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From time to time people ask me for my top five tips for businesses tackling the current trading environment. So for what it's worth, here they are.

1 Don't lose sight of the big idea or strategy

In these challenging times it is easy to let short term considerations dramatically alter the direction of a business. In my experience the businesses that remain calm, focused and devote time to rigorous planning come out on top. Of course short term changes in the micro environment should be addressed with changes to tactics and immediate priorities, but these considerations should not be allowed to compromise the overall ambition and direction of the company.

2 Plan your marketing activities and co-ordinate them to drive maximum impact

At a time when finance is scarce invest time into planning all your marketing activities. Wherever possible try to co-ordinate actions with the end customer in mind. If you can build a logical sequence of messages or contact points the overall impact will be much greater.

When planning activities if you are unsure of results don't be afraid to test first. Only spend large proportions of your marketing investment when you are able to forecast the impact with confidence, measure the results, and adjust the mechanic if at first it isn't working.

3 Embrace new media and social media techniques

When marketing budgets are under pressure it is really important to be able to measure return on investment. In my opinion one of the most effective ways to do this is through new media and social media techniques. Very often these channels can be completely free of charge. To get the best results they require organisations to have high levels of creativity, the confidence to do something different, and the ability to capitalise on results quickly.

New media and social media offer marketers the opportunity to measure results, target very specific customers and communicate very specific messages. It is often new territory, but well worth some experimentation.



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#### 4 Collaborate at a local level

There are many organisations across the East of England that can help like minded organisations to get together. Norfolk Network, The Best Of, Buy Local, and BizFizz to name but a few. There can be enormous rewards in doing this. Obvious benefits include a positive impact on the local economy, a lower carbon footprint, and a closer face to face working relationship. Often local collaborations can lead to much more, sometimes organisations can exchange products or services rather than just sharing a financial transaction, local companies tend to endorse and support each other much more proactively, and in my experience, local companies tend to be much more open to working together and exploring possible opportunities in a like minded and open spirit. These local collaborations can become some of the most powerful strategic partnerships in any organisation large or small.

#### 5 Don't compromise your values

Sometimes short term issues or trends can really put pressure on businesses. Sometimes there is a temptation to grab something that doesn't necessarily fit into the organisation or its brands. I think this is a big mistake. People buy into brands because of what they stand for. This isn't just about the product and what it does, it goes much deeper than that. Brands have cultural, ethical, environmental, and social considerations too. Remember when Snickers took the vegetarian status away from their chocolate bars? Any cost saving or production efficiency was soon outweighed by the public back lash. Brands take a long time to become established in the hearts and minds of customers, so please don't jeopardise this for a short term win.