

# System is not a dirty word 2

## How to systemise your business for profit growth

### Systemising for success

Systems can be used by businesses of all types and size to improve productivity, reduce errors and ensure consistent output. Last issue – in ‘System is not a dirty word’ – we looked at how. Now it’s time to look deeper at how to introduce them into your organisation.

If you run a franchise, you will be well used to systemisation. However, for many other businesses, life revolves around ad hoc procedures that ‘just happen’. These aren’t really systems at all, because they are neither formalised nor consistently applied.

But how exactly do you systemise your business in the first place or reinvent systems that are already there? Here are some steps to consider.

### Starting out

1. Choose an area for systemisation. This could be anything from answering an incoming sales call or ordering stationery to dealing with a customer complaint.
2. Then decide what you want the outcome to be.
3. Establish the main steps for getting there.
4. Now start subdividing each of these larger steps into more specific and detailed actions. Include any relevant metrics and designate who will be doing what. For example, one specific step in a sales process could be ‘to ensure every new prospect is emailed our latest leaflet on lawn care within 24 hours by the marketing department’.

Depending on its complexity, a system could have just a few steps or many. But generally, the better the result you want, the more steps and safeguards you will have to put into your system to achieve it.

And while it’s always good to aim for excellence, remember there’s always a cost in time and effort for doing so. The right balance is to systemise to an appropriate

level for your business and your marketplace. Also make sure that no part of your system is reliant on resources that aren’t always readily available and which your system can’t work without.

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### Streamlining

When you’ve completed listing all the steps in a process, go thoroughly to eradicate any unnecessary actions, so that the final process is as simple as possible.

When you make any alteration to your system, test it robustly to see if it still works under pressure. If it goes wrong, identify the weak points and amend a specific step or change the sequence as necessary.

Don’t try and systemise too many areas of your business at once, starting with simpler systems before going on to the more complex. And remember, systems don’t work in isolation, so consider how they are going to impact on each other.

### The weakest part

A vital point to always bear in mind is that often the weakest component in a system is not the system itself, but those who are going to use it. So always check that any system you create is understandable by the least knowledgeable and experienced staff member who will use it. If you don’t, then

sooner or later it will almost certainly fail as someone is either left wondering what they should do, or does the wrong thing by mistake.

As you create any system, you should formalise it in an ‘operations manual’, though you can call it what you want. And whether printed out and kept in a folder, or better still stored online where everyone can see it, the operations manual is the central repository of knowledge about how you do everything in your business. This is the place where new recruits can be referred, to learn the ways of your business, while existing employees can visit it for reminders on how to do something. It should also provide a definitive answer when there are disagreements about how things are meant to be done.

### Bedding down

When introducing new systems, do your best to get buy-in for the proposed changes, which won’t necessarily be expected or wanted... even if they are needed. Brief your team so members understand why something is being done, but even then, don’t expect things to go smoothly. Until they become habitual, new systems will probably have to be forced home through regular meetings or training sessions, email reminders and strategically placed visual prompts; for example, on documents or walls.

If it’s obvious a system isn’t working, you may need to pull the plug on it fast, but you should always try and allow systems time to bed down, giving your team, suppliers and customers the opportunity to provide feedback.

Unless a system contains just a few steps, you’re unlikely to get it 100% right from day one. So if you do find that a system isn’t working efficiently, or as well as you’d hoped, don’t be afraid to review and revise it.

Of course, there is much more that could be said about effective systems, but creating one is really about three things... who does what, and when.

**Brian Keen, How to Franchise Simply**