

Unplan your business

Created by Ian Sanders and David Sloly

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What's all this then?



Okay, so the notion of entering the marketplace with a brand new business idea, but no prior thought of how you are going to launch it or who your customers are going to be, is not a bright idea.

But, similarly, the thinking that you must have a proper, in-depth business plan is a myth that we're going to bust.

Who is Ian Sanders?

(by David)



I first met Ian while working as a creative in a start-up media company. Ian asked far too many questions for my liking, but he had a knack of being able to deduce profitable opportunities from his quick-fire questioning and to act on them instantly. I liked that.

You see, with a surname like mine – ‘Sloly’, pronounced ‘slowly’ – you learn very early in life that procrastination of any kind only gives people the ammunition they need to say “Sloly by name...” – and that has a danger of sticking. So Ian, quizzing me constantly to one side, was the kind of guy I could work with. Back then no-one was too sure what he actually did all day, but he soon carved out a niche for soaking up all those projects no-one else knew what to do with. He likes to work across disciplines and take new approaches to work and business. He is fast, very business driven and intelligent. He also shares my passion for coffee.

iansanders.com

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Who is David Sloly?

(by Ian)



I met David in 1993 when he was freelancing for a media group. I soon discovered this was a guy with bucket loads of ideas, most of them good. Whereas I approached ideas from a business perspective, his approach was more creative.

In many ways David was ahead of his time: as a then staff producer, he suggested to his boss that he brainstorm ideas for a radio show sitting by a lake. His boss said he had to stay at his desk. David left for good and went on to produce an award-winning show at Kiss FM.

I admire his appetite for breaking the rules and for carving out a working life beyond broadcasting to embrace the advertising industry and, more recently, psychotherapy. Not many people have the courage and talent to pull it off. So when I was seeking a partner in crime for a new project – for someone to challenge and stimulate me in equal measures – it was Sloly Time.

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What is a plan anyway?



“A series of steps to be carried out or goals to be accomplished.”

There are plans that take months – years even – and plans that are a bit a more rapid than that. The business plan for Hotmail was written overnight by one of the founders, Sabeer Bhatia. It was enough to secure finances to hire programmers to create the webmail service that was later sold to Microsoft for \$400 million. Others are not quite so quick, with management teams, analysts and advisors spending months producing financial projections, pie charts and graphs.

But if you don't require investment to get your idea up and running, then maybe you only need the time it takes to drink a cup of hot tea to get your plan down on paper.

Why do we plan?



Simply put: uncertainty.

We think that by creating a plan for executing our ideas that somehow it will guarantee its success, or at least spot the potential problems. But let's be honest. We also plan because we're told that's what entrepreneurs, department heads and CEOs do. We need plans to show investors, the Board, our bosses. To stay accountable. But in a fast-moving world, such plans are fast becoming meaningless.

“Really, a business plan is another way of saying ‘guess’, a strategy is another way of saying ‘hunch’. The awful truth is that we don’t know what will work. But it’s hard to get funding for a guess. And it’s hard to persuade a boardroom to back your hunch with their money. We need to adopt the idea of trying to fail faster. To try lots of new ways of doing something, to take risks, to experiment as if we don’t know the answer. We just need to stop acting so smart.”

David Hieatt, entrepreneur, co-founder of howies and curator of the 'Do Lectures'.

What plans are good plans?



Plans that are short, sweet and clear. Plans that inspire, excite and motivate you to fulfill them.

But that's more about setting goals of what you want to achieve and less about devising detailed plans of how you get there. We like goals (in fact we love them), but we don't advocate carefully plotted linear routes to get there.

If the risk is low,
press green and go!



If you're not risking too much money, too many people, or staking your reputation, what's to lose?

Isn't it worth getting your idea out there? A web-based business can be launched in beta tomorrow and you can fine-tune as you go. So put your foot on the accelerator and start the journey.

"I've learned one thing in 40 years of business: he who tries the most stuff the fastest, wins."

Tom Peters, uber-guru, author and speaker

**If the risk is high,
ask why**



Here's the science bit.

