

Streamlining your business to make 2009 your best year

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When most people think of streamlining, they think of cutting corners. Streamlining is actually making your business more efficient, which sometimes means spending money to make the overall business more profitable.

To be able to streamline your business, you first need to know what you are doing. If it is all in your head, you won't be able to properly evaluate and refine.

First things first, you have to write down your systems for doing things. Courtesy of Michael Port, here are the basic steps to creating a system:

1. Write down the steps you currently do
2. Evaluate and eliminate wasted steps
3. Create a simple workflow of the steps that anyone can understand
4. Create a checklist from the workflow

If you are in the service business, you likely have an intake process for a new client. By writing down that process, you can see how to make it better, cut/combine steps, or outsource part of the work to a lower-cost vendor, like a virtual assistant.

At the very least, once you document your system you can provide it consistently to every client and insure a better customer experience, which means more referrals and more revenue.

Think about the systems you have in place now and how you can improve them:

Bookkeeping/invoicing - have you considered a virtual bookkeeper to do this for you?
Customer followup - do you have a system in place to automate this or set reminders?
Lead generation - are you consistently performing tasks that bring in new clients, or is it hit or miss? If you don't like doing this, consider hiring a virtual assistant to do it for you.

Do you actively cultivate relationships with referral partners?

How do you document customer meetings? Consider a reminder system such as Jott.com to quickly recap and have it emailed to you.

Do you respond to email all day long, or do you have 2-3 specific times of day to process email?

Are you performing like tasks together, or throughout the day? Save time by bundling like tasks together (paying bills, answering email, making phone calls, etc.) so your mind stays focused and efficient.

If you are unsure where to begin, simply writing down what you do all day and matching that to your business goals is a good start. Do your daily activities work toward those goals?