

Slaying your planning gremlins

We're yet to find anyone who doesn't have at least one or two business planning 'gremlins' that stop them from getting on with their business planning. Maybe it's a fear they have, a sense that they're an artist so they don't need a business plan, or perhaps they've decided that because they weren't any good at maths as a kid they just can't write a plan.



You might already know what your business planning gremlins are. Or you might not. Either way, the good news is that you're not alone, and it's extremely unlikely that you're the only person in the world who struggles with that particular gremlin.

The even better news is that – working with the hundreds of creatives who've taken part in our business planning courses over the years – we've faced and slayed pretty much every business planning gremlin that's out there.

And the best news of all? We're sharing all our gremlin slaying tips right here. Just read on to get inside how to overcome your own business planning gremlins and go on to live another business planning day....

Our watertight tips to slaying each gremlin

Business Planning Gremlin	Take that sunshine - our watertight tips to slaying each gremlin <i>(excuse the movie geek puns)</i>
<p>I just don't know where to start. It all seems so complicated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work through our toolkit (ahem!) • Just start – that alone is a psychological boost • Break the different tasks down; on their own they aren't huge • Get curious! This is your chance to invent your future • Remember, business planning is basically informed guess work (tell your friends!) • Work on it with colleagues if you are part of a team • If you are a solo-preneur, why not round up another freelancer friend and work on your plans together
<p>It involves loads of stuff I don't know how to do, or that I'm not confident doing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take an initial skim through this toolkit – hopefully this will rid you of some of your fear, and reassure that you can in fact do this • Use our resources to help you master anything you're not familiar with • Don't go it alone – work with colleagues or friends on the bits you find difficult or aren't great at • Take it step-by-step; yes, there's a chunk of work to do, but you can take it steady and work at your own pace • Do it somewhere nice – this sound silly, but surrounding yourself with some new stationary, being in a nice space can make the world of difference!
<p>Everything is always changing, so I don't really see the point of planning, or how I can really do it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weirdly, it's even more important to do some business planning during periods of uncertainty, precisely because you need to have contingency plans for different eventualities. It might be you have a shorter term plan, that explores how different scenarios might play out. • Trust us, thinking things through and having even the slenderest of plans can really help. It means you'll be more ready than others around you.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As ever, you can't control the everything out in the world, but it helps to focus on what you can control.
I'm alright getting started, but then I get bored.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Put your vision up on the wall as a reminder of why you are doing this. Treat creating your plan as a series of smaller tasks, so you get the satisfaction of ticking them off as you go. Think about how, when and where you do your best creative thinking, and factor that into your business planning process. Being in the right environment can make such a difference.
I'm only writing it because a funder needs me to have one, so I can't really get excited about it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you already have a plan and you're simply tweaking it to better reflect a funder's language or fit their format, that really is a bit dull. But, remember it will hopefully unlock funding that will help you make the future you want to see a reality. Again, putting your vision up on the wall – or even making a collage of it, if that's your thing – can really help with this. If you don't have a business plan that's written mainly for you, and the only one you're writing is for a funder, then stop right there. When you're freelance or run your own business, everything should start with what's important to you. Running your own business or being freelance is hard enough so it has to start there. Head back to our It's All About Me module if you're in any doubt about this.
I'm worried I won't do it right.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no right way of creating a business plan. And there's no correct way of presenting it. The planning is more important than what the plan looks like. Doing the creative thinking, the 'what if' scenario planning is more important than making it look pretty. What's important is that you do the thinking and capture it in a way that works for you. It's your plan, and it needs to be your go to guide, so make sure it works for you. (Our hub business plans always start life as a series of mind maps for instance!) You can always present it differently if required by a funder/the bank.

<p>I worry it won't be good enough to convince the funder/bank etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check the basics first; make sure you're meeting their formatting requirements etc. • Make sure the sums add up, and that your financial projections sound. The numbers are often where they'll head first. • Work with other people on it; use them as a sounding board. • Find someone who's successfully submitted a business plan to the same funder, and ask them for tips. • Get someone else to look over your draft plan – a fresh pair eyes can more easily spot gaps in the plan or the arguments you are making.
<p>I'm just too busy to write a plan. I'm so busy I don't really see the need for a business plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "There's no point in running really fast if you don't know you're going in the right direction!" These are wise words in a business planning context. If you're busy that's great, but how are you going to manage that growth, not burn out? How will you know what to say yes to, and what to turn down? How will you maintain your competitive edge. • As ever, you can't control the everything out in the world, but it helps to focus on what you can control.
<p>I don't really know what needs to go in a business plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopefully working through our Balance Your Books toolkit will make this a thing of the past! • Start with taking a look at our jargon buster, our business planning 'think, do and ask list' and our Questions to help you invent your future resources.
<p>I'm allergic to spreadsheets. I'm not very good at maths. I hate finance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't worry. Business planning is not at all just about spreadsheets and sums! In fact the majority of it is about plotting and designing the future you want to create. The finance stuff is just a tiny bit of it. That's why there are only 2 spreadsheets in the whole of our Balance Your Books toolkit! • Contrary to what some business planning books make you think, most of the finance stuff in a business plan is really common sense. And the resources in our Making The Money Work module will really help. Use our templates and hopefully you'll have vanquished your finance gremlins forever!

I start off ok, but then get confused and I don't know how to arrange everything.

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- Repeat after us: "The planning is more important than the plan!" "It doesn't matter what it looks like!"
- The key thing is to do the thinking and the work – how you do it and how you record it is totally up to you. As long as you can see how you've noted conclusions you've come to, the goals you've set yourself and the strategies you've come up with, that's fine. It's your plan, no one else's, and what's most important is that it makes sense to you. If it's full of mindmaps and exists as a series of flip chart sheets on a wall, fine. If it's closely typed in Arial 12pt and bound, that's fine too! Just do what makes sense for you!