

you need to do to keep them around longer. Other things to explore: How they arrived at your site, and how you show up in search engine results for your keywords. Google Analytics or your cpanel statistics are great places to start.

2. Revenue. I'll assume you're in business to make money. So how much are you actually making? Where is your money coming from? What products and services are most popular? This information will help you make more informed decisions going forward.

3. Expenses. Money coming in is only half the equation: How much money is going out? Where is it going, and why? Are there easy places to eliminate expenses? Remember, cutting your expenses is an even more effective way to put more money in your pocket than increasing your revenue.

At least once each quarter, I suggest you look for money leaks. Have you joined any programs that you're paying a fee for but you are no longer going there or getting value? Are you buying books that lie around unread? Do you have subscriptions that you no longer read or don't have the time for?

4. Hours worked. Exactly how hard are you having to

How much money are you actually making? Where is your money coming from?

work for the money you're getting in question #2? It's great to make \$50,000 or more a year — unless you're working 100-hour weeks to create that income. Figure out where the time is going and you'll be on the track to increasing your efficacy and your per-hour wage.

5. Customer satisfaction. It's more cost-effective to sell to a repeat customer than to bring new customers into your business, so how happy are those who purchase from you? Check out your return rate, and your repeat customer rate to see.

6. Employee turnover. Can't keep a virtual assistant longer than a month or two? It may be them... but if it happens over and over again, it just might be YOU. If your contractor turnover seems excessive, dig into why your help is leaving faster than rats off a sinking ship.

Taking an honest look at where you are now is the only

way to create a workable path towards a brighter tomorrow. If you see areas where you could use a little extra help or “tutoring”, work with a business coach or mentor to figure out how to bring your skills up to grade level.

Have One Last Summer Fling

The beauty of being an entrepreneur is that you are in control of your own destiny. But that can make it really, really difficult to take time away from the computer or office to let your hair down, relax, and have some fun. If you’re like most entrepreneurs, you travel with an iPhone in one hand and a laptop in the other, and even when you should be relaxing, you’re responding to emails and checking statistics.

That level of dedication to your work is commendable, but it’s also dangerous. If you never slack off, you’re in danger of burning out, losing perspective, or alienating the people in your life, none of which is helpful for long-term success. The lazy, crazy days of summer are a perfect time to get in one last fling before school starts and business picks up again.

Can’t get away for a week-long retreat? Never fear. Here are some ways to enjoy a mini-fling:

1. Turn off the cell phone. The smallest move you can make with the biggest impact is simply unplugging yourself. Take meal times off, at a minimum, particularly when you are dining with friends or family. Carving out a few periods during your day when you can relax completely will have untold benefits on your relationship, as well as your stress level.

2. Do something different. With tough economic times, everyone has been touting the benefits of the “staycation,” where you enjoy all the attractions your immediate vicinity has to offer without getting on a plane or staying in a hotel. Continue in that vein by visiting a local park or museum, or trying a new restaurant you’ve never visited. Even venturing down a different street or checking out a new grocery store can have benefits in terms of opening your eyes and enhancing your creativity.

3. Make a new friend. If most of your personal interactions take place around answering your door to the UPS man, you need to expand your social circle. Make it a goal to create a new relationship, work-wise or otherwise. Attend a meet-up in your area, a networking event, or join an online networking group, or just chat up an interesting looking

person at the dog park. People matter, and they can be your biggest source of pleasure and refreshment.

4. Cross something off your bucket list. Always wanted to jet ski? Dreamed for years of speaking French? Have a soft spot for authentic Indonesian cuisine? Pick one of your life goals (preferably one that has nothing to do with your work) and get started. Realizing that there is more to life than your computer will energize you, and make your work all the more effective.

You may not be able to take off to Baja in a VW bus with a surfboard strapped to the top, but you can still enjoy these last days of summer. Life's short; enjoy it.

Keep Your Locker Combination in a Safe Place

Remember back in the day when the worst thing that could happen to you was forgetting your locker combination and you'd be late for gym class? Well, the stakes might be a little higher, but the challenge is the same: How to keep your private information private.

