

## **PREPARE S.M.A.R.T. ACTION PLANS**

### **What is this paper about?**

This paper sets out a process for you to translate your strategies into specific action steps to take in order to carry them out.

In strategic or business planning, or in any planning task, you will have identified your objectives and the strategies to achieve those objectives. Action Plans are the tactics you need to complete your strategies.

Let us look at a military analogy.

Once an Objective is set, perhaps to attack another country, decisions have to be made about which units to use, whether the attack should be along a broad front or in certain areas, and what direction the main attack should take. These are the Strategies.

Once the Strategies have been decided, a lot of activity has to take place to carry them out – moving the chosen units to the correct start places, ensuring arms and ammunition reach them, allocating transport, during the attack which small units take on the enemy defences and which rush past to take their headquarters. These are the Tactics or Action Steps.

S.M.A.R.T. Action Plans use the SMART model of ensuring that all your actions are:-

Specific – described specifically enough so that there is no confusion about what was meant to take place;

Measurable – described in such a way that the attainment of that action is measurable, so that you know when it has been achieved under the definitions of “success”;

Achievable – that the actions are not pie-in-the-sky but grounded in reality;

Result-oriented – that the action is described emphasising a result rather than an activity, so that you know what you are trying to achieve rather than do something just for the activity;

Timed – that there is a deadline set.

### **Why do I need Action Plans?**

You need to list out the detailed steps you need to take to follow each strategy so that you have a step by step list of actions that your team can follow.

Without this you may be carrying out a lot of unfocused and unnecessary tasks.

Action Plans will keep you on course during the working out of the strategy itself. They will give you indicators, in the middle of the action, to see if you are on track so that you can amend and adjust your actions accordingly before it is too late.

Having Action Plans will ensure that all of your actions are thought through and focused towards the achievement of objectives, and that you do not get side-tracked.

### **Your Organisation's Name**

Please type in your organisation's name.

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### **Your Strategies**

- 1 Enter here the strategies for which you want to complete Action Plans.

The best way to do this is to enter all your strategies that you want to consider. In establishing your strategies, you should have previously classified them by chronological (time) categories, for example as Short Term, Medium Term and Long Term Strategies or as Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 plus Strategies. Enter them in those categories and then follow the rest of the questions to prioritise them.


- 2 Review, then number these strategies in order of importance (what needs to be achieved first) where “1” is the most important.

You may decide to number only the Short Term or Year 1 strategies and leave the rest for another Action Planning session in a year’s time. Or you may decide you want to work on Action Plans for all of them now.

If you decide to number just a limited number of them as discussed above, leave the ranking on the others blank.

<b><u>Strategies</u></b>	<b><u>Rank</u> <u>(1=the</u> <u>most</u> <u>important)</u></b>

## **Action Plan**

- 1 Taking one strategy at a time (in priority order) complete the Action Plan Form, first by writing down the strategy at the top. Make sure that the wording is specific enough so that the strategy is clear to everyone.
- 2 On a blank piece of paper, write all the steps you need to take to complete this strategy. At this stage do not worry about the order these steps have to be taken, just allow yourself to think of all the detailed steps you need to take. Make sure you describe the steps specifically.

For example, do you need to hire staff? Do you need to prepare costings? Perhaps you need to check on certain legal requirements?

Think of every step you believe you will need to take.

Here is an example of the action steps for a strategy to open a new store in a new city:

- Find suitable premises
- Negotiate lease
- Hire a lawyer for contracts
- Design the layout and décor
- Build or renovate fittings inside the store
- Choose a builder
- Advertise
- Hire local manager
- Hire local staff
- Prepare reporting procedures to head office
- Set up banking facilities
- Train staff
- Transport stock to premises
- Opening Day

- 3 Review the list of action steps you need to take and rank them in terms of what has to be done first.

In order to do this you need to review the action steps for importance, as well as for what other action steps they might depend on. For example in opening a new store in a new city, the action step of “Choose a builder” has to take place before the action step of “Build or renovate fittings inside store”.

Copy the list, in order of what has to be done first, into the Action Plan Form.

- 4 In the Action Plan Form, write the required result of each Action Step.

This is necessary so that you know, without misunderstanding, when each Action Step has been completed. This also allows members of your team to know what they must achieve to ensure that each Action Step is completed, and recognised as completed.

For example in an Action Step “Choose a Builder”, the required result might be “Contract signed with a builder whose quote has been approved and who can complete per schedule”. This makes that action result-oriented.

- 5 For each Action Step decide who will be the “Leader” and write his/her name in the Action Plan Form.

First, a word about the meaning of “Leader” in the Action Plans. This is not necessarily the person who will actually carry out or do the Action Step. For example if the Action Step was to “Prepare reporting procedures to head office”, this may involve several people from your team, and may even include external advisers.

A “Leader” in this context is the person who will co-ordinate the work that has to be done and who will take responsibility for it being done. This means that they must have the authority to ask others to help, call in external advisors as necessary, even commit to expenditures. So it is also necessary to set their authorities and rights before hand.

They must take on the responsibility to “get the job done” in the sense that within their “authorities and rights” the buck stops with them.

- 6 Set the deadline for the completion of each Action Step and write the date in the Action Plan Form. This sets the Timed deadline.

You will need to do this with the agreement of the Leader. You cannot set up a deadline unless you have the agreement of the people who will take responsibility for achieving it.

As you set the deadlines remember:

- The timed order of each step
- The reality that other “normal” day-to-day activities will be happening too so build in realistic time frames
- That if Leaders have multiple Action Steps they are responsible for, in this as well as in any other Action Plans, you need to build in realistic time frames, or switch Leaders.

Check that the action steps are realistic – that is, the actions are achievable given the time, resources and skills.

## ACTION PLAN FORM

**NAME OF COMPANY:** \_\_\_\_\_

**STRATEGY:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b><u>Step Number</u></b>	<b><u>Action Step</u></b>	<b><u>Required Result</u></b>	<b><u>Leader</u></b>	<b><u>When By</u></b>

### **What Do I Do Next?**

You have just completed your Action Plans.

If you have completed several Action Plans, we suggest that you review them as a whole.

What tends to happen when we concentrate on one Action Plan at a time is that all the Action Steps on that Action Plan seem reasonably easy to achieve. However when we look at all the Action Plans together, we may see that some Leaders are over-committed.

Review all the Action Plans together. Have you over-committed anyone? Are the deadlines still achievable?

Ensure that your Plans have a section on your Monitoring and Evaluation procedures. These Action Plans should be reviewed regularly as part of those procedures.