

Alison Shaw

Alison Shaw had her own communications business and had written a marketing plan for a friend with a massage business – which had never been used. ‘One day the penny just dropped’ she said in an interview in Melbourne’s *Herald Sun*. She trained as a massage therapist and started her own business, Ripple, in Southport on Queensland’s Gold Coast. Here is Alison’s story:



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My Mum is an obsessive planner. She had a list for everything, even if it was a quick drive up to the shops for some milk. Fortunately I caught the habit from her, which has been the one crucial factor why Ripple has expanded so successfully in such a short period of time.

Ripple is a little bit different to other massage businesses. Its first business plan was written two years before I went to train as a therapist. My Mum would be proud.

But the real secret is not to write a business plan, a lot of businesses have them. The real secret is to use it. I know a lot of therapists who as part of their training wrote up a plan for what they were going to do, their marketing, financials and risk management.

Then life takes over, you get busy seeing clients and that plan then sits at the bottom of drawer.

The trick is to keep it on your desk and follow it.

So how has having and using a business plan helped Ripple?

Here’s my list!

Our marketing plan kept us focused on what we were going to do, and stopped us paying for ads when advertising sales people called us with the latest, greatest offer. It kept our marketing focused.

Our business plan meant that when people came to me with opportunities to buy their day spa or rent some rooms from them, I could look at the plan and see that it didn’t fit our expansion strategy. Again focus is the key.

It also meant that when opportunities did come past I saw them and could act quickly on them as I knew this was part of what we wanted to do.

Following the risk management strategies in our original plan has meant we have sidestepped some potential disasters.

The cashflow strategy has meant that Ripple has never had any bank debt, which has been a big advantage during the latest credit crunch.

It has been a large part of keeping us positive, even when we were up at 4.30 in the morning, seven days a week, just to keep on top of the work. Seeing the company fulfill its first year goals in only three months gave us confidence we were on the right track.

The lists also meant we got around to doing basic things like trade marking our name, protecting our intellectual property, having quality contracts drawn up and ensuring all of our systems were in place.

So how do you do it?

It’s pretty easy. There are lots of templates for business plans you can get from the net, but I follow my Mum’s system.

We do lists. We list what we are going to do in marketing each year, dates it will be done, costs and who is going to do it. Same with every other area of the business including HR, risk management, expansion plans, product development etc.

This ends up as a five-page easy to read document that, yes, sits on my desk.

Ripple hasn’t done anything particularly special to now be operating in Qld, Vic and NSW in four short years. We just had a plan and followed it.

We are currently looking for therapists in all regions. If you are interested please email alison@ripplemassage.com.au

Note: if you are interested in business planning, more information is available from government websites including www.business.gov.au and www.smallbiz.nsw.gov.au or www.business.vic.gov.au