Risk creates fear and fear creates paralysis. Fear moves us from the intellectual part of our mind to the primitive part, the survival part, the fight-or-flight part. The fight-or-flight area of the brain will create chemicals and a physical reaction to these thoughts as a powerful attempt to stop us doing things considered by our own minds as potentially dangerous. Yes, it can paralyse you. So you have just three choices:

1. Lie awake at night worrying about it.

or

2. Find someone who has had to deal with a similar problem and ask how they did it.

or

3. Just get on with it.

Why the notion of long-term planning is broken

Sure, we need goals. Without a goal you'd never launch a business and it would just stay an idea on a piece of paper. But to what extent can you plan how you realise that goal?

Many people's business success stories owe a lot to randomness and serendipity, and no plan can anticipate or plot that. Ask entrepreneurs their strategy for success and many reply "it all happened by accident".

Big corporations have typically engaged in really long-term plans. How flawed to think we can predict the future. How on earth can you plan three or five years in the future in such a rapidly changing world? We talked to entrepreneur Gary Vaynerchuk:

"A five-year plan is impossible in a world where what five years represents is so different to what it used to. We're going through a technology explosion, and you can't possibly do that. Think about what five years ago looked like."

Gary explains that instead he stays open minded to opportunities, always ready to embrace change. He says his core strength is being a "reactionary businessman".

"A company's success can be measured on an inverse ratio to the amount of time it spends on traditional strategic planning. In our VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world it's about 'surfing' not managing."

Kevin Roberts, Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide CEO and Inaugural CEO in Residence at Cambridge University's Judge Business School

Why too much information and too much time is a bad thing



We're not saying that whoever gets to market first, wins. It's not that simple. But in a rapidly changing market, you have to be quick.

A friend was launching a website. He had a great new idea that was potentially game-changing for that industry. Huge commercial potential. But he's over-planning, and it still isn't launched! He just needs to keep the proposition simple. He needs to refocus on why that original idea he had in the pub two years ago was so compelling. But too much time and too much analysis has slowed things down. Analysis can be paralyzing: over-thinking an idea can lead to doubt. And an idea that never gets launched just stays an idea gathering dust on a shelf: you have to **DO SOMETHING** with it.

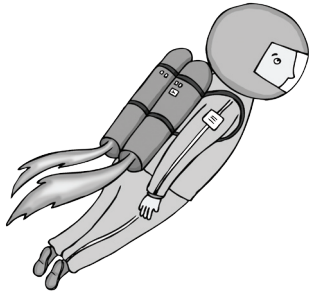
The importance of trusting your instinct when making decisions



So, in the absence of big plans and projections, what tools does every entrepreneur need to make decisions and turn their ideas into reality?

Launching a business or a new product can be frightening; it takes guts to go for it. The best tool you can use: your instinct. To take that risk and go with your gut feeling. When you're asking where you price your product, what your brand name is, what website design you green light – sure, ask your friends, co-workers and clients. But at the end of the day you have the answer inside. You just have to trust your gut. Go with it every time.

The benefits of being equipped to be reactionary in business



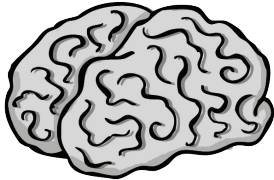
Being reactionary is not about being weak or unfocused.

It's about being ready for action – ready to react to situations and take advantage of opportunities that land in your lap... just like that. It's having the right attitude to spot an opportunity and go for it; to adapt to changing economic, technological and market changes. With a rigid fixed plan mindset, that's difficult. Keeping flexible and open minded is the way to succeed. Otherwise you could miss out on some great business opportunities.

“Charles Darwin said, ‘It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change’. At Zappos, we believe the same is true for business.”

Tony Hsieh, CEO, Zappos.com, Inc. and author of ‘Delivering Happiness’

Change your mindset



To some, the discipline of business planning has become so much the currency of start-ups and enterprise, they just can't function without big fat documents, spreadsheets and PowerPoint slides at their side.

