



## Ten Top Tips for a New Business

When Crimson Leaf started I made many mistakes. It pays to be honest about these things. My business started without planning because of the sudden nature of my having to feed myself and my family without a regular income. Life sucks, but when it gives you lemons – make lemonade. Many businesses start this way, but equally many fall at the first hurdle. This document is designed to help you avoid the typical start-up mistakes known to bring a new business to its knees almost before it's taken its first breath.

### 1. Have a plan

How many businesses start up each year with just a vague idea of where they're going? Your business is likely to be your life-blood from now on. Whether it's a full blown life support system or just something that offers a small top up to your pension (oh yes, there are **LOADS** of retired individuals starting a business for the first time) you have to get it right.

Do as much as you can to structure whatever your offering is. Be clear on your product or service. If you have more than one type of service then can it be grouped under a general heading – useful for directories and forums (“fora” if you're posh). For example, I run seminars, write for businesses, and produce websites and business profiles. I also advise on social media. All of this comes under the general heading of **MARKETING**.

So sit down and think. Grab a pen and paper and just write down everything you can do then arrange it into some form of structured package.

### 2. Research

Having sorted out what you **CAN** do, you need to know **WHO** wants you to do it. Research your market. At first you'll ask friends and family. Almost without exception they'll tell you what a great idea or ideas you have. That's the problem with families and friends – **they can't lie to you!** You need people to tell you the truth, so make some serious enquiries with local businesses, preferably your target market. You **do** have a target market – right?

This is where many businesses fall over. Having a fantastic product is great if you have someone to sell it to, but pretty useless if not. Wasting time and money on a non-starter is a noob's worst enemy.

Talking to local businesses is easier than you think. A simple phone call, initially to smaller businesses (easier to get through the “gate-keeper”) will enable you to gauge a potential client's reaction to your proposal and let you know whether you're on the right track. Most businesses won't mind telling you if you've got a lousy idea. I know business owners who are just **WAITING** for you to call just so they can tell you just how crap you are. So expect some knockbacks. But you may also gain some new ideas, enabling to tweak your offering into a more saleable product.



### 3. Business Name

There are a couple of options here. You can choose something that perfectly describes your business: **Smith's Widgets** for example; or you can pick something a little more obscure, but perhaps catchy or memorable in some way. Few people get confused by this, and sometimes a random name has a greater impact. No one made the mistake of going to **Virgin** for their first bride.

The next step is to check the name isn't already in use. Here, [Google](#) is your friend. Search online for your chosen name. If it comes up you're out of luck. If it doesn't then you're still not entirely in the clear. Check [Companies House](#) online, then go to [Who.is](#) to check that there are available domain names for your forthcoming website - because you **WILL** need a website. I wanted Crimson Leaf to be called Virgin, but Branson wasn't having it.

### 4. Branding

The process of Branding isn't just about choosing a name. It's about choosing an ethos, and a Unique Selling Point (or Proposition), otherwise known as a USP. It's also about service levels, consistently meeting client or customer expectations, in short – **DELIVERING!** And of course you may also want a memorable visual image to stun your potential clients with. This can be a separate graphic, or the name itself can be styled in a memorable way – like for instance:



I still think I should have had that.

Few people are gifted enough to produce their own artwork, so I recommend the use of a professional Graphic Designer. This could be your first bit of major spending, and could cost somewhere around £500 for a good graphics package. [Contact me](#) if you need a selection of tested designers to quote for you.

### 5. Website

Because you checked availability with [Who.is](#) in step 3, you are now in a position to purchase your domain. This can be purchased AND hosted for as little as £25 per year, and I can once again recommend hosting companies if you [Contact me](#).

