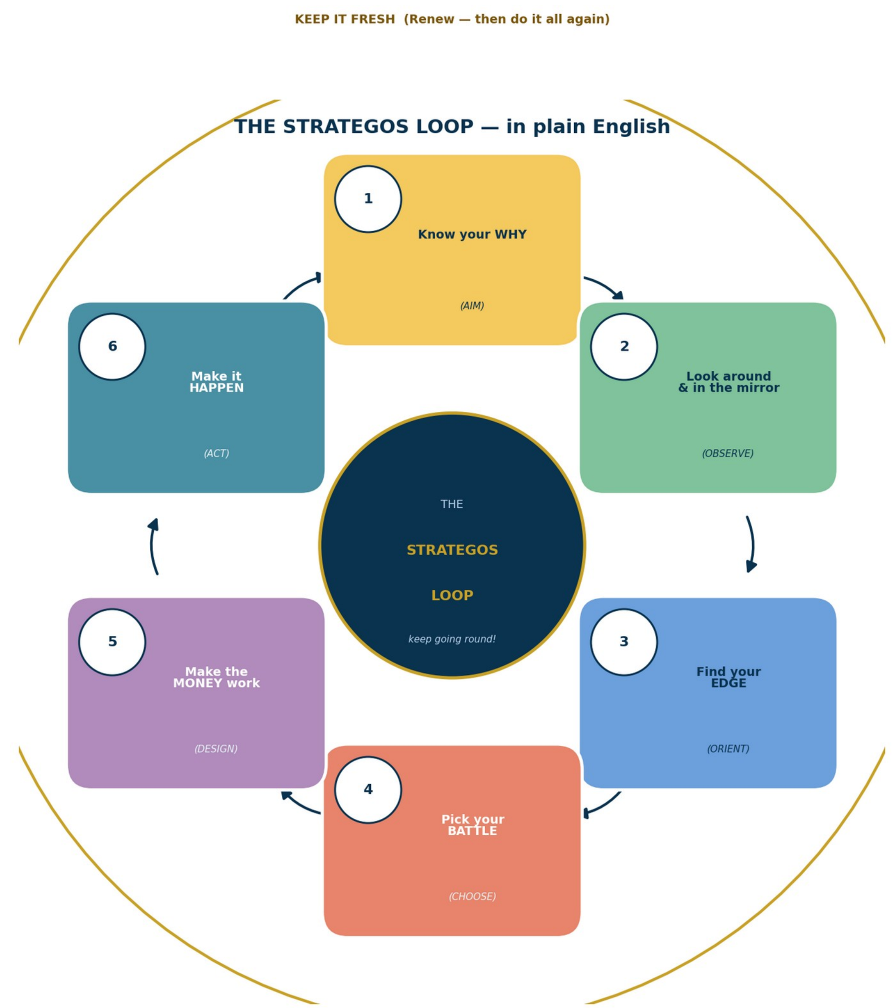
BUSINESS STRATEGY

that actually works for small business

The plain-English guide for owners, founders and entrepreneurs — grow smarter with the Strategos Loop



No MBA required · Edition 2026

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Introduction

Let's be honest about something. You didn't start a business because you were dying to write a strategy document. You started it because you're good at baking, or fixing pipes, or designing logos, or making the best tacos in three counties — and you wanted to do it your way. Strategy probably sounds like something that happens in glass-walled conference rooms at companies with a thousand employees and a person whose entire job title is 'Chief Strategy Officer.'

Here's the good news: strategy is not that. At its heart, strategy is just making smart choices about where to focus so you win more than you lose. You already do it every day — when you decide which customers to chase, what to charge, whether to hire, or which shiny opportunity to say no to. This book won't turn you into a corporate strategist. It'll do something more useful: it'll give you a simple, repeatable way to make those choices better, so your business grows on purpose instead of by accident.

About This Book

This is a practical, plain-English guide to business strategy for small and medium businesses — the shops, trades, agencies, startups, freelancers, restaurants, online sellers and service firms that make up most of the economy and get almost none of the strategy books written for them. The big-company strategy books assume you have departments, analysts and budgets. You have a to-do list and not enough hours. So this book is built for how you actually work.

Everything here is organised around one simple tool called the Strategos Loop — six moves you run in order, then repeat. Don't worry about the fancy name; you'll meet it properly in Chapter 3, and by the end of the book it'll feel like second nature. The loop takes the best ideas from the authors work with hundreds of businesses, 2,500 years of strategic thinking (yes, including an ancient Chinese general) and the modern business world, and boils them down into something you can actually run on a slow Tuesday.

REMEMBER You don't have to read this book front to back. Each chapter stands on its own. If you're stuck on pricing, jump to the money chapter. If you don't know where to focus, start with the loop. Use it like a toolbox, not a novel.

