



Should I Start a Business?

We've all probably heard this question from friends, family, acquaintances, etc. SO many times. As a small business owner myself, I've struggled with it too. I've had lots of great small business ideas (at least they're great in my mind ☺), but which ones should I really pursue? How do you decide if your small business idea should become more than just that? Admittedly, I'm no small business expert, but I have run a small business for over a decade and in that time I've identified three crucial questions to ask yourself to help you decide whether or not your small business concept is likely worth pursuing.

Of course, this list isn't exhaustive, but these three questions can help scope what I like to call "*The Success Triangle*" as a back of the envelope approach to help budding entrepreneurs decide whether to pull the trigger on that small business idea...

Consider these three elements of the Success Triangle – Concept, Execution, and Profitability

1. Concept - Is it a "good idea"?

Let's start with the obvious. Not every idea is a good one, and just because your mom thinks it's great doesn't mean it is. Too many of us suffer from that "*If we build it, they will come*" mentality which can be equally tempting and dangerous. Just because you are obsessed with your dogs and think the world is clamoring for the introduction of canine teeth whitening pens doesn't mean it's so. Remember the frenzy around the launch of online grocery shopping which was anticipated to cripple grocery stores around the turn of the millennium – didn't materialize. It's easy for something to seem like a great idea initially, but several key questions should be asked to help determine whether the concept/idea is truly solid:

- Is there a need? How significant is the need?
- How much competition currently exists in this space?
- How large is your potential customer base?
- Do you have a unique ability to provide this product/service?
- Do you have experience/passion in this area?
- Are there trends in the marketplace/industry that might make my produce/service more or less attractive going forward?

2. Execution - How Well Can You Execute the Concept?

While it's great to have a solid business idea/concept, it's quite another thing to execute it well. Your idea about selling doggie teeth whitening might be a viable concept that the marketplace needs, but how well can you execute it? How do you manufacture the product? How well does it work? How easily is it applied? How do you market/deliver the product? These questions and others are critical issues to consider when contemplating how well your business idea scores on execution:

- How will you provide great customer service?
- What is the quality level of your product/service?
- How efficiently can you produce your product/service?
- What is your time to market?
- How is your product/service produced? Fulfilled?



- How easy/difficult is it to market the product?

3. Profitability - Is Your Business Model Profitable?

Unless you're starting a non profit of course, most entrepreneurs are hoping to be profitable – quite profitable in fact! There's no shame in expecting profit. In fact, if you're not managing your profit levels, you won't be around very long most likely. As part of this analysis, it's important to evaluate your overall business model. For your dog whitening product, you should consider your pricing structure? Are you selling whitening pens individually or in bulk? Are you only selling pens or also providing a whitening service? Where will you sell – online, through vets/spas, through retailers? Consider these questions to help evaluate your business model and profit potential:

- What is your cost structure? What are your expenses?
- How much does it “cost” to gain a client?
- What is the anticipated demand (quantified)?
- How will you sell? Online, Brick and mortar, using party concept, through resellers?
- Are you focused on B to B (business to business) or B to C (business to customer) selling?
- Are you selling to individuals/groups? Bulk or individual products?
- Are you using a franchise model?
- Are you selling products, services, or both?

These questions aren't a substitute for developing a thorough business plan or considering a particular individual's suitability for entrepreneurship, but I think that they act as a simple guide to help the budding entrepreneur begin that critical vetting process.

Having developed a small business over the past decade, Dana Brownlee is an advocate for helping other small businesses succeed. She is President of Atlanta based training company Professionalism Matters and is an acclaimed keynote speaker, corporate trainer, and team development consultant. She can be reached at danapbrownlee@professionalismmatters.com and on Linked In and Twitter @DanaBrownlee.