

The business plan

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So you're thinking about starting a business. You've heard that you should have a good business plan before you begin. But having one and creating one are two different things. Having is easy. Creating is not. So how should you begin?

Designing a good business plan takes time and effort. If you have problems getting some portions of yours together, chances are you'll have problems with those sections of your business as well. So spending the time necessary to write your plan, from beginning-to-end, becomes a necessary investment—an investment in yourself.

Speaking of beginning-to-end, you should begin your planning with the end in mind. Call it an exit strategy. It is something many neglect when they plan to enter the business world. Many times, getting into business is easier than getting out. Therefore, you need to ask (and answer) "How am I going to 'get out'?" Are you going to sell to someone else? Be bought out by a larger firm? Take your business public and sell stock? The last thing you want is a business that's doing great, but you can't do anything with it. So having an exit strategy is as important as any other portion of your planning.

Having thought about the end, let's begin at the beginning. The goal of any entrepreneur is starting a business and making it successful. And the first step is describing your business (in writing), from beginning-to-end. Too many launch themselves into business without a full understanding of what it will mean to their lives, the lives of their families or even where their business will lead.

For many, a business usually starts with a great idea, a patentable invention or a new product or service that will lead to wonderful results. Unfortunately, far too few take the close hard look necessary to determine how to make that idea or invention profitable. Enter the business plan. A well thought-through plan helps entrepreneurs become successful, by forcing them to look at all the issues and challenges they may face. It is also an absolute requirement for anyone trying to secure financing for their dream.

This series of articles will help you, the budding entrepreneur, research and draft your plan. The articles will attempt to cover all the issues and elements that go into the planning process. They will attempt to create an easy-to-follow structure that will help you write your plan

once all your research is completed.

Please keep in mind these articles present one way of writing your plan. They are guides, suggesting what items need to be in the plan and how to formulate it. There are many equally acceptable ways of writing a business plan—no standard format exists. So feel free to modify the

format. Add information where you feel it necessary and take out the sections that are not appropriate to your business. But be sure the section you choose to delete really doesn't apply. Failure to think about such things as advertising, distribution or any of the other elements of the plan, may result in future failure, despite a fantastic product or service.

So if you're interested in becoming an entrepreneur, begin thinking about the business you would like to create. Write down your ideas. In the articles that will follow, we will discuss your business. I stress "your business." For even though the articles may provide some general guidelines, it will be up to you to bring forth your ideas, reduce them to writing, refine them, believe in them and act upon your beliefs.

Bait stations for rodent control

Toxic baits are often used to control the damage caused by Norway rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) and house mice (*Mus musculus*). Bait stations used in rodent

supply and agricultural chemical supply stores have them in stock or can order them.

Bait stations can be built from scrap materials, and you can design homemade stations to fit your particular needs. Make them out of sturdy materials so they can't be easily knocked out of place or damaged. Where children, pets or livestock are present, construct the stations so the bait is accessible only to rodents. Locks, seals or concealed latches are often used to make bait stations more tamper proof. Clearly label all bait stations with "POISON," "RODENT BAIT - DO NOT TOUCH" or with a similar warning.

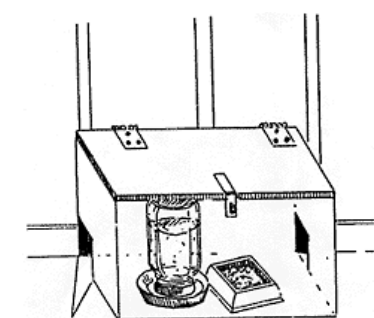
Bait stations should be large enough to allow several rodents to feed at once. They can be as simple as a flat board nailed at

holes on opposite sides of the station so rats can see an alternate escape route as they enter the station.

Bait stations for mice should have entrances 1 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Stations for mice can be considerably smaller than those for rats. A cigar box about 10 x 6 x 2 inches high, with a hole in each end is ideal for mice.

Bait stations work best when you use commonly available commercial rodent baits. Most of these baits are multiple-dose (anticoagulant) rodenticides. For these baits to be effective, rodents must feed on them over a period of days. Label instructions on such baits typically state, "Provide an uninterrupted supply of bait for at least 15 days or until all signs of feeding have stopped."