Many hosting packages allow you to upload [WordPress](#), which you can use to build the site yourself, or to form a basis for a professionally designed site. The important thing though is to secure your own domain. You'll probably opt for a **co.uk** domain if you're based in the UK, but it might help you to buy the same name with a **.com** suffix at the same time so that it blocks anyone else doing so and confusing their business with yours. By the way, purchasing your domain will also give you a number of email addresses. The site <http://crimsonleaf.co.uk> gives me [absolutelyanythingIwant@crimsonleaf.co.uk](mailto:absolutelyanythingIwant@crimsonleaf.co.uk) for example.



**Having a site built with WordPress will enable you to add or edit pages on your site through a very simple to use Control Panel (you just need a user name and password) and it also has a Blog facility. More of this later. I do confess to being a bit of a WordPress fan-boy though, just because it's so EASY!**

The site when complete should be clean and simple and contain a good mix of carefully written text and relevant graphics. The text should perfectly describe what you do or what you're selling, right there on the front page. Don't try to be too clever with web text. It confuses people. Every opportunity to place a "call to action" on your site should be grasped with both hands, and your contact details shouldn't have to be searched for.

Now for a big surprise – unless you are an accomplished writer in the sales field I would highly recommend the services of a good copywriter. OK, it sounds like a blatant advert, (and to be honest, it is) but if you don't like me or my style then at least find a good writer to prepare your site. How many sites do you see with clumsy sentence structure, bad spelling and, worst of all, no real clue of what they're doing or selling. As a warning, a significant part of my workload is re-writing other people's websites after they've made their own attempts.

The website can be a simple one page online business card, with a brief description of services and contact details, or it can be more of a brochure, with different pages for different parts of your service, a professional contact page and email capture arrangement. What you end up with can be determined by your budget, or time if doing it yourself. WordPress will enable you to start small and expand as time and budget allows if this helps.

Whatever you do with regard to writing the text you must be aware of **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)**. This is the process of writing your site in such a way that the search engines like Google, Bing and Yahoo find it and give it prominence.

People will pay a fortune for SEO, but it really is simple providing the site is written with SEO in mind from the outset. A site with little thought given in this direction will inevitably end up being [re-written](#).

## 6. Free software

To be honest, most software isn't that expensive for a small business. You'll need a way of recording your spending and income, and some form of word processing software to enable you to send out letters. You may also want a program above and beyond Outlook Express to handle your emails. Your email address came with your website, remember.

Many Windows based computers and laptops come pre-loaded with Works, a Microsoft proprietary set of programs. You can improve on this by purchasing Microsoft Office, which is another (but better) suite of integrated programs, but if you're on a **REAL** budget you might look at [Open Office](#). This is Open Source software, which means it's constantly being developed by its users and is therefore non-commercial. A better way of saying non-commercial is **FREE**.



## FREE is good.

Not only is it good, but many users rate Open Office as being right up there with Microsoft Office, and is fully compatible with it, so you don't have to worry about whether you can open other people's emailed files.

You can use the spreadsheet function within these software suites to build a simple accounts system. If you need help then please get in touch, but you should be OK. To have a professional email package then you'll probably use Outlook (not to be confused with the cheaper Outlook Express) if you have Microsoft Office, or you may download **Mozilla Thunderbird**, another open source product from the providers of **Firefox**, the increasingly popular web browser. You can download Thunderbird from [here](#).

## 7. Blog

**If you want people to engage with you, and in some cases take your business more seriously, you will want to Blog.**

The word Blog is a contraction of Web Log or weblog, and originally started as a form of online diary. People get confused by Blogs, and don't understand how they work. So a typical example would be a company who sells widgets and notes that a new piece of widget oriented legislation has just been passed by the Commons. This information may be useful for clients, so the best bet is to publish on your website as a Blog article, and anyone who comes to your site will have the chance of reading it. For how to do this most effectively see step 9 – **Social Media**.

