

Compliments of Stacey Shanner

ISSUE 19

BUSINESS

IN ACTION

AI VS. HUMAN SKILLS

What you should and shouldn't automate

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Learn the best practices for using this tool

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Front of Tear Out Card 1



The Impact of Mobile Marketing

When utilized to its fullest, mobile marketing can help you engage with consumers through text messages, emails, and more—making it a vital part of any marketing plan. Save this card for useful tips on crafting your business's strategies.





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Back of Tear Out Card 1

MOBILE MARKETING: The subset of digital marketing focused on the mobile experience. It involves shorter, more engaging content and seamless experiences delivered via avenues like text messages, emails, and websites.

- **Optimize your website.** Catering your website to mobile users will motivate them to keep scrolling. Rather than simply shrinking down the desktop version of it, adjust the coding to resize and reformat images and text for a better phone experience.
- **Keep it short and sweet.** Limit your text messaging to a short, engaging message a few times a month. As for emails, use bullet points and appealing imagery, and place the main takeaways front and center. Only send them two to three times a week, and keep your subject lines concise and accurate to encourage more opens.
- **Integrate it with your other strategies.** For a cohesive marketing plan, align your mobile efforts with your other initiatives, including your social media campaigns. For example, place Instagram buttons in your emails and text messages to facilitate easy sharing and increase engagement.
- **Follow guidelines.** Be sure to only message and email people who have opted in to your communications and give them the ability to opt out. Always confirm text registration, disclose any potential fees, and message customers only during certain hours: typically between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. in each time zone.





Dear Bill and Judy,

It's springtime once again, a prime opportunity to take a step back after the hustle and bustle of Q1 and review whether any of your policies or procedures need a refresh. This issue of Business in Action provides some key avenues to consider, including how you can better accommodate the needs of certain team members, a look at how to enable the strengths of working mothers, and tips for launching sustainability initiatives.

Offering support to your team can help your business succeed. The enclosed articles on the topic introduce various ways you can assist two specific groups, caregivers and neurodivergent individuals, so they can be their best while being a boon for your business.

In honor of Mother's Day, get a glimpse at what moms bring to the table for a company's culture and bottom line, both as employees and as leaders. And if you're in the latter group, check out the bonus list of resources dedicated to empowering mompreneurs.

Sustainability tends to be top of mind this time of year, so why not do an internal audit of your company regarding this hot issue? Inside, you'll find several potential initiatives to help improve your organization's environmental and social impact as well as its perception.

How will you spring into action to make positive changes as a leader this season? As always, it's a pleasure sending you this magazine.

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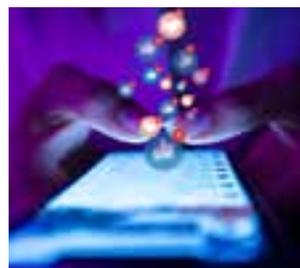
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Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace

Many employees juggle work and caregiving, making it crucial for businesses to implement flexible policies and benefits that help their team members thrive both personally and professionally. **BY ALLISON GOMES**

FROM RAISING YOUNG children to caring for aging parents, employees these days often find themselves having to balance professional responsibilities with caregiving at home. To help promote retention and create a better work culture for your team, you need to recognize and support the commitments they may have outside

the workplace. Consider these three strategies as a strong starting point.

Poll your workforce
 You can't know what your employees need if you never ask them, so first conduct an anonymous survey to better understand their responsibilities outside of work. These insights will give you a greater sense of their realities and what you can do to promote a healthier work-life balance.

Be flexible
 Creating flexibility in your scheduling policies may help caregivers better manage their various duties. For instance, implementing a fluid start time can reduce morning anxiety, enabling them to complete their personal tasks without worry of being tardy. Moreover, as long as it doesn't

affect their work, encourage them to take breaks as needed and give them the freedom to leave early for appointments or emergencies.

Expand your benefits and resources
 Just as important, examine your company's benefits to ensure that they adequately support caregivers. For one, check that your PTO policy is sufficiently generous; it's invaluable for allowing employees to handle emergencies without the added stress of work commitments. And make sure everyone is well-informed about the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows up to twelve weeks of leave for a covered event, including caring for a spouse, child, or parent with a serious medical condition.

By recognizing the demands of caregiving, you can do your part to help your employees balance their roles more effectively, which can ultimately benefit both your team members and your business. ■



Examine your business's policies, and determine where you can enhance them to better support any caregivers on your team.

BALANCING AI WITH HUMAN SKILLS

Artificial intelligence may seem like a more affordable alternative to employing a robust staff, but investing in a team of living, breathing individuals—and in developing their soft skills—may still be pivotal to your organization’s continued success.

BY ANDRE RIOS





In recent years, AI has become a monumental component of the business sphere. With its range of lightning-fast capabilities, including analyzing data, automating tasks, and crafting professional text, it has been integrated into day-to-day processes across various industries, even for those outside the tech realm. It may, therefore, tempt you as a business leader to embrace this tool wholeheartedly, entrusting it with an indiscriminate majority of workday tasks.

However, AI can't do it all—and your organization's success may hinge on the human touch that bots simply can't recreate. Check out some of this technology's most glaring limitations, the employee soft skills that ultimately outshine it, and the steps you can take to maximize your team's irreplaceable strengths.

→] Customer service

Those who have struggled with a digital assistant on a customer service call know well enough that AI isn't necessarily suited for verbal interaction. "Representative!" they may shout, only to be misunderstood, rerouted to a different set of prompts, or simply disconnected. It's evident, then, that while chatbots and other AI customer-service tools can deftly handle straightforward inquiries, virtually anything more complex exceeds their capabilities. These cybersystems operate based on algorithms and data and thus lack the capacity for compassion and emotional intelligence, preventing them from understanding social cues like veiled frustration. They're also unable to provide any genuine quality assurance or direct

solutions to nuanced concerns, such as comparing different product offerings.

Ultimately, top-notch customer service requires the kind of warm, interpersonal connection that only a human employee can provide. (And the ability to actually comprehend human speech doesn't hurt either.) Soft skills like empathy, active listening, and strong nonverbal communication can more effectively help clients through an issue and address their distress or irritation. This can, in turn, cultivate trust and loyalty to build and maintain client relationships that keep them coming back to your business.

For this reason, fostering these abilities in your client-facing employees is crucial for your business's long-term growth. To do this, assess their performance by meeting regularly with all department managers and reading reviews on social media. Follow that up with occasional training sessions to educate them about listening to clients' needs intently, handling irate customers deftly, and communicating solutions courteously.



While generative AI services excel at retrieving, processing, and analyzing data, they lack the spark of creativity and ingenuity only strong employees possess.

