

# Are You Staying in Touch with

“Optimization of both top and bottom line growth can be realized through the successful integration of creativity and structure.”

# YOUR BUSINESS?

By Larry Girouard

Do you have a way of staying in touch with your business so that you know what is working, and what is not? I recently wrote articles about the power of decluttering your business and addressing what the change process looks like. These are certainly foundational for creating a powerfully competitive business culture. That said, what are your business indicators that move you to act on something sooner rather than later to improve, or protect, your business?

I like using the car analogy because most of us drive 10,000-20,000 miles a year, or more. Our love for our automobiles starts when we were youths dreaming about our first jalopy. To this day I can remember mine...a 1954 Ford that, by any description, would be considered on its last days. It did not matter...it got me where I wanted to go without having to pedal. Free at last!

In the fifties dashboards were Spartan by today's standards, but they had the big three gauges...speed, oil level and engine temperature. While I might have tested the top end of the speedometer, perhaps all too often, when the oil or temperature gauges started to peg you were quickly moved to action at the risk that your freedom would be shortly curtailed. A terrifying thought!

Fast forward to the 21st century when I bought my first Garmin GPS system for my car back in 2002. It reminded me of the early James Bond movie, Goldfinger, where Bond was tracking a car using a screen on his dashboard that displayed a map and the location of the car he was tracking. For those old enough, you may recall that the car was eventually crushed in a car compacter with a body inside. Messy!

That said, the Garmin GPS system was terrific! The reliability and accuracy exceeded all expectations,

and it provided great advantages for the user...it saved a lot of time getting to a place you were not familiar with, and it created peace of mind driving anywhere. (As an aside Garmin was named after the company's two founders, Gary Burrell and Min Kao. The US Army was their first customer).

Today most cars have a built in GPS system that has become part of the overall dashboard instrumentation. Today's dashboards provide a wide range of real time performance metrics for the driver to easily monitor.

Think about the concept of a GPS system for your company that tells you where you are and, more importantly, where you are going. What stress relief this would present for a business owner and management team!

Optimization of both top and bottom line growth can be realized through the successful integration of creativity and structure. Most small companies are top heavy on the creativity side of the balance scale and painfully light on the structure/process side. This often results in a culture that is more reactive to their environment which results in a high stress level for all. Rarely can a company succeed over the long haul with a culture of reactivity. It is painfully exhausting and demoralizing.



## Don't Fear Becoming More Metric Driven

One reason most entrepreneurs, and for that matter most business owners, chose that career path is because they have complete control over their own destiny. They are their own boss and, in their minds, accountable to no one. Not true! They are always accountable to their customers who vote with their dollars.

If the customer experience is not up to snuff, customers will vote by sending their dollars to competition. Better said, you must have a set of company performance metrics to ensure you are delivering a quality value proposition. These metrics are the owner's boss. These metrics, or key performance indicators (KPIs), will either attract or drive away customers. Even if you do not measure your company's KPIs, your customer will.

As an owner, have the courage to make a list of all the KPIs you can think of, and then set an acceptable upper and lower limit for company performance on each one. Like the 54 Ford in the example above, if a KPI falls below the lower performance limit, this is the signal for immediate corrective action. As you improve the overall performance culture of the company, your KPI performances will begin to increase by default. The next step is to work with your employees to set higher KPI performance limits, and continue this upward trend by implementing continuous improvement methodologies with management and the employees working together.

Successful metric driven companies include all employees driving these metrics, not just management. Employees add all the value and, for the most part, impact overall corporate efficiency the most.

Like the instruments on your car's dashboard, metrics are your friend. They keep your company from straying off course with real time feedback when there is an issue that demands corrective action. Through this type of data mining, which is simple with today's technology, you can stay in touch with all aspects of your business your business from your office, or from a remote location.

Have the courage to let the power of technology help you stay in touch with the performance of your business by making your KPIs visual. It will help your team become more proactive in response to customer needs and pave the way for market penetration in a world of me-too services and look-like products.

Larry Girouard

President, The Business Avionix Company  
A Business Consulting Firm