Foolish Assumptions

Writers are told to picture their reader. Here's who we pictured while writing this book — and if one of these sounds like you, you're in the right place:

- You run, own, or are starting a small or medium business — anywhere from a one-person side hustle to a company with a few dozen employees.
- You're smart and busy, and you have zero patience for jargon, fluff or 47-slide frameworks.
- You've maybe tried 'doing strategy' before — a vision statement here, a SWOT analysis there — and it fizzled because nothing came of it.
- You want practical steps you can actually take, with examples from businesses that look like yours, not multinational conglomerates.

We did NOT assume you have an MBA, a finance background, or any idea what 'synergistic value chain optimisation' means. (Nobody does. It's not real.)

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, you will see colored highlighted text boxes which flag things worth slowing down for. Here's what they mean:

TIP A shortcut, a smart move, or a way to save time and money. Grab these.

REMEMBER Something important enough that it's worth locking into memory. If you forget everything else on the page, remember this.

WATCH OUT! A trap, a costly mistake, or a place where small businesses regularly faceplant. Watch your step.

JARGON BUSTER A fancy business term, translated into plain English. So when you hear it at a networking event, you can nod knowingly.

TRY THIS A quick, do-it-now exercise for your own business. This is where the book turns from reading into doing.

TRUE-ISH STORY A short, realistic tale of a small business getting it right (or hilariously wrong). Composites, not real companies — but you'll recognise them.

Beyond the Book

At the very back you'll find a Cheat Sheet — the entire loop, its questions and its tools boiled down to a couple of pages you can photocopy and stick on the wall. There's also a plain-English glossary so you can look up any term that trips you up. Think of those as the bits you'll keep coming back to long after you've read the rest once.

Where to Go from Here

If you're brand new to all this, start at Chapter 1 and meet the loop in Chapter 3. If you already know your business cold and just want the method, jump to Part 2 and work the six moves. And if you're in a hurry and just want to try something today, flip to Chapter 14 and run the Weekend Strategy Sprint. Wherever you start — welcome. Let's make your business win on purpose.

PART 1

Strategy Isn't Just for Big Companies

What strategy really is, why you need it, and the simple loop that makes it doable

CHAPTER 1

What Strategy Really Is (and Why You Already Do It)

In This Chapter

- Cutting through the jargon to a definition you can use
- Why strategy is really about choosing what NOT to do
- How you're already thinking strategically without realising it
- The one question at the heart of all strategy

Ask ten business experts to define 'strategy' and you'll get ten answers, most of them useless. So let's not do that. Here's the whole thing in one sentence you can actually remember:

> **REMEMBER** **The whole ballgame:** Strategy is choosing where to focus your limited time, money and energy so you win more often than you lose.

That's it. Notice three words in there: limited, focus, and win. They matter. You have limited resources — you can't do everything, chase every customer, or sell every product. So you have to focus — pick the handful of things that give you the best shot. And the point of all that focusing is to win — to build a business that meets your WHY.

(Think of why you are starting or building a business? No, it's not "make money", it's a little deeper than that. If your aim is to retire then you have a target that you need to reach in the value of your company within a certain time. If you want to leave a legacy, then you aim to create something of value that you can hand down to your children. If it's to ensure that your family has the opportunity to live a comfortable, worry-free life, then you aim for a net profit figure which will meet this need.) The WHY, therefore gives you a target and a timeframe.

The strategy is just finding the most effective way of reaching this goal.

Strategy is mostly about saying no

Here's the part nobody tells you: good strategy is defined more by what you DON'T do than what you do. A bakery that tries to be the cheapest AND the fanciest AND the fastest AND open 24 hours will exhaust itself and be great at none of them. A bakery that decides 'we are the best sourdough in town, full stop' can pour everything into that one thing and win.

> **TRUE-ISH STORY** When Maria opened her bakery, she said yes to everything — custom cakes, wedding catering, wholesale to cafés, a lunch menu, gluten-free everything. She was working 80-hour weeks and losing money on half of it. Her strategy breakthrough wasn't adding something. It was cutting the wedding catering and the lunch menu, and going all-in on being the neighbourhood's go-to for fresh bread and pastries. Revenue went UP. Her weekends came back. That's strategy: focus by subtraction.

We'll come back to Maria's Bakery throughout the book — along with a few other small businesses you'll get to know: Dave, a plumber trying to escape the price wars; Pixel & Co, a scrappy three-person design agency; Taco Tangent, a food truck with a cult following; and Knotty Threads, an online handmade-goods shop. They're made up, but their problems are real, and you'll see your own business in at least one of them.

You're already a strategist

Every time you make one of these calls, you're doing strategy:

- Deciding to focus on commercial clients instead of homeowners because they pay on time.
- Raising your prices because you're always booked solid (or dropping a product that never sells).
- Choosing to specialise — 'we only do kitchens' — instead of taking every job.
- Turning down a big contract because it would swallow your whole team and leave you exposed.