All that said, you may be able to address increasing demands such as high call volume through the use of AI chatbots, which can field basic concerns and address common requests like inquiries about your operating hours. But ensure that

interpersonal interaction is always an option, especially when a customer's needs exceed automation's strengths.

→] Creative work

While generative AI services excel at retrieving, processing, and

analyzing data, they lack the spark of creativity and ingenuity only strong employees possess. Take AI-generated art, for example, which crafts images by pulling data from existing digital assets (including other bot-produced artwork), resulting in imagery that is littered with visual errors or even appears downright comical. Automated text by systems like OpenAI, meanwhile, often suffers from repetitive or nonsensical language. Worse, both of these services have faced controversies such as factual inaccuracies and the wrongful reuse of copyrighted materials.

In other words, be mindful of your use of AI when it comes to creative tasks or projects. This tool can assist by generating data-driven insights and automating repetitive tasks, but dreaming up unique ideas, crafting compelling narratives, and leveraging persuasive language will always remain human endeavors, even if employee production is lengthier and more labor intensive. These irreplaceable talents are vital for developing electrifying marketing campaigns, designing aesthetically pleasing products, and crafting engaging verbiage that can resonate with your target audience and hook their attention.



So whether you're looking to fill a creative role or enhance the team you currently have, consider how you could invest more in these individuals to spur productivity and produce continually innovative material. For example, ask what type of environment may best nurture their spark, perhaps allowing them to operate remotely as desired so they can produce projects outside the confines of an office setting. Or enroll them

in seminars and classes led by prominent creatives to help inspire their vision.

Of course, human efforts will still require scrutiny—employees are, like AI, capable of making fact-checking errors or otherwise producing subpar work. But they are also more adept at strengthening their skills based on constructive critique. Therefore, one of the greatest ways that you can reap excellent results from your creative teams is by implementing a system of ongoing collaboration, open communication, and regular feedback.

→] Leadership skills

There's no underestimating AI's ultraefficient data analysis capabilities. However, human staff are essential for crafting powerful business strategies based on these analytics. So while you may turn to automated services to fetch information such as your ROI on a specific marketing campaign, you should lean on your team members to interpret such details, brainstorm solutions, and ultimately make decisions that AI might not be equipped to handle.



For instance, how can you address customer complaints about slow service times or improve the clickthrough rate on your marketing emails? What approaches could you take to better contend with competing businesses that have rolled out new products or services? AI might be able to offer up some broad recommendations, but finding ideas worth executing as part of your business strategy will likely require some creative thinking—something that is, as noted, simply outside the competencies of machinery.

Look for team members who frequently step up with fresh perspectives, solutions, or tactics,

and consider positioning them in leadership roles where they can apply these strengths with impact. For better results, you could also enroll these outstanding individuals in professional courses where they can develop the various soft skills required of effective leaders, including business communication and strategy implementation. You may even choose to invite managers in training to shadow you on the job.

These tasks of scrutinizing your team and preparing them to step into leadership positions yet again exceed AI's capabilities. Though some accessible adaptive-learning programs can streamline employee

training, the best way to identify standout performers, foster their talents, and place them in roles where they can shine is to rely on your own proficiencies and those of your current management team.

→] Preserving the workforce

AI can unquestionably offer unique benefits to your organization. But as with managing employees, executing such tools properly depends on you being realistic about their limitations as well as their strengths. As of now, they fail to fully replace the key soft skills of talented human staff: emotional intelligence, contextual understanding, creativity, and innovation. So avoid the temptation to turn to AI for its sheer speed and instead retain and invest in a talented team of human employees. Automation's ultimate promise is saving you time and money, but an evident decline in quality may cost you more in the end. ■



Assess your organization's most pressing needs, then consider how your employees' soft skills—and even your own—could present viable solutions.



The Business Benefits of Neurodivergence

Neurodivergence may have been a fuzzy term for business owners in the past, but it's become crystal clear how hiring and supporting team members with outside-the-box thinking can be beneficial.

BY MATTHEW BRADY

IMAGINE HAVING A TEAM MEMBER WHO'S

ultraproductive, dedicated, focused, detail oriented, and innovative. How would you describe them? A dream employee, perhaps? Management material?

These sought-after qualities can also describe neurodivergent people. Unfortunately, however, this group is often overlooked in the job market, resulting in an estimated unemployment rate upward of 40 percent. Discover the many strategic advantages you can get by making your workplace and processes more neurodivergent friendly and how to foster these individuals' strengths within your organization.



What is neurodivergence?

As this relatively new term indicates, neurodivergence is literally a different (divergent) way of processing

Neurodivergence is literally a different (divergent) way of processing (neuro), encompassing a breadth of people who, simply put, are hardwired to experience the world differently. It's thought that up to 20 percent of Americans are neurodivergent, with the most well-known examples being autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, and ADHD.

(neuro), encompassing a breadth of people who, simply put, are hardwired to experience the world differently. It's thought that up to 20 percent of Americans are neurodivergent, with the most well-known examples being autism spectrum disorder (ASD), dyslexia, and ADHD. It's important to note that each of these individuals is different and should be treated accordingly; that said, there are common behaviors they may exhibit in certain situations, including the ones below.

Social interaction

Some, such as those with ASD, may have difficulty with things like nonverbal cues, figurative speaking or humor, and eye contact.



Communication

You may find that some neurodivergent people are surprisingly direct while others are measured in what they say and take more time to clearly explain their thoughts.

Change

They often thrive in predictable environments, and it can be frustrating for them to deal with change.

Sensory overload

Loud sounds, strobe lights, messy workstations, and the like can cause them to get distracted or act out; as such, they tend to prefer quiet spaces.

Other conditions

Neurodivergent people may sometimes exhibit secondary disorders. For instance, a person with autism may also display OCD, or one with ADHD may also experience anxiety.



No barrier to success

Being neurodivergent isn't necessarily an obstacle, as evidenced by the success of various well-known figures such as animal behaviorist Temple Grandin and actor Sir Anthony Hopkins, both of whom have autism, and entrepreneurs Richard Branson and Kevin O'Leary, who have dyslexia. Meanwhile, Sandi Wassmer, CEO of the UK nonprofit Employers

Network for Equality & Inclusion, has thrived despite being diagnosed with ADHD over fifteen years ago.

Not every neurodivergent person will become an Oscar-winning actor or fly into space, of course, but they do often provide immense workplace value. For example, it's thought that those with autism can be 90 to 140 percent more productive than their neurotypical counterparts. In addition, studies have found that hiring people with disabilities increases not only revenue, sales, and profit margins but also overall company bonding and morale.



