

WHEN BUSINESS QUESTIONS LEAD TO MORE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

In business, everyone has questions. When you start a business, you should ask a lot of questions to make sure you are going in the right direction to succeed. Unfortunately, I did not do that before I opened my business. In fact, most of the questions I should have asked beforehand were things I had to learn along the way. Believe me, there were plenty of bumps and even a few accidents on the road! I also discovered that asking myself one question would lead to many others. The more questions I asked and answered, the more my business grew in ways that were both personally and professionally satisfying.

Client Questions / Pre-Planning

In my novice days, I did not realize the value of pre-planning. I am the sort of person who thrives on jumping right in to new endeavors. It is true, however, that I was required to do lots of pre-planning for my clients. When you are developing a product like a brand new website, discussion and consultation with your client is absolutely necessary. After all, you need a place to start, and planning saves a lot of time, money and effort.

If you were planning a typical marketing campaign, you would of course invest the time to carefully consider your needs regarding such items as advertising, press releases, copywriting, web site, brochures, etc. Websites are, first and foremost, a marketing tool. In planning a website, a client will need to consider specific concepts. Naturally, a target audience must be determined, as well as consideration for the computer savvy and systems of that audience.

- Which browsers are visitors likely to use?
- Are they using PC's or Mac?
- Are they computer novices or high tech users?

These are just a handful of the topics that in-depth pre-planning would cover.

Planning also comes in handy for Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques. In order for me to integrate these services into a package for a client, I would advise them to first to conduct research determine which phrases that they want to use to drive traffic to their web site. Some other questions I would review with them include:

- What is your company's position?
- What other services and information do you offer?
- What keywords are your competitors using?

Clients at times have difficulty visualizing the look of a new site. I recommend finding other sites, both in their industry and out, that appeal to them. It is then critical for me to ask the right questions to help them sort out WHY the site(s) attracts them. This makes it very quick and easy to fine tune their design requirements.

These are just a few brief examples of how in-depth pre-planning can move the project forward efficiently. I quickly realized that providing an in-depth consultation and giving the client a worksheet to complete beforehand was both necessary. The more time spent

on planning before any work is started, the swifter and more efficiently the project will progress.

Business Questions / Answering Clients

In thinking about what a client needs before I start a project for them, I began to ask myself, what else can help my clients? One of the answers to this question concerned technology issues. I had made a habit of carefully and simply explaining to my clients how web technology works, so that they understood any requests I asked of them and the logic behind what was or wasn't possible. Because of my explanations, they began to ask me for guidance on general technology questions, such as: *How do I set up my email?* or *How can I protect my computer?* While these questions have nothing to do with web development, my clients trusted me to research and find the answers. With my background and resources, it was simple enough to give them the information required. I soon found myself offering a new service to existing clients: answering their technical questions regarding any topic.

I wondered if there might be more efficient ways to inform clients and even grow my business. I began writing articles and posting time-relevant information to my clients on the most common questions. This logically led to my decision to start a newsletter, "Tech Savvy in Plain English", which would anticipate and answer their technological questions in advance. Answering the question of how I can help my clients has also led me to plan future services in training and in the development of a small business portal. These services can be used by clients and non-clients alike. Once again, asking myself the right questions has helped me further advance and market my company.

Business Questions / Focusing on Ethics

Thinking through what else can help clients (and non-clients) led me to a new idea, *What if I sought to truly SERVE the client, rather than just serve my business?* Just a little more thought on this topic led me to a life-changing question:

What if THE CLIENT (or prospective client) was my bottom line concern at *all* times, rather than profit, reputation, or my even business?

My business had been floundering at the time, but it felt like a worthwhile idea and I had little to risk. I tried this new position, with amazing results. Quite honestly, it did not take long before referrals starting pouring in. Compliments came from people who had never been my clients, who'd been told they "must" try me. My whole outlook changed, and with it, my business stepped up to a new level.

Putting clients (and others) first with regards to your business and your expertise will simply change your life. First of all, people will look to you as a trustworthy resource and will recommend you, without you asking. Secondly, prospects and clients will feel like they are getting first rate service, because THEY ARE. It's impossible to offer shoddy customer service if your client always comes first and foremost.

One life-changing question about business ethics quite easily led to another. When my husband brought home a book from work which encouraged complete honesty in the corporate world, I asked myself a new question:

What if I was always 100% honest with the client?

Being truly honest was a lot tougher than I had first thought, but it turned out to be far more worthwhile than I'd considered. People can't help but trust you when you tell the truth, even if it's a tough pill to swallow. Of course, you need not inform the client of every little hiccup in a project, but if something isn't going right and you need time to fix, adjust or research it, you need to tell them. A bit of tact and balance are necessary, but explaining problems to the client has worked for me.

Clients generally don't actually expect perfection, but they do expect consideration, respect and honesty. Can you lose clients this way? Possibly – it hasn't happened to me yet. The real question to ask here however is, can I run a business this way? My belief is that true corporate honesty will not only build your professional reputation as a person and a company of integrity, but you can feel confident that you are running a business ethically. Your corporate worries will start to fade away, and you can more easily handle your own missteps and errors.

When Questions Lead to More Questions

As you can see, answering one set of questions only led to more questions. While that may seem frustrating, the truth is, the more you learn about not only your business and your clients but about yourself, the more efficiently your business will run and the more likely you are to succeed.

Questions lead to growth – both personally and professionally.

If you would like to run a more successful business, my advice is to answer all the questions that pop up: from client, prospects, and colleagues and from yourself. In business, one question is worth a thousand opportunities.