



# 105 Tips

for Creative

# STARTUPS



LOVELDA SMITH

## Foreword

Hi there,

My name is Lovelda Smith.

This book is packed with little start-up gems for start-ups (I've found that creative start-ups in particular get a lot out of these).

I encourage you as you read through these to evaluate how you are implementing them in your business. Many are easy to skim over as over simplified. But.... Often the simple things yield fantastic results. I say why complicate things unnecessarily.

Think about how you could implement these tips more in your business, perhaps even write a list of action points.

Enjoy and all the best with your start-up. These are incredibly exciting times (even though it may seem challenging at times).





## **Always ask the obvious questions**

No-one likes to ask the stupid question. But as a startup, it is stupid not to ask the questions which are top of your mind. Assumptions are the core of far too many issues. Who knows you might even avoid a pitfall or learn a thing or two which saves, you time, money and effort.



## **Start with your existing network**

Our existing network is all too often overlooked. Do you really know what your friends and family do? Do you know who they know that could assist you in your business? Make a habit of mining your existing network, you'd be surprised what you can find.



#3

## Get introductions

If someone says they know someone who can help. Never take their contact details, always ask the person with the relationship to make an introduction. Introductions are always more powerful than you getting in touch out of the blue.

#4

## Always ask for referrals

Thanks for your business... do you mind finding my next client?  
Why not have your existing customers help you find your new clients by asking for referrals.





#5

## Always ask for testimonials

If someone says they know someone who can help. Never take their contact details, always ask the person with the relationship to make an introduction. Introductions are always more powerful than you getting in touch out of the blue.



#6

## Limit free work

Do “free work” strategically. It’s all too easy to make “free” work a habit. Before you know it you have lots of clients but none of them are bringing in any money. They’ll attract more non paying clients, don’t let it be you.

#7

## Always put agreements in writings

The devil is in the detail. The purpose of getting agreements in writing allows both parties to become really clear on what they are signing up to. The problem with verbal agreements is that they do not provide clarity.

#8

## Focus on what you are great at

Apart from being more fun, it's also easier to improve. If something comes naturally to you, you shine at it. If it is difficult you'll more than likely spend a disproportionate amount of energy on it, only to become mediocre. Doesn't make much sense if you ask me. I know which I'd choose.





#9

## **Tell people what you are up to**

Let the cat out of the bag! The fact that you are starting a business is something to be celebrated, don't keep it a secret. Who knows, someone might actually be able to assist you.



#10

## **Always know your break-even point**

Your break-even point is where your total expenses is equal to your total revenue. Any money you make beyond that point is profit. This is the minimum you need to be making.

#11

## Account for team members in your pricing

Ensure you account for the time it takes to do the job in your price. When business grows you're going to have to pay others to do the jobs you once did. Make sure you can afford to pay them.

#12

## Do your due diligence

There is nothing wrong with being trusting, just ensure that trust is built on something. Do your own background checks, especially if the risk to you if things don't work out is high. As they say, hindsight is 20:20.





#13

## **Use productivity tools**

Get more out of your day. Why take an hour to do something which with the aid of productivity tools can be done in 10 minutes. Time is the one resource you cannot produce more of, use it effectively.



#14

## **Always keep an eye on your costs**

Costs eat into the margin of your business. Keep an eye on your ongoing costs. As yourself, is this purchase essential, is there an alternative way of achieving the same thing for a reduced price, is this the best deal I can get?

#15

## Get the most from the tools you pay for

Imagine the efficiencies if we took the time to get the most out of the tools we already have at our disposal. Whether paid for or free, most of us only use a fraction of the functionality of the tools we have access to. Take the time to understand how you can get more value from what you already have.

#16

## Cancel subscriptions you don't use

If you don't use it (especially if you pay for it) cancel it! It's easy to be leaking money for subscriptions you don't use. The same is true of email subscriptions. If you are simply deleting emails when they arrive, unsubscribe and declutter.





#17

## Trust your gut

Intuition is a powerful ally- if it feels too good to be true, it probably is. Often when things don't work out, you recall that you had a gut instinct you ignored. Learn to trust that internal knowing.



#18

## Invest in building quality relationships

Relationships open doors and create opportunities, invest in nurturing them.