What you can do

As a savvy leader, you should embrace the potential of any team members who are open about their place on the neurodivergence spectrum—along with those who may prefer to remain private—by taking steps to support their needs in the workplace. After all, this is far from a new concept. In fact, Ernst & Young (EY), Freddie Mac, SAP, Home Depot, Charles Schwab, JPMorganChase, Google Cloud, and other big businesses have been committed to neurodiversity inclusion for years, with many having started specific programs for it.

The bottom line: if you haven't yet adjusted your way of running your





business in this respect, don't hesitate to do so. Otherwise, you risk being at a competitive disadvantage both practically (for reasons already discussed) and perceptually (as more job seekers consider inclusion to be an important company value). Here are some ways to go about it.

Create a welcoming first impression

“Feeling excluded and invisible is typical for neurodivergent people,” says professor Ludmila N. Praslova (also a person with ASD) in Harvard Business Review’s *Ascend*. To help make such situations atypical, update your in-house processes, starting with your hiring methods. From the top down, educate your team about neurodivergent tendencies and needs so they can be baked into job descriptions, interview standards, and company culture. For interviews in particular, eschewing a one-size-fits-all approach can be helpful since job seekers with autism, for example, may have difficulty with standard conversation practices like social cues, such as knowing when it’s their time to speak. Instead, have alternatives like test taking or hands-on competency demonstrations (such as how to run a program on a laptop) available as part of your interview process in case such options are requested beforehand.





Craft an accommodating work environment

The key to productivity for any employee is a working environment that feels supportive, positive, and collaborative. So how can you make sure your office or remote work meets that standard for your neurodivergent employees? First, be ready to provide reasonable accommodations. Some neurodiversity conditions fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), so such individuals have the legal right to request them, both during interviews and after coming aboard—and your cost will likely be minimal. Per a January 2024 survey by the Job Accommodation Network, 56 percent of employers reported zero expenses for obliging employees with disabilities, and the 37 percent who incurred a one-time cost said it averaged about \$300.

Note that to remain ADA compliant, you cannot pose disability-related questions before a job offer is made, though you may generally ask if they need any accommodations. The restrictions aren't quite as strict once you hire someone, but you might still want to keep the questions broad to help them feel comfortable. For anyone you onboard, consider having their manager inquire whether their setup works well for them; if they request something like dimmer lighting, noise-canceling headphones,



or even a walkthrough of Zoom view options for meetings, be prepared to meet their wish. It may also behoove you to go back and provide the same courtesy to your current team to ensure that they feel fully supported and boost morale.

In addition, you and your organization should get in the habit of tweaking your language to avoid subtle but widely construed negative language (e.g., a “disabled person” versus “a person with disabilities”) and be crystal clear about what you mean, such as saying “Complete, fact-check, and distribute this report by Friday” instead of “Get this report done by Friday.” You could also overhaul your company’s work schedule, especially in terms of hours and in-office requirements. Both your neurotypical and neurodiverse employees would appreciate the flexibility, but the latter may especially—some may thrive in the routine of taking the train to work every day, for instance, while others may become withdrawn in a busy office. Finally, look into ways to enhance even your most innocuous processes. Something as simple as providing neurodiverse team members advance notice of forthcoming changes can make a huge difference, allowing them the extra time they may need to process it.

Create a path for future growth

A general rule of thumb is that when you find good employees, you want to keep

them, and for neurodivergent ones, that may require some extra considerations. The key is recognizing what each individual excels at and giving them well-defined instructions for how their corporate growth can be achieved, preferably in writing so they can reference back to it. Offering mentoring and training for career advancement, much like you would for neurotypical team members, has also been found to profit these individuals as well as organizations’ bottom lines.

This overview can start you on the road toward creating a more inclusive workplace, but there are plenty of ways to get more information, such as through the US Department of Labor or the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), which provides a comprehensive neurodiversity tool kit for employers. Take that first step today, and discover how much your business can benefit from having these individuals on your team. ■

Take Action

Brainstorm with HR about how you can make your organization more inclusive for neurodivergent team members.

Secure Retention in a Hot Labor Market

With cooling workplace morale and insufficient pay driving employees out the door across various industries, prioritizing retention becomes more essential than ever—both for protecting your resources and for ensuring ongoing organizational success.

BY ANDRE RIOS



In today's hypercompetitive business environment, one of the biggest challenges companies may face is reducing employee turnover. Continually needing to fill open positions can drain your finances, impact workplace efficiency, and dampen company morale. And all these downsides only compound when you consider that, per various research, the time investment required to replace prized employees may be trending much longer.

The key, then, is to make improving retention a top priority as a leader: not only encouraging employees to put their noses to the grindstone but also motivating them to clock in every day with a smile on their faces. Apply the following approaches, and you can foster a more loyal and driven workforce that aids you in achieving your organizational goals.

⊕ Compensative competitively

Naturally, employees are keenly invested in their own financial well-being, so compensation is central to staff retention. Ensure that your salary rates are competitive within your industry, using listings for comparable jobs as a reference. Additionally, review your benefits package to make it as comprehensive as



feasible, focusing on enhancing insurance and retirement plan options as well as paid time off.

Additionally, if top talents are seeking an increase in pay, be willing to discuss it with them—while you shouldn't stretch your payroll budget too severely, consider the potentially greater financial loss of your most valued team members being snatched up by rival organizations that offer them superior earnings.

☉ Lead with intention

Though you should be firm about your staff adhering to rules and working efficiently, you should also be motivating and approachable. Operate every day like an inspiring captain, leading by example rather than just by force; those who clearly demonstrate a good worth ethic and success in their fields can more effectively motivate their employees, creating a more loyal and productive workforce. Also consider investing in training seminars that will cultivate your abilities, ranging from open communication and conflict resolution to goal forming and ideation. Work to become a leader your team loves to follow, and your retention rates might just soar.

Building teams that work well together is fundamental to retention. When employees feel comfortable with their coworkers, they're more likely to experience enhanced daily satisfaction in their roles.

☉ Foster success

Employees are more likely to stay with a company that invests in their professional growth and offers them viable paths to career advancement. To demonstrate your commitment to your team members' potential, schedule regular one-on-one feedback meetings to discuss their strengths and weaknesses along with their career goals. Then provide avenues for them to make progress toward these aims by hosting skill workshops, holding training sessions that teach important skills, and recommending them to mentorship programs.



Furthermore, when leadership positions become available or your company's growth requires more managerial hands on deck, prioritize promoting from within. This not only is a cost-saving measure but also communicates to employees that their diligent labor may yield fruits of advancement and personal success. And for those you can't currently



promote, you can still acknowledge them with occasional bonuses, awards, and public recognition in meetings. Creating a workplace culture that nurtures growth and rewards success may result in greater retention rates—along with higher productivity as your team members endeavor to prove themselves.

