



Marketing Messages

MARY CHARLESON

Time to take stock of the present and plan for the future

With the US dollar at a 25 year low, and the Canuck buck at parity or higher, most Canadians seemed to be buoyed by purchase optimism this past holiday season. Some will continue a spree of retail therapy well into the New Year with numerous January sales. But for many that optimism will fade around the third week of January with the sobering arrival of their credit card statement.

Financial perils aside, what better time then now to take stock of plans for 2008 and beyond? I look forward to this time of year not only for the opportunity to rest and spend time with family and friends but as a quieter time to review the past year and to write out goals for the coming year. This process can be beneficial to both individuals and business owners. It accomplishes three things.

1. There is incredible power and forward momentum that comes from recognition of accomplishment over the past year.
2. It forces you to focus on long term thinking, so rare in a world that is full of instant response and short term measures of achievement.
3. The act of writing goals down solidifies action, which brings them much closer to reality.

I personally write out business, personal and family goals. I may have as many as 5-10 goals in each area. I usually do this after spending time on my own walking, swimming or x-country skiing. I clear my head, vision the future, and record what it will look like through a series of goals. I then write specific steps required to accomplish each goal. Sometimes there are 2 or 3 steps or as many as 10 steps noted for each goal. Often larger goals take multiple years to achieve. I usually do the next stage of the process on a different day. This second step requires some brainstorming and time to let my mind wander and exhaust ideas that I may not have considered previously to actually accomplish the goals. At the third stage I make these steps measurable by attaching a target completion date to them. Collectively they form my "to do list" for the next year. Specific actions are then noted in my 2008 calendar. It may sound rather structured, but it's actually fun to allow yourself the freedom to envision the future and how you plan to get there. It requires some uninterrupted solitude, a necessary luxury in order to move forward with purpose.

For companies this process can be an active task of marketing and business development performed by a team or lead by an individual. It allows you to create your future based on trends, observation and company strengths rather than respond to competitors. For individuals this process can be an act of creating your future rather than allowing life to become a series of events controlled by others.

What is both interesting and rewarding is the process of reviewing the previous years objectives and goals. Because they were made specific and actionable, I usually find that many have been accomplished and all have had some sort of action taken on them. I keep my annual goals in a folder. It's fun to review plans from 2, 5 or 10 years previous to measure how this process has moved business, personal and family goals forward. It is incredibly empowering.

A recent survey of 1,200 people across Canada by **TNS Canadian Facts** revealed that 5.3% of people in BC had the intention of starting a new businesses venture within the next 12 months. That's higher than the national average of 4.3%. Based on a current population of approximately 4,115,000 that is the equivalent of over 218,000 new ventures in the works. If only a fraction of these are successful in joining the existing ranks of 370,700 small businesses currently registered through the BC Ministry of Small Business and Revenue, it still represents a substantial amount of planned future growth. Think of the power this process could hold for these people.

I encourage you to take the time this January for your business and for yourself to set out a plan. Email me and share your goals and steps to get there. Once you've written it down and told somebody about it, you're almost certain to take action!

Mary Charleson, President of Charleson Communications, is a marketing strategist, speaker, and consultant. She writes monthly and can be reached at mary@charleson.ca