

SME DIGEST

ADVICE FOR SMALL & MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES



Edited by Adam Bernstein

GETTING BACK TO BUSINESS

SEEKING ADVICE



No matter how resilient we are, how much we think we know, there will come a time when some external support is needed. Whether it's a mentor, a shoulder to cry on, or just some friendly advice from a like-minded group, no one should ever feel too big to ask for help from others.

By Adam Bernstein

There are many sources to turn to, but it should be no surprise that social media – in particular Facebook – has groups that may be of value. Unlike formal organisations such as the British Chambers of Commerce, CBI or the likes of Business Networking International, Facebook groups allow businesses to dip in and duck out as they both seek what they need while potentially finding a forum to promote their own businesses.

Social media's success follows from there being no need to wait on busy phone lines for support and there's a fair degree of remoteness and anonymity if required.

Coronavirus support is available, but there is a word of warning; don't take everything at face value – sense check what is read or told before action is taken. Social media is a great enabler but it's also a source of misinformation.

Even so, if used for nothing else, it can be a great relief to some to be able to unburden and share experiences with like-minded people, all of which are in the same boat as you – suffering as their businesses were forced to close or customers have become risk averse and are staying away.

Of course, social media is nothing new and firms turning to it for advice is nothing new either. Indeed, before the pandemic broke out, small business finance provider, Iwoca, ran a survey that asked more than 820 business owners about their use of social media. The results were interesting.

In particular, those surveyed were asked what they thought was the best way to link up with, and network through, to other firms. Not unsurprisingly, social media featured high up in the options with it beating the old-fashioned telephone call 15 percent to 12 percent. In second place came the personal introduction at 25 per cent, but networking came in first at 26 per cent. Of course, government restrictions and the need to social distance has made personal contact and networking impossible and has left social media to become the method of choice. Even so, some 48 per cent of business owners with both an online and physical presence said the feeling of being in a community of businesses had improved since they started trading.

(It should be noted that the survey didn't disclose the demographic of those surveyed; it's highly likely that a younger cohort surveyed would be more in tune with social media compared to those with greyer hair).



Facebook groups to explore:

According to those surveyed by Iwoca, 90 percent of business owners use Facebook and collectively they identified five groups that they thought were best for support.



Start Up Business Help and Advice UK Public Group

This private group has around 10,400 members and is recommended to owners of UK start-ups. It's primarily a forum where individuals can ask questions and share help, advice and similar experiences. It offers members plenty of useful advice that has been shared by others in the community. Some ask about start-ups and ideas and find both advice and offers of help from the group; others are detailing what they've been doing and have subsequently received feedback; while others are using the group as a networking opportunity and are directed to contacts that can help with the business.



British Small Businesses Network

The British Small Businesses Network has 4300 members but is a public group that seeks to support the self-employed and small business owners. Set up before coronavirus struck, the group shares its experiences and advice on, for example, the government schemes and how businesses should apply to them.



Small Business Support Group UK - Coronavirus

Next comes this private group with 1800 members. Like the others before it, the goal is to offer help, advice and support to the owners of small businesses and anyone else who seeks to support a small business. A by-product of the group is that many are sharing what they are doing and offering discounts to members during the crisis.



Coronavirus Business Support Group UK Public Group

This too is a private group, but smaller with 4500 members. Its community aims to help any business owners looking for support and positivity during the crisis. As to why it should be considered, it holds Zoom events where members share useful information on their areas of expertise based on questions that members are asking. While the group's administrators are presently collating a business to business directory to make it easier for members to promote their businesses via the network, it's notable that the likes of accountants are offering help and advice including how to make successful applications to government schemes.



Self Employed and Coronavirus - UK Support Group

Lastly, this small group of just 250 members is public and is squarely aimed at anyone who is self-employed or is freelance. Members share tips and news on how to survive as a self-employed individual during the crisis as well as advice on what is available. Interestingly, the group contains a number of journalists who seem more than willing to help raise awareness of the issues that members are facing.



To finish...

By definition of the web and social media being almost infinite in size and breadth there are clearly more than five groups to join. Search them out and ask around – there's plenty of help you just need to find it.