#19

## Do what you say

Trust is the cornerstone of any quality business relationship. A simple way to build trust is to do what you say.

#20

## Be honest with yourself and others

Be honest even when it's painful. In fact ESPECIALLY when it is painful. Don't leave out significant pieces of information when working with others, they'll eventually find out and it'll undermine your reputation and relationship with them going forward.



#21

## **Know when you are out of your depth**

Pushing your boundaries and being a little uncomfortable is normal in business. But that is very different to being out of your depth. Know the difference, know when you need more support and when you are simply not the right person for a job. Not every job is a good job for you right now.

#22

## **Build a quality team**

We aren't going to be great at everything. We aren't going to be excited about every role in our business. And we ALL have blind spots. Build a quality team that compliments you and can see the things that you can't.



## #23

### Invest for Return

Work out what your ROI (Return on Investment) is before investing. How will you know that this “purchase” was worthwhile? How much more money will you be able to make as a direct result of this purchase? All too often people classify things as an investment to justify “throwing away” money, don’t let it be you.

## #24

### Know when to move on and let go

The skill of an entrepreneur is knowing when to call it quits. Sometimes the most effective thing to do is let go and move on. Lots of energy goes into holding onto something long beyond when you should. Whilst you are holding onto the past, new exciting ventures have no room. It’s a sign of strength, not weakness to let go when it no longer serves you.





#25

## **Refine your processes**

NEVER get complacent. Always look for ways that you can refine your processes, increase your efficiency and therefore increase your profit margin. Develop a habit of constant, never ending improvement.



#26

## **Develop a habit of continuous personal development**

Keep upgrading you! Create a personal development plan for yourself. It's inevitable that these improvements to yourself will result in improvements to your business.

#27

## Watch how you spend your time

Watch out for time sapping activities. It's amazing how we can lose hours in a week doing time sucking unnecessary activities. Learn to be more deliberate about how you spend your time. It's a precious resource that you cannot create more of.

#28

## Learn the art of leverage

Leverage: use (something) to maximum advantage. Look at where you are not getting the most out of a tool, resource or activity.





#29

## **Be true to yourself**

There is room for everyone, it's a much more pleasant entrepreneurial journey when you are able to be yourself.



#30

## **Know the lifestyle you want your business to support**

Your business could support your lifestyle, or be your life. I know which I'd prefer. Start with the end in mind and define the lifestyle you'd like your business to support upfront. This will drive the decisions you make and how you structure your business.

#31

## Give credit where credit is due

Great, respected leaders give credit freely, openly and graciously. We are all supported on our way to success, it is a fools game to act as if you did it all yourself. Be open with the credit you give others, they'll be loyal and provide continued essential support.

#32

## Invest in items which are core to your business

Don't be cheap with CORE items in your business. People notice and it undermines your brand.





#33

## **Never make decisions when in an emotionally heightened state**

Emotional blindness can get us into all sorts of trouble. Do not make decisions when you are emotional. Allow the dust to settle and to return to a grounded calm space where you can see things clearly.



#34

## **Pick your battles, focus on the bigger picture**

Life's too short to get into long battles about the small stuff.

#35

## Create regular “thinking” time

It's it funny how the best ideas always come when you are relaxed. They are generally out of the blue when you least expect. Create time for creative and thinking. The thinking that got you to where you are isn't going to get you to the next level. Allow yourself the space for fresh thinking and new ideas.

#36

## Stay true to your natural talents and strengths

We've all got them. Things that come so naturally to us that we are left wondering what others struggle so much to get the same thing done. Instead though, we sink precious life energy into achieving mediocrity in something which is hard work for us. Stay true to your natural talents and shine.



#37

## **Build a team that compliments you**

Avoid the natural tendency to want to work only with people just like you, cause people just like you understand you. The problem is people just like you have EXACTLY the same blind spots as you and that's not going to support your business. Ensure your values align and that your skills compliment.

#38

## **Learn how money works**

As tempting as it is in the early stages of business to barter or exchange services to grow your business. Money is the currency accepted by landlords and shop owners the world over. Failure to understand how it works and more importantly how to make it work for you is the downfall of any startup. Make it a priority to master money.