ID theft is a very real threat. In fact, ID theft complaints are

the number-one complaint to the Federal Trade Commission, accounting for 26 percent — maybe even more by now — of all complaints, and account for billions of dollars in loss.

While your identity can be stolen through the postal service or by someone swiping your wallet, by far your greatest exposure is online. And when you're an online business person, that risk is even higher; not only your personal information is available, but your professional information, too.

Thankfully, there are a number of low- and high-tech options for keeping track of your passwords and user names. Here are my picks:

Low-tech: You can purchase a "password journal" from an office supply store, or just create your own from an inexpensive spiral notebook. On the plus side: This method is easy and inexpensive, is portable, and is perfect for technically challenged individuals. The problem is that if you don't have your notebook with you, you don't have the information — and if you lose it, you're in trouble!

Mid-tech: Start a computer file with all your password and user names in it, like an Excel spreadsheet. You can

save this on your desktop, or upload it to a file-sharing service like Dropbox or Google Docs. The upside: It's free, portable, and (if you use the file-sharing service) available online from remote computers. The drawbacks: Hackable. If someone somehow accesses your spreadsheet, they have your world at their fingertips. Or if your computer crashes and you don't have a back-up, well, you're kinda screwed.

High-tech. Online password storage and management services are big business. Check out Roboform.com, KeePass.com, and LastPass.com. For just a few dollars a month (\$29.95/year for Roboform, for example) these services will generate, store, and even fill in your passwords for you. Plus side: The safest method for managing passwords online. Downside: you have to pay.

Whatever you choose, any of these methods are more secure than using the default password of "12345" as your password for everything from your bank account to your Twitter account. Don't wait until someone breaks into your locker and steals your lunch money before you start protecting yourself. One last word of caution: Never use the same password on your bank account or credit cards that you use for

other online transactions, like gaining access to your website or blogsite.

Set Your School-Year Goals

Want to make the varsity football squad, get an "A" in biology, or finally date the head cheerleader or the captain of the football team? Nothing is going to happen until you set a goal and work at it. And while January may be the prime season for goal- and resolution-setting, no time is better than right now to take stock of where you're at and figure out where you want to be a year from now.

When setting goals for your business, go back to section 8 when you took your placement test, and figure out a good stretch goal (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, inspiring) for each of the following categories:

Traffic. Online, everything begins with quality traffic, and just about every business could use more of it. Think about ways you can double your traffic over the course of the next academic year (nine months), by paid sources (advertising), email marketing, guest blogging, podcasting, social media, and search engine optimization. Then rank those efforts

BACK TO SCHOOL LESSONS FOR BUSINESS

according to how difficult it would be to implement, and how much of an impact it would have on your business. Then pick the top two or three ideas and get moving!

Sales. If you're not making the sales you want, you either don't have the traffic, aren't converting, or don't have products and services for your target audience. We took care of traffic above, so let's talk about conversion and products. Take a look at what you're offering your audience. If you believe in the value of your products, then you need to convey that value to the audience in a way that resonates with them. Think about hiring a copywriter to make over your web page, or try adding a video or audio sales letter. Are your testimonials strong enough? Are you offering enough products? Again, pick one or two things you can do over the next few months and start them now.

Lifestyle. If you're working too many hours, the number one thing you can do is to start outsourcing some of your less-critical tasks. Start with something you don't enjoy, like bookkeeping or customer service emails, and find someone to help you out. Even a few hours a week will give you a taste of the freedom to be had when you offload all of your

unsavory tasks! Think about how much more energetic and inspired you'll feel when everything on your to-do list is something you actually want to do.

Setting year-long goals each January is a great exercise, but there's no reason to wait another three or four months to take stock of your business. Start now, and by January, you'll be well on your way to achieving your aspirations.

Final Bell...

Between the department store sales, the slight changing of the weather, and the smell of new pencils, this time of year, it's hard to escape the excitement of back-to-school. So don't fight it. It is my hope that this short report will help you leverage the energy of the season to evaluate your business and make some profitable changes.

And if you feel like buying a new backpack or pencil box, go right ahead.

All the best,



Marty Marsh
is a
Successful Soul Proprietor
and You Can Be One, too!

Learn more at
www.MartyMarsh.com