☉ Cultivate bonds

Building teams that work well together is fundamental to retention. When employees feel comfortable with their coworkers, they're more likely to experience enhanced daily satisfaction in their roles. As an added benefit, getting to know and like each other may make them more hesitant to leave for another job.

To foster such connections, arrange for teamwork on important projects, invite employees to share ideas in collaboration sessions, and encourage them to participate in workplace social hours, hosting occasional icebreaker games and the like. Do so, and workplace bonds may begin to take shape—leading to greater loyalty and possibly even attracting new talent. ■

Take Action

Execute these retention strategies to reduce turnover and preserve your team, protecting valuable resources.



Unlock the Potential of Mobile Marketing

Mobile marketing should be a vital part of any marketing plan thanks to its ability to help businesses better engage with consumers through text messages, emails, and more.

BY LUKE ACREE



There's no denying that smartphones have become an integral part of daily life. According to the Pew Research Center, it's estimated that 90 percent of Americans now own one, while Harmony Healthcare IT reports that we spend an average of over four hours a day on our devices. Given this, mobile marketing is no longer just an option—it's a requirement for business owners looking to connect with a wider audience.

To help you better understand the power of this strategy, consider the simple text message. Per Soprano, a whopping 85 percent of cell phone users prefer to receive a text over a phone call, and most open it within three minutes. So if you're not texting your clients or prospects, you're missing out on the potential for exponential growth. By leveraging this and other forms of mobile marketing, you can boost engagement, attract more customers, and drive sales like never before.

Defining this tool

Mobile marketing is a subset of digital marketing that specifically focuses on the mobile experience. While digital marketing encompasses a broader range of online strategies—including SEO, social media, and digital ads—that are typically designed for a variety of devices, mobile marketing is tailored to the unique behaviors and needs of cell phone users. This often involves shorter, more engaging content and seamless experiences delivered via text messages, emails, websites, and other like avenues. When someone can simply click a link

that's messaged directly to them, there are fewer barriers preventing them from engaging with your service or product. In turn, you can more effectively reach new customers and simplify their interactions with your brand as well as improve relations with your current clientele.

A word of warning

As valuable as this strategy is, there are some caveats to be aware of. For one, you must only message and email people who have opted in to your communications, meaning they have selected that they want to receive your marketing content. For text messages, you'll also need to confirm their registration and disclose that they can be subject to fees, and you can only message customers during certain hours, typically between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. in each time zone. (This may vary by state.) And *always* give the option to opt out of your organization's mobile communications, whether text or email. Besides helping you remain compliant, these steps give your recipients greater agency by allowing them to engage with your business when and how they want.



Best practices

When crafting your mobile-marketing game plan, you need to create a seamless and engaging experience that organically encourages closed deals and drives better results. Follow these proven techniques to maximize your strategies and ensure that your efforts resonate with your audience.

Optimize your website

It's no secret that every business needs a website to reach consumers, but many overlook the importance of checking that theirs is mobile responsive. There's often nothing more frustrating for customers than getting on their phones and trying to navigate a site that continually hides the menu bar or has text that's too large or small. There are many ways to go about reducing these annoyances. For instance, instead of simply shrinking down the desktop version of your website, change the code for your mobile one so that it resizes and reformats images and text for a better phone experience. By optimizing your site for mobile users, you'll prevent many headaches and help keep customers scrolling.

Limit yourself

One of the best things about mobile marketing is how fast your content gets to users and how quickly they can



then engage with it. But you want to avoid hindering that accessibility by sending too much content in too short of a time. If you're texting clients, for instance, they don't want to see a large body of text every day. Instead, keep it short and limit your messaging to a few times a month.

The same could be said for your emails. While the format naturally lends itself to more text and even images or videos, most users will simply skim the content for information directly relevant to them. A more effective approach is using bullet points and placing the main takeaways front and center. Even more, don't flood your clients' inboxes, which may lead them to quickly unsubscribe. Only send your marketing emails two to three times a week (though it may depend on what campaigns you're currently running and the needs of your audience), and keep your subject lines concise and accurate to encourage more opens.

Personalize your efforts

Much more so than with traditional print marketing, you have many opportunities to personalize your mobile marketing, gearing it toward each person your business is connecting with. For your emails,

this can be as simple as adding an individual user's name to the beginning of the email, which services like MailChimp can do automatically for you.

Integrate it with your other strategies

For a cohesive marketing plan, make sure that your mobile efforts align with your overall initiatives, including your current print strategies, social media campaigns, and other touchpoints. For example, include social media buttons in your emails or text messages to facilitate easy sharing and engagement. This will help create a more unified experience for your audience.

Leverage data and analytics

As with anything else in business, you must measure and track the success of your mobile-marketing efforts. Use a tool like Google Analytics to frequently examine key performance indicators like open rates for text messages and emails, click-through rates for mobile ads, and conversion rates from mobile traffic to get valuable insights into user behavior and campaign effectiveness. You can then leverage this data to refine your strategies, identify trends, and make informed decisions to improve your tactics.

