



WHY A BLANK PAGE?

Well, metaphorically speaking I suggest a blank page signifies the end of a major crisis and indicates a new start. Very few people or businesses I have known over the years have a “dream run”. Whether this situation is a self-created crisis or an all-encompassing problem of Biblical proportions perhaps. I am suggesting you can reflect on the past, try to tweak the existing processes you are using specifically to run your business OR start again, with a blank sheet? Isn't that an exciting option ... a brave new world? More importantly, it may be the reset button you or your business need to learn from this last horrific year or just a time to have a shake-up.

I'm aiming to inspire you to what is one of life's great opportunities. After all, you have the chance rarely offered – take what you know and redesign your business future.

Turning a worldwide catastrophe into the opportunity to reinvent your very own wheel. After reflection, you may agree with the often-used phrase “if I was starting over I would not do it the same way” or “if I knew then what I know now I would do it differently”.

2020 – an interesting year, certainly worth turning the page on!

I've always aimed at hoping to view the glass as half full instead of half empty. However, in times like these it is important

to know there is help about – the tough part is asking. There are more people listening than you think. The international death toll is horrific and is difficult to ignore and it magnifies and creates other problems that also cause impact. The problem is not just the pandemic. In the western world, males die by suicide three to four times more often than females. This greater male frequency is increased in those over the age of 65. Australia has lost approximately 1,200 people since March by people taking their own life. A dramatic increase due to COVID-19, let alone bushfires, business difficulties and the general stress that has touched and effected everyone. I know many of us are touched by this difficulty. It's time to turn over a blank page and be in charge of your own destiny.

On a much brighter note here a couple of mental help organisations eager to assist you or people you know:

- **Lifeline** – www.lifeline.org.au
 - **Black Dog Institute** – www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/
 - **Suicide Call Back Service** – www.suicidcallbackservice.org.au/
 - **Beyond Blue** – www.beyondblue.org.au/
 - **Man Anchor** – www.mananchor.com.au/
- These guys have an industry background.

Back to the Blank Page

Now, the first step I would like to suggest is make yourself comfortable, that could be at work, your kitchen table, by the beach or in your man cave or ladies retreat – whatever takes your fancy. Maybe a coffee, clear your mind and just think how this event can change your life for the better! Yes of course you'll need a “blank sheet of paper” or computer or white board – maybe even all three if you are anything like me! Let's Go...

These ideas are presented so you can consider and arrange to suit your own needs in your optimum priority:

- 1 Assess your well-being.**
We are starting with the most important item on your agenda YOU, your family and your people. That may be the ‘RUOK’ question and a simple chat or leading right up to seeking professional help to work together with the right people, strategies and processes that will help build understanding as to the best practice approach. This could also involve looking at nutrition, exercise and your work environment. Remember this is a blank sheet approach – don't be limited by the old standards – forget the saying “we have always done it this way” approach. Start the page with “in a perfect world I would like to ...” free yourself from entrenched protocols and

methods. Ok, of course you should consider the grounding influences like budget, timing, success likelihood and potential risks. The fun part is opening your mind, heart and skills to opportunities and future experiences that you may have lost, discarded as the business took over your life?

2. Costing versus Quotes

The continual great debate. Lets face it, people have been complaining about pricing for centuries. If there is a never-ending debate on social media it is low prices, price cutting blah, blah. Get a grip. I have been in this industry since 1968 and the subject has always been the number one topic for those who don't take the time to focus on higher ideals. That will never change – you must adjust your attitude and probably your customers and processes to find your own formula.

I put to you, it is NEVER just about pricing. Profitability is created by many tangible and intangible factors. If you work in a world where your model is just – add your labour, materials, overheads and a margin, well, you are stuck in the perpetual downward spiral of only seeing the obvious. Rarely, do I ever see highly profitable and successful sign and print businesses only focus on prices! These special signmakers understand their worth, they have a trusted and loyal client base, these companies take pride in their customer service and quality. Yes, they “get IT!” The “IT” is different for everyone. Your mission on your blank sheet is to list key reasons what you believe are your unique skill sets, then turn them into a selling and education opportunity for your business and its clients.

