

Breakthrough Consulting

Week 9: Automate and Maximize Revenue

Homework

This week's homework focuses on a few of the areas covered in the week's video/audio/transcript lesson. I've also included relevant and recommended resources at the end.

1. Automation, outsourcing, and delegation.

Like I discussed in this week's lesson, think about the tasks and activities you do that are NOT worth \$1,000/hour.

- What processes do you find yourself doing repeatedly?
- What could you template-ize?
- What could you automate?
- What could you outsource?
- Who could you delegate tasks to?

Create lists for each of the above, then decide the biggest things that suck your time, energy, or revenue, and target those for automating or outsourcing.

Start with just 1 task or activity, and decide how you might be able to spend less time on it--through automation, outsourcing, template-izing, or delegation. Then decide what steps you need to take to minimize your time on it.

Often, the first step--after identifying a task--is to document your current process/system for it; that way, if you need to hand it off to someone else, you'll have it documented. If you hire a contractor to do the task, and find that they aren't working out for you, you can get a different contractor, and forward them the documentation you've already created--that way, you don't have to do the training multiple times.

2. Repeatable solutions.

Review your recent clients, projects, and problems for patterns and/or trends. What problems or projects do you or your clients repeatedly encounter?

Again, make a list of potential problems that you might be able to solve with a product or template-ized service. The idea is to create something once, then re-sell it to multiple clients. You may end up lightly customizing it for each client, but by having a product or template-ized solution, you're leveraging your time and generating more revenue (i.e., a higher effective hourly rate).

Once you've whittled your preliminary problem list down to those that have the most potential (i.e., biggest problem, biggest value, most clients who need it, etc.), identify potential prospects

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who might be interested. Talk to those prospects about the problem, gauge how severe it is for them, how valuable a solution would be, and then get feedback on your idea for a potential solution. Do NOT sell anything or discuss price at this point. You're ONLY goal is to learn about the need for a solution to this problem, to understand the problem deeply, and--if you've validated that the problem is one worth solving--to begin refining the solution that you'll build as a product or template-ized solution.

Remember, do NOT spend time or money building anything until you've validated that you have customers who truly care about having the problem solved, and who are eager to get their hands on your solution. Seriously. Don't waste time on something no one cares about.

3. Group coaching and training.

Group coaching and training is somewhat similar to repeatable solutions and product/service development, since you first need to gauge whether and how much interest your market has in your offering. For coaching and training, you'll also need to determine the specific topics your market cares most about.

What topics/problems could you explore as potential webinars/classes? Based on your knowledge of your niche, make a list of 10-15 topics that you think your niche would be interested in. Talk to prospects and clients (or e-mail them) to see which they'd most prefer, which would help them solve their biggest problems, etc.

Once you have a short list of 3-5 topics, you can choose the topic with the most interest, and create a free training, seminar, or webinar on it. Free trainings get your feet wet doing a group-based delivery, and let you learn all the logistics behind the process.

Oftentimes, you won't be able to cover everything you'd like in a single session. That's actually good, since you'll then have more content to provide during a paid training/seminar. In that case, the free session whets your customers' appetites for more--which they'll get in your paid training.

4. Marketing channels.

Remember: you're creating an orchard. You plant seeds, water them, make sure they have lots of light, and pull the weeds. You don't expect peach trees to bear fruit that first season; you know it's a longer process. But you also know that if you tend the trees well, they'll continue to bear fruit for many years.

Same with your marketing. Schedule consistent time each week to focus on your marketing.

What have your most fruitful channels been? How can you amplify those results or automate them? Build relationships and use professional persistence to keep yourself in your prospects' and clients' minds, and keep delivering value to them.

What new channels could you explore? These days, most people are focused on online channels--which makes a lot of sense, since they lend themselves to automation and greater reach. But don't ignore offline channels; your competitors may be ignoring them, but that only makes a better opportunity for you to stand out.

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5. Resources.

These are all books, tools, services I've personally used and recommend. In some cases--with the time tracking and accounting tools, for example--I've literally spent dozens of hours implementing and testing the services to see which is best. Yes, it was a pain, but ultimately you have access to a short list of the top tools instead of having to muddle through things the hard way like I did. Oh, and yes, some of the links below might earn me a small commission if you end up using them; however, I'll never recommend anything I haven't personally tested and/or use myself.

- **Automating, outsourcing, and delegating:**

- [The E-Myth Revisited](#): A solid book that talks about why it's far better to work ON your business, not IN your business.
- [The 4-Hour Workweek](#): Though this book is targeted more toward 20-something single people who want to travel the world, the book has some excellent ideas and examples that will completely change your paradigm about work and lifestyle.
- [Fiverr](#): Get virtually any task done for \$5.
- [Craigslist](#): Another good source for outsourcing. Rather than have to respond to every potential applicant when you post a job, it's better to pre-screen applicants by giving them a small task that they need to send you as part of their "application." For example, have them take an online typing test and send you their results, or have them send you their LinkedIn profile. Anyone who can't/won't follow those simple directions gets cut out from the application process.
- [99Designs](#): Get bids and samples on your graphic design projects from dozens of designers & artists. The benefit is that you see what they're going to create before you pay for it.
- [Shoeboxed](#): Scan your documents & expense receipts to the cloud. Their free plan stores your documents while requiring you to do the scanning/photographing, while their paid plans let you mail your junk to them to scan.

- **Time-tracking + invoicing tools:** I've tried all 3 services--plus about a dozen other products--and the ones I've listed below are the best of the lot.

- [Harvest](#): Super easy to use, with good reports that let you see how you've spent your time. Integrates with Xero and Quickbooks (though the Quickbooks Online integration is prohibitively expensive).
- [MinuteDock](#): Similar to Harvest, MinuteDock is super easy to use with great reports. Integrates with Xero and Quickbooks--yes, Quickbooks Online too. This is currently what I use.
- [Freshbooks](#) (more an accounting system--see below)

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- **Accounting:** I've tried all 3 below, and though Freshbooks isn't quite as robust or comprehensive as Xero or Quickbooks, it's great if you don't have more complex accounting needs--such as payroll.
 - [Freshbooks](#)
 - [Xero](#): A nice, comprehensive accounting system that's one of the only serious competitors to Quickbooks.
 - [Quickbooks Online](#)
- **E-mail marketing:** [MailChimp](#) is the service I'd recommend, unless you have--or think you'll have--more than a couple thousand people on your e-mail list. For bigger lists, [AWeber](#) is the tool of choice. Beware though: if you start with MailChimp--or any other email marketing tool--and later want to convert to AWeber, all your existing subscribers will need to opt in--again--to your list, which often means you'll lose some of your subscribers, since they won't opt in.
- **Product development:** There are several great books on the lean startup process--basically where you're starting a business or creating a product while eliminating as much waste (time, money) as possible. One of my favorites is [Running Lean: Iterate from Plan A to a Plan That Works](#), since it's very hands-on, and walks you through how the author worked through iterating his own business, interviewing prospective customers, creating his MVP, etc.