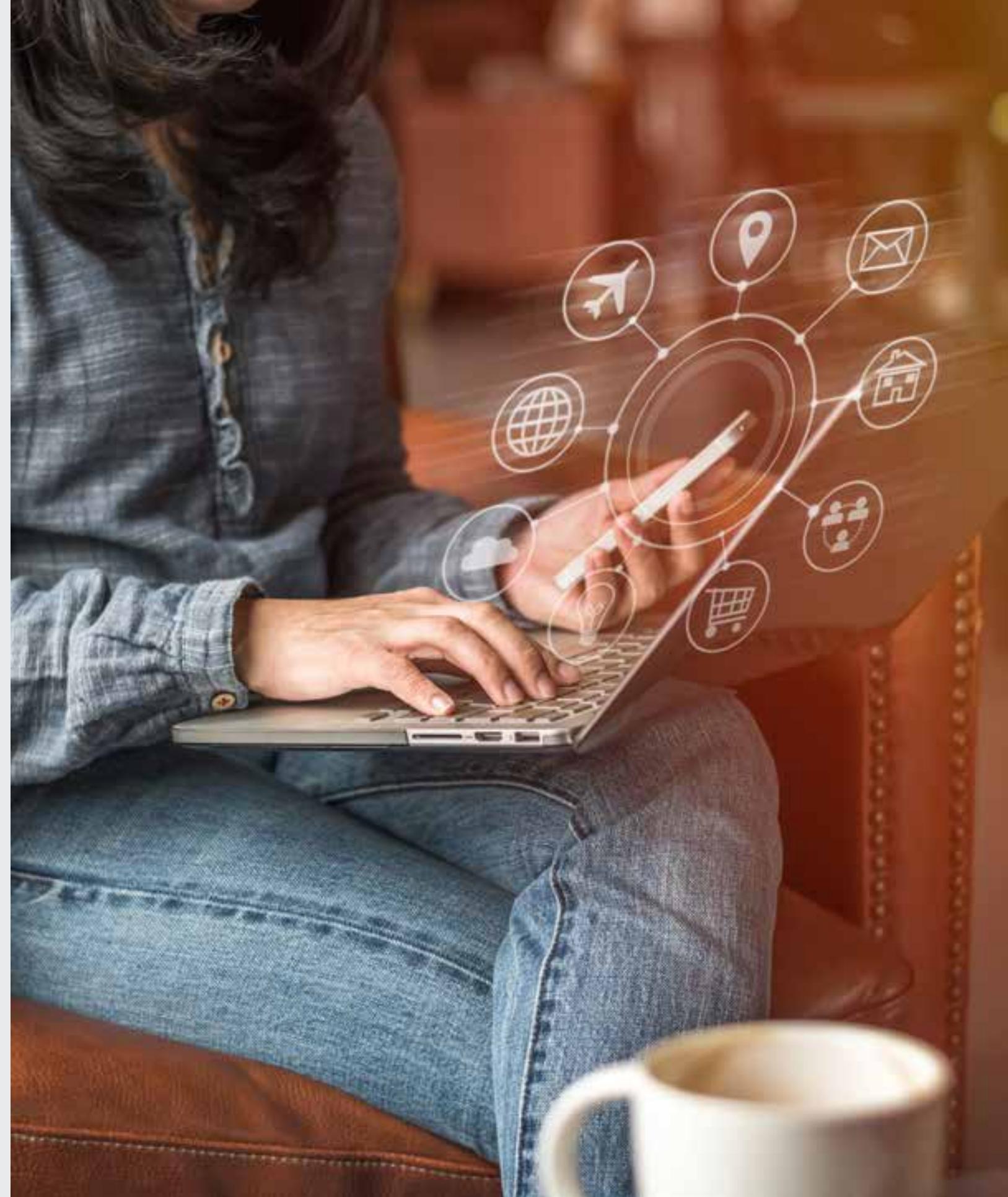


Examine your business's current mobile-marketing efforts, and determine how these strategies may help improve your efforts.

Mobile marketing offers immense potential for business owners to connect with their audiences in meaningful ways. By incorporating it into your marketing plan, you'll better position your organization to engage with consumers, enhance customer relationships, and achieve its business goals. ■



About the author: Luke Acree is an authority on leadership, a lead-generation specialist, and a referral expert who has helped more than 100,000 entrepreneurs and small businesses grow their companies. He hosts *Stay Paid*, a sales and marketing podcast, and has been featured in *Entrepreneur*, *Forbes*, and *Foundr.com*.





The Perks and Perils of Working with Loved Ones

Are you thinking of hiring friends or family members? If so, use this guide to navigate the myriad dynamics you may face and help you implement good working practices for your team. BY LAUREN KIM



AS A BUSINESS OWNER, you may have considered hiring those closest to you at one point or another. Perhaps your friend has a daughter who is a new college graduate looking for a sales assistant position, or maybe you think your spouse would be a perfect fit in your marketing department. Before you make moves to bring them onto your team, be sure to fully understand the pluses and minuses of doing so. This rundown can help you determine whether employing friends or family is a good move for you and how to navigate its potential challenges.

Pluses

Hiring and collaborating with a loved one can be beneficial for your company for a wide number of reasons. For one, they may be a more trusted, loyal, and hardworking employee from the jump simply due to their connection



Unlike with other hires, you're probably well acquainted with these individuals' strengths and weaknesses, which can help at all phases of the hiring, onboarding, and training processes.

to you. Those with a more distant link, such as that daughter of a friend, will likely be incentivized to prove themselves worthy of the favor, not wanting to let you or your friend down. Meanwhile, direct

family members and intimate friends will generally be invested in your success and may demonstrate a deeper care for and commitment to the job, resulting in immediate productivity.

Additionally, unlike with other hires, you're probably well acquainted with these individuals' strengths and weaknesses, which can help at all phases of the hiring, onboarding, and training processes. You can more quickly identify where their skills and personality may fit, streamline any induction steps, and determine what development they may need to be best positioned for success.

And, of course, there's the ability to see and interact with people you enjoy daily, which can brighten your workday and boost your own productivity. As a bonus, your camaraderie may even foster a more positive environment, providing for better employee morale and a stronger overall culture.

Minuses

All that said, there are potential drawbacks to working with loved ones

as well. First and foremost is the risk that either you or they may exploit your relationship, intentionally or not. For instance, you may subconsciously hold them to a higher standard than other employees, such as by wanting them to work longer hours. On the flip side, they may expect special favors from you, from leniency with project deadlines to compensation perks they haven't yet earned. And even when you take measures to ensure that you treat your friend or family member without favoritism, a perception of it may still develop among your other employees, eroding trust and morale and making them skeptical of their own opportunities for advancement.

Furthermore, filling a role based on personal connections may sometimes mean passing up a more skilled external job candidate. While this may prove inconsequential for lower-level positions, it can cause potential problems for more critical ones if the hire currently lacks the experience or abilities to dive in right away and manage the duties. This can also prevent you





from building a stronger, more inclusive and diverse team, which may even make it difficult to attract and retain top talent down the line.

On a more personal level, working with loved ones can blur the lines between your professional and personal lives, such as when family disagreements spill over into the workplace or vice versa. This could lead to tensions that strain your well-being and hamper your effectiveness as a leader, whether due to your inability to get a break from work at home or your employees seeing you undermined by apparent insubordination. Either way, it can be difficult to right the ship once such issues begin to develop.

Best practices

Clearly, successfully employing friends or family requires careful consideration and clear communication. Before hiring one, have an open and honest conversation with them about the potential impact on your relationship. Discuss how you'll handle challenges that may arise, such as disagreements or differing work styles. Creating a clear plan for managing these situations can help protect your personal bond while also maintaining a successful professional partnership.

On the business side of things, have your HR department, ideally staffed by nonrelated third parties, manage the entire hiring process to ensure fairness and objectivity. This approach can guarantee that the same rigorous criteria and evaluations are applied across the board for *all* your hires, minimizing any existence or appearance of bias or nepotism. You should also place your loved one under a supervisor other than yourself to maintain professional boundaries and prevent conflicts of interest. Finally, make sure to document these specific hiring and employment procedures in your employee handbook, if they aren't already included, to reinforce your commitment to them across your team.