#39

## Learn the art of leadership

Welcome to the world of the “CEO” believe it or not, when you start your own business, you bestow upon yourself the title of CEO. You are now officially a leader. You’ll need to inspire people towards your vision, make difficult decisions and execute against a plan. Leadership is one of those necessary skills we often overlook that we will need when we decide to start a business.

#40

## Create regular breaks to rejuvenate

Burnout is the dark side of entrepreneurship. You’ve got one body, look after it and it’ll look after you. As much as we wish we were super human, we need time to rest, heck, even technology needs a reboot every now and then. All yourself the time to refuel.





#41

## **Do not neglect your friends, who will you talk to when you get successful**

Work, work, work, work. Is your default answer always “I’m busy”. If you have ever been on the other side of an “I’m Busy” person you know it translates as “You are not important enough for me to make the time for you”. Is this really the message you want to send your friends?



#42

## **Take care of your team**

You couldn’t get to where you are without your awesome team. They all play a crucial role in your success. Create a conscious habit of rewarding the efforts of your amazing team. If you look after them, they will continue to look after you.

#43

## Nothing good comes from a scarcity mindset - ground yourself

As a startup it can often feel as though there isn't enough. Enough time, enough money, enough customers. However, people can sense your desperation a mile off and no-one likes feeling like an object to be used in someone else's game. Ground yourself and learn to operate from a place of abundance... even when it feels like abundance alludes you.

#44

## Making testing a way of business

As a creative you have an idea a minute. Obviously they are all great ideas... well until they aren't. Create a habit of testing your ideas. Yes, I know normally they are awesome. But occasionally they aren't and the impact is painful.





#45

## **Develop a habit and attitude of gratitude**

There are so many bumps along the way as a startup. It's so easy to become so focused on the bumps that we lose sight of that which is amazing on the journey. Train your mind to focus on that which you have to be grateful for. No one likes doing business with the person that's always complaining that things are really difficult.



#46

## **Stop comparing, it's futile**

Listen... let's keep it real. We can't all be great at everything. The problem with comparing, is that our default is to compare our weaknesses with someone else's strength. Now, when put like that you can see the senselessness of it all. Learn to collaborate and compliment. It's a much better use of your energy than comparison.

#47

## Never stop improving the basics, that's your foundation

I was told when I was learning ballet, that at the Royal School of Ballet, they spend an entire term doing one ballet move! YES an ENTIRE term! Everything they do is built off this one basic move, so world class ballerina's master this simple move. The same should be said of the way you do business. Way too many startups skim over the basics to move on to the more "exciting" things, only to find that their business foundation is shaky.

#48

## Know the ONE thing people come to you for

Don't confuse your potential customers. Focus on the ONE thing you can do really well for them. What is the main thing people ask you for. what is the problem you are best known for solving. Make a name for yourself doing that. It confuses people when you have a big long list of things you do. Keep it really simple... they can find out about all the other magic as they work with you more.





#49

## Reward loyalty

Don't ever take for granted those who helped you when no-one knew your name. Award loyalty. The customers who kept the lights on when you didn't know how you'd pay your bills, the suppliers that did you an awesome deal, the friends who offered a listening ear. The world needs more people like them. Their belief in you is priceless.



#50

## Consistent branding and messaging

I know you're creative. That doesn't mean that your brand imagery and messaging should change as often as you change your clothes. Consistency stands for a lot. Allot people to get to recognise your brand and style. Give it 3 months to see if you resonate with who it attracts. If after 3 months it's not working, then tweak it. Too often we don't give an idea long enough to prove itself.

#51

## Be helpful

It's sounds so simple. But, when we are full swing into our businesses we can easily forget this very simple but very powerful principle. Helpfulness builds relationships, it shows that you care and it's just basic customer service. Be helpful, because you can, not because you can see an immediate benefit to you right now and see where it takes you.

#52

## Know who you are not - not everyone is a great match for you

All too often we take for granted in the startup learning processes the learnings of who we are not! They are so important, not everyone is a great fit for us and that's perfect. Life and business is so much more beautiful when you know who you aren't so you can shine as who you are.