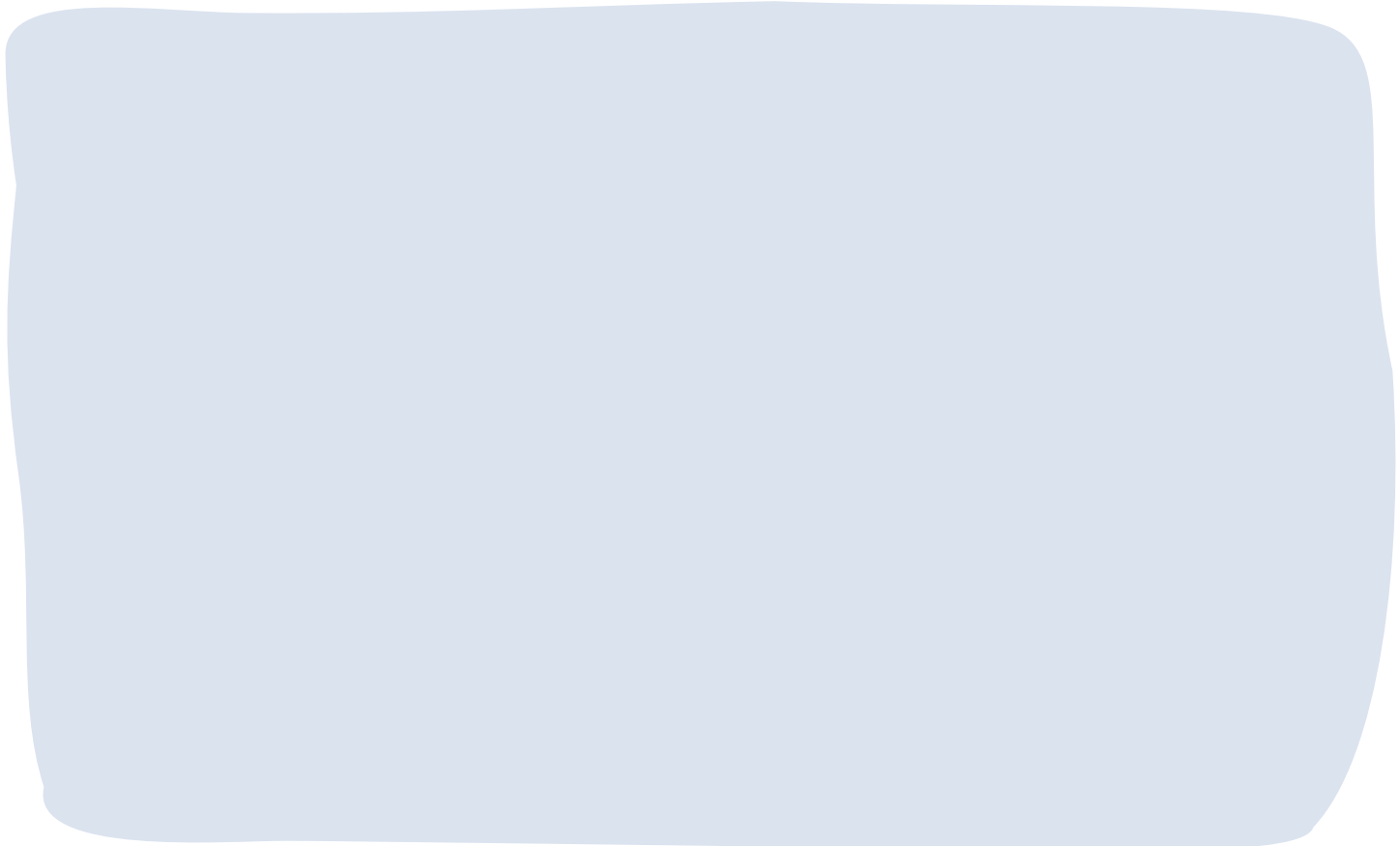
Some of these people have lost touch with the basics of business. It doesn't matter what a five-year plan says; better evidence of your business acumen is having a damn good idea, finding your audience, having a point of difference in the market, and... having a model to make money. That's what it's about, right?

Embracing the spirit of Unplan is not about being lazy, or being sloppy. It's about being focused and having the right attitude for success. It's about going for it, not just talking about it.

So don't hide behind the business planning process – get naked.

Your notes







This booklet is sponsored by Mason Zimble, a creative, interactive B2B technology marketing agency where David Sloly is creative director. With offices in the UK (Bristol, Reading and London) and the U.S. (Austin, Texas), Mason Zimble provides a range of services, positively disrupting audiences and conventions across direct marketing, advertising, branding, web development, email lead generation, viral, channel incentive programmes, social media and strategic consulting.

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