Employing friends or family has its share of benefits and drawbacks, so it's best not to take this decision lightly. Instead, think carefully about the potential impact on everyone involved to help ensure a smooth onboarding process and beyond. ■

Take
Action

Review your hiring policies to make sure there are guidelines in place for hiring and working with friends and family.

The Power of Working Mothers

Read about all the pluses that moms bring to the corporate table, both for the companies they work for and the ones they run, and how to support them for greater professional and organizational success. BY **MATTHEW BRADY**

As the givers of life, mothers are arguably the most powerful collective force humanity has ever known, and yet their value—both at home and in the office—hasn't always been respected in the American workplace. But that has been changing in the twenty-first century. Slowly but surely, companies are growing to appreciate and accommodate working mothers, and when they don't, moms are taking control by starting their own. Explore why maternal qualities, regardless of who exhibits them, are practically custom-made for business success and how you can make a difference for moms on your team.



NUMBERS TO KNOW

Mothers' involvement in the job market has steadily been increasing over the past fifty years or so. According to the US Department of Labor, the participation rate has been particularly high for those with children under eighteen and even more for those with kids under age three, the former jumping by over 50 percent and the latter by 87 percent between 1975 and 2021. Most recently, a 2024 Hamilton Project survey said that "prime-age" women (ages twenty-five to fifty-four) are participating in the workforce at higher rates than ever.

But this growth in numbers hasn't necessarily led to parity since working moms still make less than working dads—and COVID-19 only shone a brighter light on the problem. Months after the pandemic hit, Brookings found that COVID impacted working mothers far more than fathers, especially concerning job losses. In 2022, polling from the National Women's Law Center showed a similar trend, citing a 16 percentage point difference between moms and dads who said their work hours were affected by pandemic-related issues like schooling and childcare. The business journal *Knowledge*



at *Wharton* even cited a corporate “motherhood penalty”—around 5 percent fewer earnings per child—that’s driving moms in Sweden to become entrepreneurs, warning that such parental penalization is likely even more pronounced in America.

EMPOWERING WORKING MOMS

If you’re a business leader, you can play a pivotal role in improving the lives of the moms in your company. Put yourself in their shoes to determine simple, cost-effective ways to help support them so they can, in turn, make your business more productive and profitable.

Understand and capitalize on their strengths

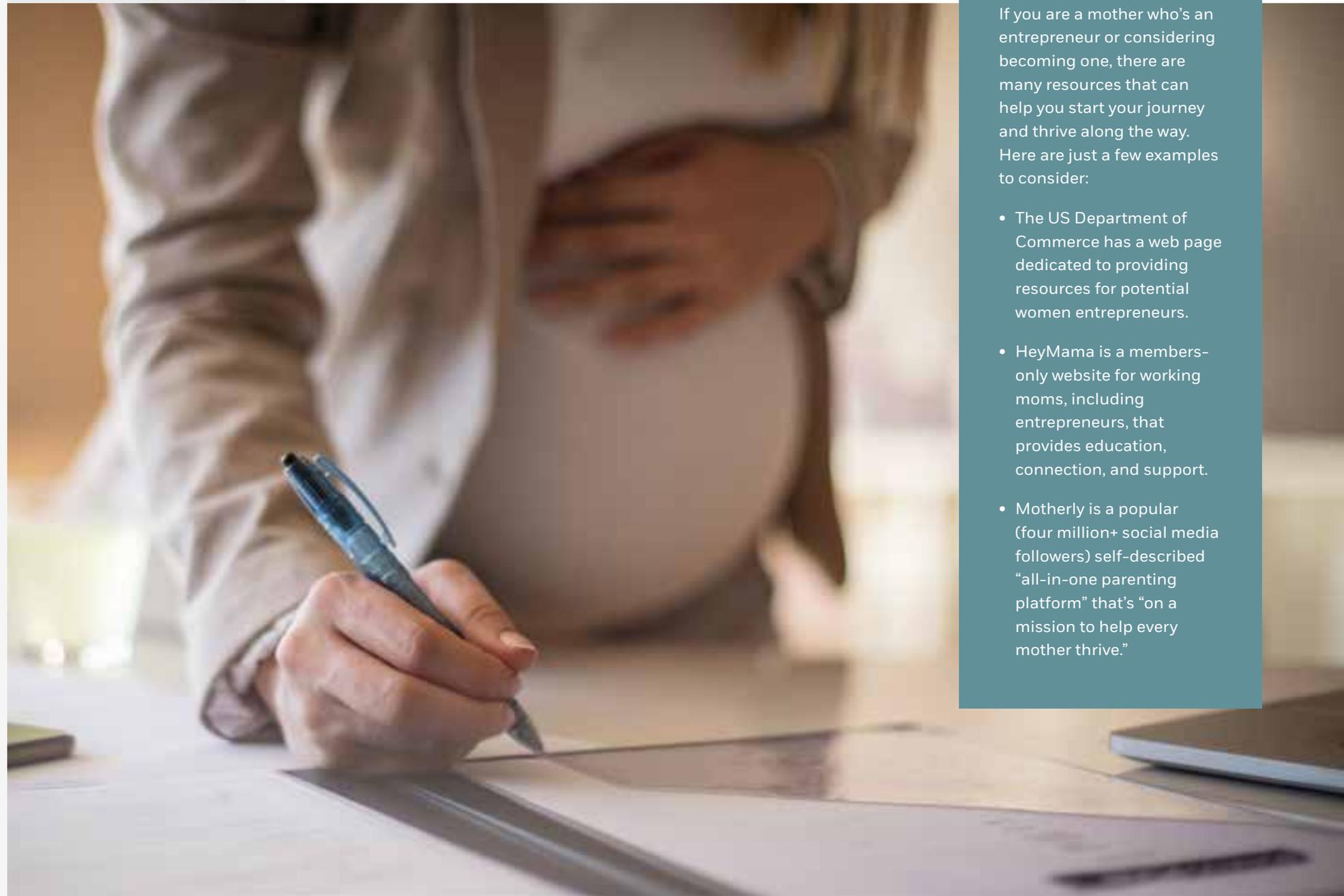
Moms are often the leaders of the household—the home CEOs, so to speak. They are known to be superefficient with their time, masters of multitasking, well organized, good communicators, experts in conflict resolution and negotiation, and eager to support those they’re responsible for. In short, they know how to get things done. Wouldn’t you want your business to run as proficiently as moms tend to run their households?

Jot down a list of such qualities to get a comprehensive picture of the unique benefits these individuals have to offer the workplace. Then evaluate how they

work in practice by talking to the moms (and dads) on your team about how they consciously or subconsciously apply parenting to their projects and teams. For instance, they might have great insight into how to make the distinction between when to oversee everything (as one would for young children) and when to give independence (as one would for a teen). They would appreciate you valuing their opinions and understanding where they’re coming from, and your team could glean useful strategies for a more productive workforce.

