

How business can prepare for high and low seasons

Most businesses experience peaks and troughs; be it peak buying periods in the retail sector or greater demands on accounting firms during the tax season.



Bridget du Toit, head of sales and services at EasyBiz Technologies

In light of this, Bridget du Toit, head of sales and services at EasyBiz Technologies, suggests several measures businesses can adopt during business lulls to ensure greater business longevity and sustainability.

“ While seasonal fluctuations are commonplace, it is businesses ability to adapt to the ever-changing landscape that ultimately determines their success. ”

- **Invest in your employees**

Du Toit advises business owners to make use of business downtime to train employees and provide them with skills that will allow them to operate more effectively and efficiently.

“Training should form part of a business’s retention strategy and by upskilling employees during seasonal lows, businesses will ensure their people feel valued and that they are playing an important role in the business’s success,” she says.

- **Mind the budget**

Business owners may be tempted to spend unnecessarily when a business is doing well. Instead, they should consider saving additional finances to prepare themselves for seasons of lower demand.

“When businesses notice a shift in spending – for example, they haven’t had as good a peak season as expected – then should consider adjusting their costs and spending to remain on top of cash flow,” adds du Toit.

- **Create offseason excitement**

To ensure the business remains top of mind for customers – even during off-peak seasons – organisations can create excitement by offering specials, conducting direct marketing activities and running promotions. This will attract business during off-peak seasons and remind customers about the peak season ahead.

- **Create niche markets**

Customers have needs all year round. So, try and find a way to service those needs throughout the year.

Du Toit says off-peak seasons are also a good time to expand a business's products and service offerings.

"There is more time to think about add-ons or what customers would enjoy. Business owners do, however, need to make sure that the addition of duties for employees will enhance and not limit them.

"Essentially, it's all about finding ways to anticipate and service evolving demands. In this way, business owners can keep what they do relevant, innovative and desirable," she adds.

- **Maintain customer contact**

No matter how positively customers view a business, these feelings will soon dissipate if they don't hear from it for an extended period. Irrespective of how successful a business becomes; service and communication are critical to the retention of customers.

"By keeping in constant contact with their customers, businesses can reassure them that the supplier they have partnered with cares about them. Sometimes all it takes is a small prod in the form of an email to say: we haven't forgotten about you, or it could be something bigger such as a marketing roadshow or TV and radio ads – whatever the business can afford," says du Toit.

- **Promote data analysis of business operations**

It's imperative to have clear oversight of a business's strongest and weakest aspects. This will help businesses to prepare for high demand seasons and budget for low demand seasons.

"This is why it is so important to have good quality accounting packages and customer relations management (CRM) systems in place. Businesses that do not have data at their fingertips cannot make relevant decisions," notes du Toit.

- **Think outside of the season**

“Business owners should not wait before trying to establish a year-round customer base. They need to be creative in their thinking around fluctuating seasonal demand and then focus your marketing activities to align with that.”

It is important to set the groundwork early, either through targeted online advertising or by building relationships with regular customers to elicit additional business, or thinking of ways to attract new customers.

It is helpful to use strategy sessions and meetings with management teams and employees to their input when trying to find creative solutions for an ever-changing market landscape.

- **Inventory control**

Some businesses generate a year's worth of revenue in a few months. This means the availability of stock is paramount for them to meet high demand in peak seasons. Businesses need to assess all factors regarding inventory management, from forecasting and supply chain management, to the optimisation of retail space.

“Nothing is worse than having high demand and no stock available,” says Du Toit. “Business owners can use their downtime to forecast correctly for seasonal demands, and perhaps look at promoting once-off sales or other promotions to sell surplus stock where necessary.”

- **Spend time on marketing and admin**

Businesses should invest time in thinking creatively and considering whether their current website and advertising measures are still relevant to their customers. They can also use seasonal lulls to get feedback from customers on how to improve their offerings to better meet their needs.

Although admin can often be tedious, it is an important driver of business success. By tracking expenditure versus income on an ongoing basis, businesses will have a bird's eye view of what is happening in the business at all times.

- **Get online**

Technological advancement and social media have resulted in the evolution of marketing. Businesses can promote themselves and sell their goods and services anywhere, at any time.

Du Toit advises businesses to take advantage of what technology has to offer – from e-commerce platforms to social media – to create opportunities for new business. “It is important to stand out from the crowd and differentiate the business from its competition.

“By doing things differently and embracing the technological era, businesses can position themselves optimally, drive traffic to their platforms and capture their customers' attention,” concludes Du Toit.