You could however, run a more informal Blog, where you record your thoughts and feelings on a regular basis – and I mean regular. One of the biggest failures in Blogging is the "Intermittent Blog". If you want to see a perfect example of the "Intermittent Blog" then go to my site. I'm too embarrassed to supply a direct link here. Remember, this document is to advise you on how things **SHOULD** be done. Some plumbers have leaky pipes too. Nobody's perfect. However, one of the reasons that I have so little time to write my own Blog is that I'm busy writing them for other people. – see [here](#) for more information.

## 8. Build Back-links

Just a short section here. An effective way of increasing traffic to your website is to create back-links. A back-link is where your web address is mentioned somewhere else. If you make a comment on someone else's Blog for example you may find that your web address is asked for. Great – because search engines like Google will find it and help to push your page ranking up. If you join a business forum (highly recommended) then every time you make a comment on the forum your website will get noted. I have over 5,000 back links to my website just through this type of activity. You may also request that you are placed in some one else's "Favourite links" section on their website in exchange for writing an article for example. Everything helps.



## 9. Social Media

**Social Media is the collective heading for online groups such as [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Linkedin](#), [4Networking](#) etc.**

With Twitter and Facebook you can have either business or personal profiles depending upon your plans for using them. My accounts are mainly business because I want EVERYBODY to know about what I do. You should do the same. There is one key thing to remember whenever you are online and talking to people, even people you've never met – **BE YOURSELF**. Too many people try to put on a "businessy" front and their followers lose all interest. You can also put people off by spamming the whole world with adverts for your service. No more than 20% of your "Tweets" (I know, I know) should be adverts for your service. **ENGAGE** with people, link to useful or interesting articles, tell jokes (but nothing that will harm your image), offer help, but above all be yourself. Within my first ten tweets I offered a small morsel of help to a fellow Tweeter who sent me a copy of a contract to tender for Government services in return. It doesn't get any better than that.

As with everything in business, the key to success in social media is **ACTIVITY**. I spoke about Blogs earlier. The most effective way of getting your Blog read is to Tweet a link to it, or place a link on Facebook, or place a link on one of the business forums you may end up joining.

The idea is to get people to your website, where they won't be able to help themselves when it comes to looking around to see who you are and what you do. **LOADS** of business is generated this way. Advert time again – Crimson Leaf offers full **Social Media Strategy** training, available [here](#).

## 10. Networking

**I've saved the best business tool for last.**

Business Networking has undergone a renaissance in the last four years. There have always been networking groups around, the most popular being [BNI](#) (Business Networking International), a formal business exchange network which holds business breakfast meetings at 06.45 am.

Four years ago [4Networking](#) was born. 4N is the younger, rowdier brother of BNI in networking terms. It too holds breakfast meetings at 08.00 (a little later) and full members can network at up to four locations each week, choosing from 230 groups.

Each meeting gives the opportunity for up to **THREE** one-to-one meetings with fellow members or guests, and you have a 40 second slot to give a quick run-down of your business. From the very first meeting you can ask if there is an available slot for you to present a 15 minute 4Sight slot, which is an insight into your business, not a blatant sales pitch. There are currently over 33,000 members of 4N, many of whom use the infamous [4N Forum](#), where business ideas are exchanged, solutions offered, and contacts made.

**For my business, 4N has been the biggest single influencing factor in its success.**



Networking in general is an essential part of the business process. You will find both clients and suppliers from networking, and nothing will sell your business as well as you. But it doesn't have to be formal. You may network at the squash club, golf club or even the pub. Tell people about your business (but don't ram it down their throats) and offer help if they have a need. Sometimes giving away your knowledge for free can reap huge dividends.

**I hope you've found these Ten Tips useful, and we haven't even touched on Traditional Marketing, Seminars, Other Marketing collateral, Multi-Level Marketing or any one of a number of business-boosting tips. Feel free to [contact Crimson Leaf](#) to see how we can help, or have a look at my [Testimonials](#) for a flavour of what we do. Or you may want to take advantage of our "[First Impressions](#)" website review if you've got that far.**

Thank you for downloading and reading this short e-book.

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