Get creative with accommodations

As is often the case in business, it requires give and take to achieve a successful partnership, including with parents. First and foremost, ensure that you’re accommodating situations that aren’t negotiable; for example, most new breastfeeding mothers are allowed by law to have break times in privacy to express milk. Additionally, reassess your benefits, considering whether you can offer generous leave for parents-to-be or even on-site childcare. The latter would be particularly helpful since *Motherly’s 2024 State of Motherhood* report says that two-thirds of moms surveyed have considered leaving the workforce simply because of childcare difficulties. (For more tips on how to support your caregiving employees, see page 3.)



RESOURCES FOR MOMPREENEURS

If you are a mother who’s an entrepreneur or considering becoming one, there are many resources that can help you start your journey and thrive along the way. Here are just a few examples to consider:

- The US Department of Commerce has a web page dedicated to providing resources for potential women entrepreneurs.
- HeyMama is a members-only website for working moms, including entrepreneurs, that provides education, connection, and support.
- Motherly is a popular (four million+ social media followers) self-described “all-in-one parenting platform” that’s “on a mission to help every mother thrive.”



FORGING THEIR OWN DESTINIES

Another avenue that women have increasingly been taking is starting their own companies—and the results have been impressive. According to the US Census Bureau’s 2022 annual business survey, women-owned businesses tallied over \$2 trillion worth of receipts the previous year. And the US Senate’s 2023 *Women’s Small Business Ownership and Entrepreneurship Report* revealed that “women in particular have been the driving force behind America’s economic rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, creating about half of new businesses for the third year in a row.”

Just as important as the economic impact is the personal one: namely, how motherhood prepared them for being boss moms. As Andrea Heuston, CEO of the creative firm Artitudes, succinctly put it as a guest author for *Inc.*, “Motherhood has undoubtedly made me a better entrepreneur.” Jennifer Jay Palumbo, founder and CEO of Wonder Woman Writer and contributor to *Forbes*, would agree—she came right out and said that with its long days, sleepless nights, and difficult customers, “starting a business is much like having a baby.”

Such similarities are partly why more and more women are throwing their hats into the business-ownership ring. If this is you,

here are some common keys that fellow mompreneurs swear by for balancing parenting and running a company.

Define “balance”

Simply put, you need to establish what your priorities are between work and life and then set firm boundaries to prevent your company from overwhelming your family life or vice versa. For example, let both your family and your team know which times you’re absolutely unavailable.

Get assistance

Entrepreneurs have a natural inclination to take charge of everything, but that can lead to burnout or worse. Whether it’s asking for more help from your team, outsourcing some tasks, or investing in tech to make life easier, always be open to assistance.

Carve out “me” time

Everyone needs an occasional break from it all, and this may be especially true for mother business owners. Be sure to recharge each week, even if just for an hour or two, by taking some true alone time without your kids or your company so you can continue giving your best to both.

Find your village

A common theme from many mom leaders is the importance of community, whether it’s through an entrepreneurial group, a women’s association, or a local mom group.

Danielle Finck, founder and CEO of Elle Communications, undoubtedly spoke for mom bosses everywhere when she concluded on the website the Good Trade, “It all boils down to community. I never realized how deeply I needed other people until I became a mom.”

Collectively, mothers are a powerful influence on the economy, integral to the companies they work for, and bold leaders who blaze their own path of entrepreneurship. Cultivate their value within your team and promote their strong qualities as ones to mirror throughout your organization, and see just how much they can contribute to your business’s success. ■



Get feedback from mothers in your company on how you can make it more parent friendly.



How to Conduct a Sustainability Audit

By assessing your business's environmental and social practices, you can uncover ways to minimize your ecological footprint, enhance resource efficiency, and strengthen your commitment to your community.

BY LAUREN KIM





When shopping, today's consumers are increasingly prioritizing businesses that align with their values, especially those committed to environmental protection and fair labor practices. For example, according to a PwC survey, more than 80 percent are willing to pay more for products that are sustainably sourced or produced, with some open to spending nearly an extra 10 percent in total.

To meet these growing expectations, more and more companies are turning to sustainability audits that can provide a clear road map for reducing their environmental impact and enhancing their social responsibility. In turn, they may not only boost their positive contributions to the world but also improve their bottom line, such as by growing their client base and cutting certain operating costs. If you're looking to do the same, use the tips in this guide to understand the basics of what such an audit may entail.

→ A checklist for your company

First and foremost, what exactly is business sustainability? According to Harvard Business School, it's "doing business without negatively impacting the environment, community, or society as a whole." This can be put into practice in any number of ways, including by lessening your consumption of energy and other natural resources, creating less waste, adopting equitable hiring and employee-management programs, and positively contributing to your local and greater community.

Auditing your company's sustainability enables you to identify how you can improve in these areas, offering numerous advantages. For instance, by pinpointing opportunities to conserve resources and energy, you may be able to optimize your business's operations and minimize its carbon footprint. Likewise, an audit may allow you to find ways to demonstrate your commitment to being eco-friendly, which could better attract environmentally conscious consumers and foster a happier and more engaged workforce. In these ways and more, becoming more sustainable can make your organization more adaptable, robust, and profitable for the long haul.

→ Key components

A thorough sustainability audit should delve into several essential aspects of your enterprise, but here are just two critical areas worth starting with. In addition to the steps that follow, consider consulting with a legal representative to make sure that you're in full compliance with any relevant laws and regulations.



Environmental

Naturally, you'll want to evaluate the overall impact of your company on the environment, including your energy-consumption patterns and waste-management practices. For example, examine the different stages of your products' life cycles, including the raw materials and

energy used to produce and package them and the means by which they're delivered. Even just a few tweaks to these processes could greatly reduce the amount of harmful chemicals and waste you produce. Additionally, review your supply chain to assess whether your vendors use eco-friendly materials and employ

By pinpointing opportunities to conserve resources and energy, you may be able to optimize your business's operations and minimize its carbon footprint.

energy-efficient practices; if not, it may be worth switching to ones who do. While this may mean taking on higher costs, the benefits will be far greater in the long run.

Social

Equally important as your environmental impact is your social responsibility, both inside and outside your walls. Regarding your internal practices, evaluate your workplace culture to ensure that you are fostering a positive, inclusive, and respectful environment for everyone and that the pay and



benefits you provide meet industry standards. Beyond your company, explore your community involvement, philanthropic initiatives, and support for local businesses, especially ones you're in partnership with. And don't forget to consider your effect on your clients, paying attention to factors like customer satisfaction and data privacy.