When using multiple-dose (anticoagulant) baits, it is very important that they be fresh and of high quality. Rats and mice often reject spoiled or stale foods. Provide enough fresh bait for rodents to eat all they want. When you first put bait stations out, check them daily and add fresh bait, as needed. After a short time, rodent numbers and feeding will decline and you will need to check the stations only every two weeks. If the bait becomes moldy, musty, soiled or insect-infested, empty the box and clean it and then refill it with fresh bait. Dispose of spoiled or uneaten bait in accordance with the label. Follow all label directions for the product you are using. (DJ)



an angle between the floor and wall, or a length of pipe into which bait can be placed. More elaborate stations are completely enclosed and can contain liquid as well as solid rodent baits. Hinged lids provide convenient inspection of permanent stations.

Bait stations for rats should have at least two openings about 2 1/2 inches in diameter. Cut the



control programs may increase both the effectiveness and safety of rodent baits (rodenticides).

Bait stations are useful because they:

- * protect bait from moisture and dust;
- * provide a protected place for rodents to feed, allowing them to feel more secure;
- * keep other animals (pets, livestock, desirable wildlife, etc.) and children away from toxic baits;
- * allow you to place bait in some locations where it would otherwise be difficult because of weather or potential hazards to non-target animals;
- * help prevent the accidental spilling of bait;
- * let you inspect bait easily to see if rodents are feeding on it.

You can purchase bait stations from commercial suppliers or make them yourself. Manufactured bait stations made of plastic, cardboard or metal are sold to pest control companies and to the public. They come in various shapes and sizes for rats or mice. Some farm

Acreage Insights



Acreage Owners Expo-2000

If you live on an acreage or if you are considering moving to an acreage, this is a program for you. Plan to attend the Acreage Owners Expo-2000 at the Agricultural Research and Development Center (near Mead) on March 18. The day's presentations will begin at 9 a.m.

Twenty educational workshops custom designed with the acreage owner in mind will cover a wide spectrum of subjects.

- Planning the landscape
- Acreage equipment advise
- Fencing
- Backyard wildlife
- Tree care
- Pond development & care
- Exploring acreage websites
- Keeping horses
- Windmills
- Gardening expertise
- Acreage security
- Environmental assessment

- Drinking water wells
- Lagoons and septic systems
- Solid waste management
- Native grasses and wild flowers
- Pests that affect your health
- Storm water runoff plans
- Annual and perennial plants
- Landscaping materials

University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension educators and specialists will be on site to answer your specific acreage management questions. Drinking water test kits, soil test kits and numerous educational publications will be available.

Pre-register by contacting the Dodge County Cooperative Extension office at (402) 727-2775. Advanced registration: \$15. Registration at the door: \$20. (DJ)

Water softening

As the water treatment industry has grown in the U.S., the concept of water softening has often been misconstrued as a purifying, cleansing or conditioning process. This is due largely to exaggerated advertising and, in part, to consumer misconceptions about water treatment. But the reality is that water softening simply removes hardness minerals and eliminates problems that are a nuisance and not a threat to human health. The decision "to soften or not to soften" is a matter of personal preference, not necessity. However, water softening does have advantages and disadvantages that make this decision a significant one.

Advantages

Most consumers would agree that hard water leaves scales on pots, soap films on

skin and detergent curds in the washing machine. More importantly, scales can also buildup on hot water heaters and decrease their useful life. Soap film and detergent curds in bathtubs and appliances indicate that you aren't getting the maximum cleaning action from these products. Soft water not only eliminates these nuisances but also protects appliances and saves cleaning time.

There are other advantages to water softening, as well. It is a well developed technology that has been used in homes for almost 65 years. The equipment is reliable, effective and widely available, providing consumers with convenient features and a selective market. The simple technology of softening makes it

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Acreage & Small Farm Insights Web Site

Visit our Internet web site at: <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/ianr/dodge/acreage/index.htm> to learn about Extension programs, publications and links to other acreage and small farm information.

"Part-time Farming" video

"Part-time Farming" will help develop your country environment and improve your quality of life. Just one hour of "Part-time Farming" provides tips that will save you costly mistakes and precious time. Call 402-441-7180 to order your copy.