3. Build enjoyment into your work.

If you are not springing out of bed to greet the day with the lust for life, work and knowing you are going to have a great day ... well, change it. I could stop this paragraph here perhaps? Here is a contemplation I am asking you to take – it's the Benjamin Franklin method – another blank sheet of paper – make a ‘To Do’ list. Back in Oct 2016 my article in VI magazine was “Another million things to do”. It offered a secret to getting things done. Obviously any achievement is highly rewarding and enjoyable – Yes? If you would like a copy of the article, email me below with “To-Do Article” in the subject line. Conversely, here is another simple tool to enjoying work – take your blank sheet draw vertical line down the centre of the page. Heading the right side with Plus + while the left side with Minus -. Go ahead and list ideas both positive and negative, then get a coffee, take a break and come back to the list and rate each from one (1) Low to ten (10) High.

What now? Do the ones that are the most important or meaningful – at the very minimum you are getting project completed and that is a good place to be.

4. Collaborate for success.

In the recent “Great Australian Signmakers Survey” the outcome clearly defined the real market size and business profiles. In round numbers over 70% of the almost 500 participants were from sole traders or up to seven employees! Clearly, that leaves 30% of larger companies and many of those are market specific. “So, what?” you ask, – no one has every piece of equipment or the perfect employee for every job. The smart operators manage and coordinate strategic alliances with their logistic partners to service the needs of their business. Sure, you may call them ‘subbies”. I would like you to seriously consider just how important these businesses are to your companies well-being. Treat them well, pay them on time, be organised to provide them adequate time for their integral part of the project – Not as an afterthought. I suggest you will recognise how much easier life becomes.

5. Stay in touch with your clients.

Have you ever sat down with your best 20 customers and sought their ideas on what they need from you? The Pareto Principle or the 80/20 rule dictates as an example 80% of your work with come from 20% of your customers – a fact lasting centuries – ask for a copy of my article the 80/20 Rule from VI magazine August 2011. The outcome will astound you, virtually no one understand the power of enlisting your customers. Consequences could be:

- i. Developing online ordering systems or booking systems
- ii. Saving the business in both time and money
- iii. Reducing turnaround and time management
- iv. Enhanced respect and confidence
- v. Increase in per job profit as better organisation reduces time investment
- vi. Just to name a few or many benefits to both participants

Besides, if you are not engaging your customers I suggest someone else will, especially in times like these.

6. Systemise.

Most business operators have developed their systems somewhat organically as the need demands. You could call it haphazard. The reality is they often can benefit greatly from a complete overhaul. Yes, time again to open your note book to a new blank page and start a section whereby you

list those annoying little problems you can solve by implementing a good end-to-end system. I advocate even the sole operators can create advantages in time saving, increased profits and less mistakes from even the simplest form of systemisation. Take a checklist for installation vehicles. Yes, it is a live document and in a very short space of time by updating day-to-day, you have a mature list worthy of the effort and it offers a brilliant return on the investment of time. I can send you a sample of the Installer Vehicle checklist if you email me as listed below.

7. Allow yourself time to live.

The need to recharge one's batteries is critical to well-being. Take a reward, have a holiday and please ensure you smell the roses along the way! Better still buy your partner some flowers. It's short and sweet however a lesson easy to learn if you genuinely understand your value to your family, the business and your customers. The control of the business is in your hands, furthermore for those customers who always want a project done in rapid time, no notice and lower prices – one simple question – do you need them? This time your list could be the customers you may dump, the holidays you wish to plan and special times you wish to spend with family and friends – now, that is the best list so far!

8. Stay, Sell or Merge.

I have written many articles on this subject. Right now, is the very best time ever to reconsider your most attractive option. Selling now may be an option, nevertheless the sale price will reflect the profit you have made in the last 12–24 months. I have many customers who have set new records in profits and revenues – for them selling is the last thing on their mind. They are having a great time. Unfortunately, many are not so prosperous as they may have customers who are focused in areas highly affected by the current conditions. Either way for you I suggest you decide as the future directions you will take need firm commitments.

Now over to you. Get started to rescript your future, turn that blank paper into your action list.

We are offering a free 40-minute introductory ZOOM discussion to the first 10 readers to discuss your strategy for shaping your future or direction. Email me on john@controlzone.com.au with “Blank Sheet Of Paper” in the subject line for a return email.