

Tackle 2015: Expand your small business

 [By Ivan Epstein](#)

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Last year was a challenging one for South African businesses and there are few signs that 2015 will be much easier.

However, get the basics right and your business will be in a good position to survive and even thrive this year. Here are five fundamentals that can help you to succeed in expanding your business during 2015.

Get your admin sorted

Most small business owners dislike doing admin because it's a distraction from selling, serving customers and expanding the business. But it is essential to be on top of your paperwork to meet the demands of SARS, the Department of Labour, and other government bodies, as well as to ensure that your cash flow stays healthy.

The right software will help to take some of the pain out of paperwork by automating it for you. An accounting application can streamline many of the calculations and forecasts you need to do to stay on top of your business.

Take risk management seriously

White collar crime is on the rise in South Africa, which means that you need take steps to protect your business. In addition to credit card fraud and other scams you might encounter from people outside your business, be alert to the rising incidence of payroll fraud. It happens mostly to businesses with fewer than 100 employees, and it can seriously hurt their ongoing sustainability.

Luckily, there are few simple steps you can take to protect your business against payroll fraud. These include enforcing segregation of duties as well as investing in a robust automated payroll solution to capture and track transactions. Use the information from your payroll system to keep tabs on payroll transactions and impose checks and balances on the payroll environment.

Investigate the cloud

If you're still relying on Excel spreadsheets or an outdated accounting package to keep track of your accounting and payroll admin, now might be the right time to look at new technologies, such as cloud applications. As a cloud user, your accounting application and data are both reached through your browser no matter where you are - it makes accounting and payroll as simple as using Facebook or Gmail.

The data is hosted at a secure data centre, so you don't need to worry about security, infrastructure or technical skills - instead, you can concentrate on running your business. Plus, the cloud changes everything by allowing you to work anywhere and anytime you have an internet connection.

Make time for your employees

Your employees are the key to the growth of your business, so it's important to invest in them. The happier and the better trained they are, the more innovative and customer-centred they will be. Consider investing in employee self-service tools that will help you to automate routine HR processes, such as leave applications, so that you can spend more time on training, development and the mentoring of your team.

Be creative about your marketing

You're running a successful and profitable business - why not take it the next level by marketing your products and services to a bigger audience? Sure, advertising and public relations can be expensive, but you can also do some basic search engine optimisation and use social media to get your brand out there. Other avenues to raise awareness for your business are, for example, competitions for small businesses, such as the annual 702/Cape Talk Small Business Awards. These awards can be a wonderful way to get marketing traction without needing to spend a large amount of money - they usually attract a lot of attention in the media.

ABOUT IVAN EPSTEIN

Ivan is the co-founder and CEO of the Softline Group. His current role is that of CEO of Sage AAMEA which includes Softline/Sage in Africa, Australia, Middle East and Asia. He is one of four operational CEOs in the Sage Group and serves on the Sage Executive Committee which is responsible for the strategic direction and continued growth of Sage internationally and Softline in South Africa.

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