→ How to get started

To conduct your audit, you may want to hire a sustainability consultant, who can assist you in assessing these and other areas and finding solutions for improvement, whether that involves investing in renewable energy or launching beneficial employee training programs. Or as another option, you can create an

internal green team to take on the tasks of evaluating your practices, setting goals, and tracking your progress, being sure to recruit across departments to ensure a diverse perspective and greater buy-in.

If you go this route, you'll want to have them start by collecting and analyzing data like your company's



Recruit employee volunteers to work toward your company's green and social initiatives.

energy consumption and employee feedback. Based on their findings, they can then chart a path for making improvements, establishing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound) goals and developing a comprehensive action plan that includes specific steps needed to obtain each one. For example, one objective could be to reduce your company's energy usage by 15 percent within twelve months, using energy consumption tracking software and monthly meter readings to help monitor your overall progress.

As part of this process, your team should clearly indicate timelines, assign responsibilities, and identify necessary resources for reaching your goals. To maximize success, ensure that they provide regular updates not just to you but also to



all your employees, encouraging outside ideas via a suggestion box or online platform. Further, it may be worth celebrating milestones and achievements—perhaps by hosting a party featuring locally grown or produced food, outdoor games, and party decorations made with recycled materials—to maintain momentum and reinforce a culture of sustainability throughout your organization.

A sustainability audit is most efficient when it's an ongoing process, not a one-time event. By regularly assessing your societal and environmental impact and making improvements, you can build a stronger, more enduring business while also contributing to a better planet. ■

Outsource Your Way to Top-Notch Social Media

Assigning your marketing to a social media management expert can help you recover hours you can then commit to more strategic projects that foster company development.

BY FAITH FIORILE

On today's digital age, social media is a necessary tool for companies in all industries due to its ability to enhance customer interaction, raise brand awareness, and boost sales. Still, keeping a strong online presence can be a difficult chore that requires a lot of time, knowledge, and work. While some business owners may choose to find ways to handle it internally, there may be equal, if not greater, advantages in outsourcing it to freelancers or an agency. Discover how this option could potentially save you man-hours and money along with what steps to take to choose the right partner.

→ Benefits of outsourcing

Often offering complete services at a fraction of the cost of staying in-house, outsourcing to an agency or independent consultant allows you to attain an excellent online presence with minimal stress and investment.

Hiring one or more employees specifically to manage your social media involves costs related to salaries, benefits, and more, potentially eating significantly into your marketing budget. Meanwhile, passing this task onto your current team members could overload or disrupt their workflows; managing social media can take an average of six to ten hours every week, requiring time for regular monitoring, content creation, follower interaction, and analytics. But by outsourcing, you can free up this valuable time for them to concentrate on main business operations, a move that will greatly improve productivity.

This option can also help you gain access to specific skill sets. You may be good at, say, content creation specifically, but a social media manager would have expertise not just in that area but also in strategic planning, audience engagement, analytics, platform-specific

strategies, and much more. This vast background makes them adept at leveraging tools to create specific campaigns that are appealing to your target market. Even more, they are better able to stay up to date on the latest trends and best practices, allowing them to adjust as platforms, algorithms, and prevailing thoughts rapidly change to keep you ahead of the curve and one step in front of your competitors.

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Another important benefit outsourcing can provide is consistency. Building credibility and confidence in your brand requires keeping a regular posting schedule, interacting with your audience in a timely manner, and maintaining a steady message. Hiring an outside team ensures that someone always stays on top of each of your social accounts, giving your online marketing initiatives discipline and structure as well as providing a steady stream of excellent material and customer engagement.

→ How to find the best partner

In order to have a strong online presence, you need to choose the correct agency or consultant to oversee your social media accounts. Follow these steps to help you identify the ideal fit.

Specify your objectives

Begin your outsourcing journey by outlining what you want to accomplish. Is your goal to raise brand awareness, generate leads, boost sales, or improve customer engagement? Knowing your intentions will enable you to find a partner whose background and expertise suits your particular requirements.



Review potential collaborators

Once your goals are laid out, you can begin looking at possible managers. Search for freelancers or agencies that have experience in your field of business, and review their portfolios to get a gauge of their level of skill and history of success. You can also review their client endorsements or reviews to get a sense of their professionalism, communication styles, and approach. The goal is to gather a short list of options you think would work well with you, match your brand values, and be able to successfully convey your message to your target audience.

Schedule a meeting

From your top picks, reach out for a preliminary discussion to get more detailed insight into their strategies and see how they might plan to boost your brand. Ask how they tackle areas like curating compelling content, generating audience engagement, and measuring quantifiable outcomes. Also make sure they have a concrete approach for various platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and TikTok.

Just as important in this meeting is to discuss how your partnership might work. Effective collaboration

Take Action

If outsourcing your social media management aligns with your business needs, begin researching potential agencies or consultants to assess their services.

requires open and honest communication, so specify exactly what you expect from deliverables, progress reports, deadlines, and performance standards. Then, depending on the answers you receive, choose the manager who you feel most comfortable with and seems the most qualified to meet your goals.

Following these guidelines can help you make a wise choice about your approach to social media management, ensuring that you make the move that best supports your company's marketing efforts. Once you've found your perfect social media management match, don't hesitate to dive right in. With their expertise leading the way, you can craft top-notch campaigns that turn prospects into devoted customers. ■

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Top Tips to Boost Employee Retention

One of the greatest challenges your business may face is reducing employee turnover. Continually needing to fill open positions can drain your finances, impact workplace efficiency, and dampen company morale. But if you apply the following approaches, you could foster a more loyal, consistent, and committed workforce.





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Back of Tear Out Card 2

- **Compensative competitively.** Check listings for comparable jobs to ensure that your salary rates are competitive within your industry. Build a benefits package that includes insurance and retirement plan options along with holidays and paid time off.
- **Discuss increases.** When top talents seek pay increases, be open to negotiating with them. While you don't want to stretch your payroll budget too far, you should compensate based on their value to your organization.
- **Cultivate your leadership skills.** Attend training seminars that will enhance your managerial abilities, ranging from open communication and conflict resolution to collaborative brainstorming and strategy ideation.
- **Foster success.** To demonstrate a commitment to your team members' potential, schedule regular one-on-one feedback meetings to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and career goals. Then help them plot a route to achieving their aims.
- **Raise up leaders.** When leadership positions open, prioritize promoting from within. This saves on hiring costs and communicates to employees that their efforts could pay off.
- **Acknowledge excellence.** Reward employees with occasional bonuses, awards, and public recognition in meetings to nurture their growth and celebrate their successes.
- **Cultivate bonds.** A cohesive team culture boosts loyalty and possibly attracts new talent. To foster such connections, arrange for collaboration on important projects, invite employees to brainstorming meetings, and plan regular team-building events.



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