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June/July 2018

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ELIMINATE THE (TOO MUCH) TO-DO LIST



Facebook, incoming mail, chats at the water cooler – it's all too easy to get distracted from the work in hand. **CATHERINE GLADWYN**, Delegate VA, offers some tips on how to have a more productive day

I OFTEN see people online asking 'How do you stay focused when you're a business owner?'. Well, for starters, don't post on Facebook and wait for replies.

Sometimes we're our own worst enemies, putting barriers in our own way, often without realising, because we're doing it habitually.

Did you know we probably only earn money around three or four hours a day, even if we're sat in the office for eight, as there are so many distractions.

I get distracted too and have to have a quiet word with myself and refocus. Here are some things I do to help me be more productive. You might find some will help you too?

Start the day...

Don't worry I'm not going to suggest you start your day with a five-mile run and an hour of yoga, it's much simpler than that.

Often having too much on your to-do list can create a sense of panic, which that wastes time and distracts your full attention from the task in hand, so if we remove the panic we are more productive and focused.

Start every day with a daily to-do list. Not an open-ended one or a weekly one, a daily list. That way you can focus on just a few tasks that need doing before the day is out, so you don't get overwhelmed or spend time prioritising. Plus, the shorter the list the more likely it'll be you can get away earlier!

Focus on bringing the money in

Make your initial tasks of the day those that will bring the money in, so you don't end the day thinking 'today was unproductive'.

For example:

- Respond to potential new client enquiries;
- Provide quotes for work;
- Throw some social media posts out for the day, so it can work for you while you're working;
- Respond to old or existing clients (good customer service leads to long-term relationships);
- Complete outstanding work so you can send final invoices.

Have a notepad

Do you ever start a task and think 'ooh, I must remember



to do this' or 'ah, I better just quickly do this other thing before I forget'? When you stop a task to do something else it takes on average 23 minutes to refocus and get on with the original task – not good for time management and productivity.

To avoid me going off track and trying to multi-task I have a notebook next to me all day and jot down those little things that come into my head, so I don't have to try to remember. Instead I can do them later or add them to my to-do list for another time.

Social media distractions

Is there a way to avoid the distractions of social media other than locking yourself in a cellar with a packet of biscuits?

Yes, there is! And even better, you can still have the biscuits.

It is simply about limiting your time. I know that's easier typed than done, so here are a few other things you can do to stop Facebook taking over your life:

1. Log out of the platform on your laptop/PC and remove the automatic password fill. This creates an extra barrier to you getting on to Facebook in just one click.
2. Remove the app from your phone, so the only way of getting online is via the laptop/PC.
3. Set a timer. Before you go online, set a timer and, as I said initially, limit your time. Perhaps 10-minute bursts?

Networking (face to face)

Possibly a controversial one for some, but are those networking events really benefiting you and your business, or is it like cake – nice, but that's about it?

Consider how much it's costing you by travelling to a venue, the time spent there and travelling back.

Eat

Bit of an eye roll here from some of you perhaps, but take time away from everything to eat. I know you're busy, but do it just once or twice a week if you can't promise me you'll do every day.

It really does make a difference. A lunch break doesn't have to be an hour. If you're too busy just take the time it takes you to eat your lunch. That might only be 20 minutes, but at least you're recharging yourself.

Before you finish for the day...

Write tomorrow's to-do list. That way you know what's expected of you when you get into the office, so you can start with a focus and hopefully switch off in the evening.

It also stops that 'oh I must remember to do that' when you wake at 4am for that trip to the bathroom!

● **Catherine Gladwyn is a Swindon-based virtual assistant providing support to businesses. See delegatevirtualassistant.co.uk.**



MANUFACTURING with Neil Elsdon of RSM

BREXIT UNCERTAINTY WEIGHING ON UK MANUFACTURERS

With less than a year until the UK leaves the EU, it is becoming increasingly clear that UK manufacturing businesses are facing a very uncertain future trading environment.

Yet within this context, UK manufacturing is booming. Output has, at the time of writing, increased for 20 consecutive months, due in part to the falling value of sterling driving export sales, but also by domestic demand.

This growth is despite evidence that nearly half of manufacturers have already raised prices as a result of their increased costs, with the remainder planning to do so in the near future.

The upturn in output is being matched by increasing employment in the sector, yet the availability of talent will likely come under growing strain when 'freedom of movement' comes to an end.

Efforts are being made to close the UK skills gap with the help of the government's apprenticeship policies but it remains to be seen whether these will prove effective.

The current Brexit challenges also come at a time when we are entering a new era of 'smart manufacturing' where new digital technologies like big data, cloud computing, the internet of things and artificial intelligence all have the potential to radically transform the sector. However, Brexit uncertainty is holding many companies back from investing until the final outcome of Brexit negotiations becomes clearer.

Many businesses began their Brexit planning on June 24. While the recently agreed transition period offers some breathing space, we are nevertheless seeing an increase in the number of clients revisiting their contingency plans as the ongoing uncertainty leads to greater concern.

The most important message we are hearing from our clients is that the need to plan around the potential outcome scenarios is becoming more important the closer we get to knowing the details of the final deal. However, it is the uncertainty that is the biggest barrier to meaningful planning.

RSM offers specialist advice on reviewing and formulating Brexit plans to ensure you and your business are up-to date with the latest developments. Please feel free to get in touch if you would like to speak with one of our advisers.