#53

## Know your numbers

Not your measurements, your business numbers? What's your profit margin, Conversion rate, ROI etc. There are important numbers in your businesses. If you don't know what they are, how will you know how to improve upon them or if they are declining?



#54

## Measure everything

Stop bumbling around in the dark! It's important to understand what is working and what isn't. If you are sending an email, how many people opened it? If you have a website, how many people visit it? If you did an event how much money did it make after costs? Do not embark on something unless you can measure it's effectiveness.

#55

## Get a great accountant

A GREAT accountant is much, much more than a bean counter. They are an advisor, and educator and a total asset to your business. All too often startups look for a bean counter... your accountant can be sooo much more than that.

#56

## Learn the art of sales

Sales is what brings in the cash to run your business, if you can't figure out how to sell what you create there will be no business. Sales is an ART not a science, it's a creative undertaking. Relax into it and put your creative hat on, you'll be surprised how much easier it becomes when you learn the words that resonate for your target audience.





#57

## **Always look to do better**

Compete against yourself. Seek to constantly improve. Go happy customers, what would it take to have customers who are raving fans referring clients regularly.



#58

## **Give customers more than they expect**

Non memorable businesses give customers what they expect. Exceptional, memorable businesses give customers more than they were expecting, they wow them. Exceptional businesses give you reason to be a raving fan and insist that all of your friends, family and colleagues buy. Always go that step further than a customer expects.

#59

## Admit your mistakes, apologise and rectify

Mistakes are inevitable. In truth they are a beautiful opportunity to build loyalty. Customers understand that sometimes things go wrong, when you are able to deal with it professionally and fairly they truly get a sense of what you are about. Customers want to trust you and know that you'll do what you say. If you fail to for whatever reason, how you deal with it determines if you are really a "safe pair of hands". Face the mistakes head on.

#60

## Take responsibility

Resist the urge to blame someone else. Yes, they may have had a part to play, but ultimately it's your business. You could have made a different decision, you could have heeded warning signs, you could have had contingency. You cannot grow when you haven't taken responsibility, you business cannot grow. Sometimes it might be painful, but take responsibility.



#61

## **Be creative - with everything**

There are some areas in business where creativity comes naturally. There are others which we don't question. What would it be like if you could inject creativity into your negotiations, contracts, office space, invoices. You're a creative, why do you limit your creativity to your art form?

#62

## **Every challenge is an opportunity in disguise**

Our default is to thinking of a "challenge" as a problem. However, isn't it also true that there have been times of adversity where you have ended up far better off. What if you could reframe your "challenges" as opportunities in disguise. You'll probably find that with your creative mind you can create a raft of great opportunities that this challenge opens up.

#63

## Become an effective outsourcers

Oh the hours lost on becoming mediocre at a weakness! Grow your business from your natural talents and learn how to effectively outsource the rest. Your customers will have an extraordinary experience and you'll be much happier for it.

#64

## Be social on social media

The clue is in the title. Social Media platforms are really powerful once you truly understand what they are about. If you approach them to be all about you, you'll find you get limited results. When you started to become interested in your audience, to get to know them and to engage with them.... well that's when things change.





#65

## Be fully present with your clients

You'd think this would be obvious. As a startup there are lots of moving pieces. It can be difficult to put them to the side for a few moments when you are with your clients and give them your undivided attention. Take a few moments before spending time with your clients to do a brain dump of everything on your mind so you can give them your undivided attention.



#66

## Make upselling your friend

We all know organisations who are great at this. Ryanair, VistaPrint anyone in affiliate marketing. There is always an offer after the offer. Something additional which compliments your existing purchase. Not everyone will buy, but many will. Learn to offer your customers these additional complimentary items whilst they are in a buying mood. I know I've bought 500 business cards when I meant to buy 250... the offer was just so good.

#67

## Let your clients guide what you create

Why rack your brain thinking of the next amazing thing to create. If your customers keep asking you the same question, then sell them the answer. Say you're an artist and people keep asking if you will frame their painting.. partner with a framer and sell framed art or unframed art. Simplez. Often the next product or service is in your existing customer base.

#68

## Always do a proof of concept

Prove your idea on a small scale before launching into a business. Get in front of potential customers and see if they think it is as great as you do, sell a few to get some customer reviews and prove people will buy. This way you are able to justify additional investment and are able to prove you are creating something that people want.