The trouble is, most owners make these calls one at a time, under pressure, without a bigger picture — so the choices don't add up to anything. Strategy is what connects them. It's the difference between a pile of good decisions and a business that's actually going somewhere.

The one question underneath it all

If you boil strategy down to a single question, it's this: how will this business win? Not 'how will it survive,' not 'how will it stay busy' — how will it win, meaning: why will customers choose you over the alternatives, again and again, in a way that makes you money? Every chapter in this book is really about helping you answer that one question, and then act on it.

TRY THIS Right now, in one sentence, finish this: 'Customers choose us instead of the competition because ______.' If you can't finish it clearly, don't worry — that's exactly what this book is going to fix. Write down your best attempt anyway; we'll come back to it.

The bottom line

- ✓ Strategy = choosing where to focus your limited resources so you win more than you lose.
- ✓ Good strategy is defined by what you say no to, not just what you say yes to.
- ✓ You already make strategic choices; the trick is making them on purpose and connecting them.
- ✓ The one question underneath everything: how will this business win?

CHAPTER 2

Why Small Businesses Skip Strategy — and Why That's Expensive

In This Chapter

- The real reasons owners avoid strategy
- The hidden costs of 'winging it'
- Why being busy is not the same as making progress
- How a little strategy beats a lot of hustle

If strategy is so useful, why do so many small businesses skip it? Not because owners are lazy or dumb — quite the opposite. They skip it for reasons that feel completely justified in the moment. Let's name them, because you can't fix a habit you won't admit to.

The four reasons you're avoiding it

1. **'I don't have time.'** You're slammed running the actual business. Strategy feels like a luxury for people with spare afternoons. (Spoiler: it's the thing that eventually GIVES you spare afternoons.)
2. **'It sounds like corporate nonsense.'** Every time you've seen 'strategy' it came wrapped in buzzwords and PowerPoint. Fair. This book strips all that out.
3. **'I already know my business.'** You do! But knowing your business and having a clear plan to grow it are different things. Expertise isn't strategy.
4. **'Last time I tried, nothing happened.'** You did a vision board or a SWOT, felt good for a day, and then Monday hit and it went in a drawer. The problem wasn't you — it was that nobody showed you how to turn it into action.

WATCH OUT! The most dangerous phrase in small business is 'we're too busy to plan.' Being busy feels like progress, but you can be busy driving in circles. Motion isn't the same as direction.

What winging it actually costs

Skipping strategy isn't free — it just hides the bill. Here's what it quietly costs you:

- **Wasted money** chasing customers, products or markets that were never going to work for you.
- **Price wars** you can't win, because without a clear edge, the only thing left to compete on is being cheaper.
- **Burnout** from saying yes to everything because you have no clear basis for saying no.
- **Missed opportunities** because you were too heads-down to see the wave coming until it had passed.
- **A business that depends entirely on you** and can never be sold, scaled, or left alone for a week.

TRUE-ISH STORY Dave the plumber was the busiest guy in town and barely breaking even. He said yes to every call, undercut competitors to win jobs, and worked himself ragged. When he finally sat down and did the loop, he realised the homeowners he chased were price-shoppers who'd leave him for anyone $10 cheaper — while the property managers and small commercial clients he'd been ignoring valued reliability and paid premium rates without blinking. He fired the price-shoppers (politely) and went after the clients who'd actually pay for 'shows up on time and does it right.' Same skills, half the hours, double the profit. That's what a few hours of strategy bought him.

A little beats a lot

Here's the encouraging truth: you don't need a lot of strategy. Small businesses don't fail from too little planning detail; they fail from having no clear direction at all. A single clear choice — 'we serve THIS customer, we win by being THE BEST at THIS thing' — beats a hundred pages of analysis. This whole book is designed to get you to a few clear choices, fast, and then help you act on them. A weekend of thinking can change the next five years.

TRY THIS Add up, roughly, how many hours you worked last month and what you took home after everything. Now ask: is that number going up over time, or are you just running faster to stay in the same place? Keep that number in mind. It's the scoreboard strategy is trying to move.

The bottom line

- ✓ Owners skip strategy because of time, jargon, overconfidence, and past letdowns — all understandable, all fixable.
- ✓ Winging it hides its costs: wasted money, price wars, burnout, missed waves, and a business that can't run without you.
- ✓ Busy is not the same as progress. Motion isn't direction.
- ✓ You don't need a lot of strategy — you need a little, clear and acted on.

END OF PREVIEW

Enjoyed the preview?

You've read the opening of the book. The full guide — every move, the weekend sprint, the Part of Tens and the cheat sheet — is available on Amazon.

Get the full book on Amazon

Search: “Strategos Loop — Business Strategy That Actually Works”