



BUSINESSSENSE BY TIMKELLY

Don't be a rabbit in the headlights

With Covid restrictions having finally lifted some semblance of normality should return, but not everyone is experiencing the freedom-day joy.

I speak with repairers every day and lately, when I ask how business is going at the moment, there are two conflicting replies. It's either "We have more work than we have ever had" or "We haven't seen a car for months, the staff are still furloughed and were close to going bust."

Some, it would seem, have become paralysed by fear and indecision. But what to do? Well, claims volumes are slowly but steadily increasing and there is a future. The question is "What does that future look like?"

Covid has left a lot of bodyshops exposed and has showed where the weaknesses are in those businesses. What is also clear is that you cannot afford to do nothing, and yet I see many repairers reacting like a rabbit in the headlights.

Last year I wrote a series of articles on business – now available in the bodyshopmag.com archives – and one of the topics I covered was about proper planning. Whether you have a plan or not, now is a very good time to revisit it.

Look at what went wrong last year, what work did you miss, what work didn't you miss, what made the most profit? Can you replicate that work? The repairers who told me that they have work coming out of their ears are mostly doing restoration work. Not an insurer in sight and it's bringing in good profits.

Virtually every bodyshop I know target insurance work, yet it is the least profitable statistically unless you are doing huge volumes. I am not saying you cannot make a profit from it, I am saying you need to

research what types of work suit you best and provide the most profit.

I would also suggest thinking laterally. One repairer I know started painting house doors and window frames along with kitchen cupboards. What started off as a supplemental work stream has created a second business. This meant there was less drive to get insurance work in and they stick to more restoration work when working on vehicles with the other work being the main income stream.

This might not be for everyone, but the primary point of running a business is to make profit. If your business is not doing that, you have an expensive hobby.

Last year was my busiest ever, yet this year from January to June was extremely quiet. I was very much in the same boat as my repairer friends. I took a time-out for a breather, revisited my business plan and looked at what changes I need to implement. I also looked at what I did that was successful and what wasn't.

This might sound common sense, but often business owners feel too embarrassed to do it. I reached out to all of my contacts for whom I had worked the previous year and told them I had capacity to do more of their work. Some I got nothing from, but others didn't realise I could work ad hoc on projects or training because I never told them I could.

I learned a vital lesson. Do not be scared to market yourself in whatever form works for you, whether it is a full-page advert or a phone call and a chat. Develop relationships and keep them alive. Don't procrastinate and, most importantly, don't be the rabbit in the headlights.