#69

## **Quality over quantity**

Always ensure the quality of what you produce is something you are happy to have your name associated with. As a creative, quality is expected of you.



#70

## **Likes are vanity, engagement and conversion is sanity**

In the world of social media, the golden metric is engagement. Who's taking the time to comment and share? Often business owners get caught up with the number of likes or impressions. What's most important is the number of comments and shares, that's a sign of an engaged audience.

#71

## Make evaluation and review part of who you are

How regularly do you review your business? It's easy to become complacent with how things are. Integrate regular review and reflection points - quarterly is recommended.

#72

## Seek out feedback

We need regular outside perspective. Build a peer group of those respected in your industry and regularly seek their feedback. Ask your customers how they find your service and what they think will make it better. It's far easier than assuming that you have have the answers.





#73

## Rejection isn't personal

It feels like it is... but it really isn't. Rejection is just feedback that you are not aligned with the person you are speaking with, or that the offer doesn't work for them. Separate the discussion from who you are and you'll be able to see it much more clearly.



#74

## Use sales objections to revise your sales pitch

Why are we so terrified of objections in the sales process? We think it's personal and about us. Actually it's an excellent opportunity. I mean your customers are telling you what they need to hear from you to buy from you. Use objections to refine your sales process to make it more efficient to let your customers know why you're the best option for them.

#75

## Telling isn't selling

Eeeeeek... we hate the person who talks at us hoping that the more words they use the more likely we are to buy. However, far too many startups slip into that category when selling themselves. To be very clear, telling is not selling it's a lecture and it's uncomfortable.

#76

## Focus on benefits vs features

Tailor your sales pitch to those you speak to. Benefits are the “what’s in it for me” features are attributes of your product or service. When you can link your product or service to what a potential client will get out of it that will benefit their life, you are really onto something. That’s powerful selling.



#77

## Define your target market

Who do you sell to? OR better yet, who do you sell to WELL. There is a certain category of people you love working with, where you can clearly articulate the benefit they get from your service and who get a lot of value from what you do. Take the time to define who these are, knowing this make lots of other areas in your business so much easier.

#78

## Be consistent and persistent

Too many quit before the finish line. If focus and perseverance aren't something you can tap into then you're in the wrong game. Your success is reliant on them.

#79

## Seek out people who already have your target market

Learn where your target market hang out. Learn who already sells really well to them and build those relationships. Get creative about it, Disney did this really well with McDonalds of all companies by providing the toys in the happy meal - funny how they always related to the latest Disney movie. Where can you do something similar to this for yourself?

#80

## Collaborate, Collaborate, Collaborate

Too many startups think they can do it alone. Those that make a success of it learn very early the power of collaboration. Learn how to effectively work with others.



#81

## **Guard your reputation with your life**

Your reputation is your secret weapon that opens doors and closes deals for you. Don't allow others to speak badly of you especially without any cause. Rectify your mistakes early and stay in communication with your clients and suppliers. Reputations take time to build but can come crumbling down in a matter moments.

#82

## **Your customers are your best salespeople**

Your existing customers, if you look after them and can convert them into raving fans are the very best salespeople you can have. They speak from experience, they speak with enthusiasm and they have relationships and influence with their peers.

#83

## Make it really easy for others to refer you

Too many referrals get lost because the system for referring doesn't work. It's complicated or the follow up sequence just doesn't exist. Make it ridiculously simple for people to refer people to you.

#84

## Have a clear vision

When things get turbulent it's easy to forget why you started. What's your vision, why are you doing this anyway? The answers to these questions will keep you focused when you just want to throw in the towel and walk away.





#85

## Define your values

What do you stand for? What can people expect from you? Knowing your values helps you identify who you can work with - customers, suppliers or team members.



#86

## First impressions count always put your best foot forward

You might like it, or agree with it. But that doesn't change the fact that it is human nature to form an opinion in seconds. Some people will place more value on this initial opinion than others, but it's an opinion none the less. Put your best foot forward.

