



If you hate the idea of writing a business plan this article has your name written all over it! Since starting my business in 1990 I have helped business owners write literally hundreds of marketing and business plans. Typically these were big, meaty 60-page documents that took months to research and develop. Banks loved them, potential investors thought they were great, and clients felt they finally had clarity and direction in their business lives. In fact, most clients saw significant growth in revenue and profit as a result of developing a business plan, but it came at a cost; in some cases \$20,000 plus endless hours spent working through diagnostics and problem solving.

Over the years I began to realise that these plans were becoming out of date quicker and quicker. It seemed by the time they were completed markets had changed and new challenges were on the horizon. It was time to face the fact that business plans were no longer able to keep up with the fast pace of business growth.

It's not surprising when you think about it; our businesses' lives have undergone an avalanche of change in the last five years. We

are communicating differently with emails, text messages and VOiP. The way we receive information has been revolutionised with web searches, podcasts and even videocasts. The business world is moving at warp speed but we haven't changed the way we review and plan for business growth.

We still rely on cumbersome research and clunky diagnostic exercises that can take forever to process. In fact, the business plan has become show and tell for business owners. By the time it's complete, it is simply a report about what has already happened.

Lets face it, the business plan is dead. It's too slow, too cumbersome and just not flexible enough for the fast moving business world we all now inhabit.

Of course, we still need to plan but we need a faster, more flexible process to create and test our growth vision for the business.

I have found that vision planning is a much more dynamic way of planning that overcomes some of the limitations of traditional business planning. It's faster, easier and can be updated easily. Vision planning differs from traditional business planning in its basic approach. Most

business planning is done from where you are today and spends a lot of time documenting the current situation. In vision planning you actually start in the future. You travel in your mind to a date two to three years down the track and create a detailed vision of what your business will look like and act like in the future. This approach means that all the speed bumps and barriers that get in the way of planning when you look at it from the 'now' perspective simply disappear. A great example of this is a client of mine who felt she couldn't plan for the future because she was trying to build her business around the staff she currently employed and what they did and didn't want to do ... so there were always reasons why she couldn't do this or that. When I asked her to stand on a date two years on and look back, she suddenly realised that those team members may not even be in the picture. She was suddenly free to create a real vision. The trick to vision planning is to be very specific. If you are describing new premises talk about location, colours of the walls, amenities, lighting or even areas for socialising. One client had always wanted an office near the beach so he could go for a swim after work, so he drove around the beachside suburbs and found