

From SWOT TO TOWS

Doing a SWOT analysis is really useful. It really helps you to think about what you've got working for you internally and externally. However, it's static, a bit like a photo of you or your business at any one point in time. It tells you what things look like now, but doesn't really help you work out how you can change any of it.

To get the most from your SWOT it's worth turning some of the thinking on its head and thinking about TOWS... how you can turn the Opportunities and Weaknesses you've identified into Strengths.

Doing this is a bit of a game changer. It gets you started on thinking about strategies and tactics that will help you move your business forward (which is what we cover in our Debunking Strategy module).

Here's how

All you need to do is to take each of your opportunities and weaknesses in turn, and reflect on what you could do to turn them into a positive. Here's an example:

Weakness: Income is unpredictable, I never know when the order book is going to be empty or full

Potential TOWS response: Look back at previous years to try to identify past trends. Plan sales pushes at appropriate moments in response to this. Use quiet time to do longer term business planning or 'back of house' tasks that need doing

You can do this TOWS exercise on your own, but it's also a really good one to do with friends and colleagues. As with a lot of things, a 'hive brain' approach can be super useful here, as it's great to get different perspectives on potential responses.

When we do TOWS at the hub, we tend to use a table to help us organise our thinking, so we've added one here to help you too. All you need to do is add each weakness and opportunity to the left hand column, and in the corresponding right hand box list your potential responses.

Do that for an hour or two and voila! You have just started work on the new strategy that'll form part of your business plan. Definitely time for a break and a treat!

Weakness or opportunity I need to address?	Potential TOWS response
eg. Income is unpredictable; I never know when the order book is going to be full or empty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Look back at previous years to try and identify past trends.• Plan sales pushes at appropriate moments in response to this.• Use quiet time to do longer term business planning or 'back of house' tasks that need doing.