#87

## **If you're the biggest fish in the pond, it's time to find a new pond**

It feels great to be the person smartest person you know, to be the person that everyone in your circle goes to. The trouble is that you stop growing and expanding yourself. When you find that you are the most accomplished person that you know and spend time with, it's time to find more accomplished people to push you so you grow.

#88

## **Sometimes the truth hurts, build resilience**

Isn't it so annoying that sometimes when people tell us what we need to hear it really hurts. Like REALLY hurts. It is also how we grow. As much as we want to not engage with these individuals they are doing us a favour. We you want your business to grow you're going to need to develop resilience cause sometimes the truth just hurts.





#89

## **Mistakes are inevitable, brush yourself off and move forward**

Don't dwell on the past. Resolve it, heal from it and move on. So what you made a bad investment once, someone stole your money, you lost a huge client. Deal with it head on, address the emotional impact and then let it go and move forward. Let the past be the past, it doesn't need to hang over your future.



#90

## **Live your values**

Use your values as guiding principles. It's all too easy to find yourself becoming someone you don't like.

#91

## Create a powerful follow up sequence

It's staggering how much business is lost simply because follow up processes are rubbish. What's the point in getting someone interested in what you are up to if you aren't able to follow up on that interest. People's attention moves on and as does their interest.

#92

## Aim to wow

Give people sooo much more than they were expecting. Aim to leave your customers wowed! Happy customers are so last year... what you want now are raving fans.





#93

## **Imperfect action is better than perfect inaction**

Get started and allow your creativity, customers and opportunities to guide you. You find your flow in taking action. Just one baby step at a time... that's it.



#94

## **Dare to be bolder than you are comfortable**

**STOP PLAYING SAFE!** Push yourself, stand for something go that little bit further than feels comfortable.

#95

## Review progress quarterly

Ever heard the saying “can’t see the wood for the trees”. It refers to that state we get to when we are so caught up in something we can no longer see the bigger picture. Take a step back quarterly to look at the bigger picture. Are you actually working on the best things for your business?

#96

## Create automated income streams

Time for money is an old paradigm. There are only so many hours and what if you want a holiday? What income streams can you create in your business which are automated with no need for human involvement. This doesn’t mean you stop exchanging time for money, it just stops being the only way you do business.





#97

## Share your successes

Stop skimming over your successes. Share them. Who doesn't like to hear that a friend of theirs is doing really well. There is nothing arrogant about it. I know when I'm excited about something I want to tell others.. so I do.



#98

## Celebrate your successes

Hey there... take a minute and take it in. You did good, I think this deserves some acknowledgement.



#99

## Repurpose content

This is one awesome form of leverage, it's a blog post, no it's a video, no it's a scope, no it's a... you get the point.

#100

## Be clear on what makes you different

How do you stand out? Why should I pick you? Hey there is only one you, sell it.





#101

## **Know your competition**

Take the time to research if anyone else is doing something similar to you. How do they do it? How successful are they? What is it that you do that makes you different?



#102

## **Have a mentor or coach**

Regularly inject fresh thinking into your business. Get a mentor or coach, they have experience of doing what you want to and they are impartial so can provide an objective perspective on things.

#103

## Sweat your assets

This is a term more widely used in manufacturing. It essentially refers to getting the most from the investments you make into your business. There is no point buying a new piece of software and only using 5% of it's functionality.

#104

## Never pay more than you should

Shop around, more expensive does not necessarily mean better. Spend intelligently on your business.





#105

## **Do the thing you are avoiding most first**

Procrastination gets us all, get the most important thing done that you are avoiding done first. We've all done it, put off something until the end of the day and then convinced ourselves that we now don't have the energy, so we'll do it tomorrow. Promise.



Did you find these useful?

I'd love to hear the list of actions you've got to implement, please ping your list over to me on [Lovelda@TheCollaborationClub.com](mailto:Lovelda@TheCollaborationClub.com). I love working with creative entrepreneurs to support you turning your idea into reality... trust me... it doesn't need to be as difficult as you think.

If you haven't already, join the mailing list to get video tips into your inbox twice a week.

I'm also sharing regularly on social media connect on twitter ([@TogetherGrowth](https://twitter.com/TogetherGrowth)), Facebook (search Collaboration Club) and YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/CollaborationClub>).

