

BY JAMES MOHR



BOOK REVIEWS

So, You Want to Start a Business?

Current economic problems and a trend toward sending IT work offshore have brought many Linux professionals to the ranks of the self-employed. The Linux community supports a variety of consulting roles, including admins, developers, system architects, tech writers, and sales agents, and every one is a small business owner. Because running a business requires some special skills, knowing the ins and outs of starting a business are recommended for anyone who wants to get in the game.

So, You Want to Start a Business examines some reasons why businesses succeed or fail and shows you how to stay on the right side of the balance sheet. As this book describes, many companies fail despite having good products or services. The reasons for failure are always quite clear in hindsight, but many new business owners aren't watching for them up front. The book begins with topics related to launching a successful business, and it provides additional information on managing the growth of a business, finding and managing the right employees, and running the business itself.

One important observation that hit me personally is that a good idea does not necessarily translate into a good business opportunity. Recently, I had an idea for a new web service, and



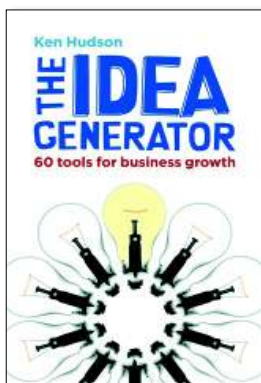
I asked several business owners if they wanted to help. They all thought it was a great idea, but none was really interested in taking part. Because no one was really ready to back this idea, it did not have much business potential. If I hadn't read this book, I probably would not have even considered this problem.

The book is designed as a reference. In each chapter, the basic principles are discussed, and the authors lay down a number of business rules, which are also presented at the end of the book, along with a per-chapter list of

“lessons learned.” Reading the rules and lessons learned gets you thinking in the right direction. Each chapter provides additional information on why a given rule or lesson is important.

Although you are not going to get detailed information on bookkeeping, human resources, sales, or advertising, you will get the building blocks of good business practices.

Edward D. Hess & Charles F. Goetz
224 Pages
FT Press, 2008
ISBN-13: 978-0137126675
UK£ 7.91, US\$ 12.91, EUR 16.99



The Idea Generator: Tools for Business Growth

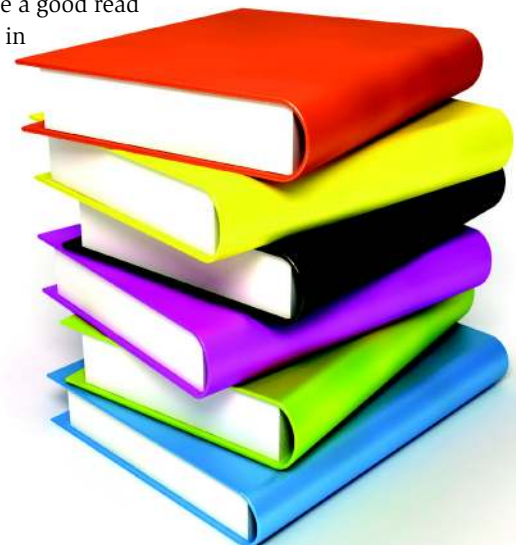
The Idea Generator is broken into six sections – each titled “Ten Tools” to do something like “immediately improve your performance” and “help you sell with more impact.” Each tool is presented on two facing pages. The first page describes the tool (e.g., “expand your usage occasions”), and the facing page explains how to use the tool. For example, at our company, we expanded the use of our monitoring tool by making it available not just

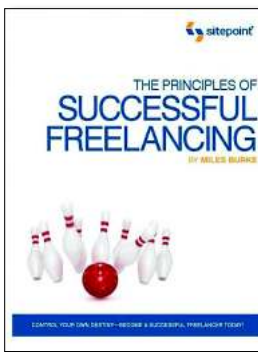
to the data center, but also to company management so they could immediately see the state of various systems. This step increased the “usage occasions” of the software, as described by one of the tools in this book, and it increased the visibility and value of our team.

Ken Hudson
160 Pages
Atlantic Books, 2008
ISBN-13: 978-1843547624
UK£ 5.99, US\$ 11.00, EUR 10.99

Discussions are under two pages for each tool, leaving little room for detail. Although a few were a bit too superficial, they did not detract much from the overall value of the book.

Designed to be a reference, the book's short discussions allow you to become familiar with each tool in a couple of minutes. This book would be a good read during TV commercials, in a doctor's waiting room, or anywhere you have a few minutes to spare.





The Principles of Successful Freelancing

One of the key differences between freelancing and other forms of business is that freelancing is the business of *you*. For the most part, you are selling a piece of yourself – be it your time, your knowledge, or a combination of both. If you’re planning on becoming a freelancer, this book provides a wonderful supplement to *So, You Want to Start a Business?* Depending on

where you live and what kind of freelance work you do, your business might be much closer to the freelance business described in this book than to the hypothetical ventures described in many of the other “start a business” guides.

The book begins with an overview of what freelancing is, discussing the advantages and disadvantages, and offers an assessment of whether you are cut out to be a freelancer. The author discusses the personality traits necessary for a successful freelancer. Following this is a chapter titled “Prepare for the Transition,” which discusses the key points of moving from a steady income to the less certain freelance world.

Many of the topics apply to any kind of business, but the book presents them in the context of the freelance experience. For example, if you are a freelance web designer, you have far

fewer ongoing wholesale costs than someone who might be selling sandwiches. On the other hand, how much you charge for your work is a much more complicated question. When you are selling sandwiches, the scope of the work is pretty easy to define (whatever appears on your menu), but when you are freelancing, you typically have to spell out the scope of the service in a formal written agreement.

The sales process for a freelancer is also much different from the process that someone who makes sandwiches goes through. This book provides an entire chapter titled “Win the Work,” which combines the basics of selling in general with tips for selling *you* as a freelancer specifically.

This book also does not go into a great deal of depth; however, it is definitely an easy read. The author addresses topics such as customer relationship management and advertising. The case study examples at the end of each chapter add a practical level to the material, driving home the most important points.

If you are thinking about starting your own freelance business, this book definitely deserves a place on your bookshelf.

Miles Burke

200 Pages

Sitepoint, 2008

ISBN-13: 978-0980455243

UK£ 24.99, US\$ 23.07, EUR 27.95

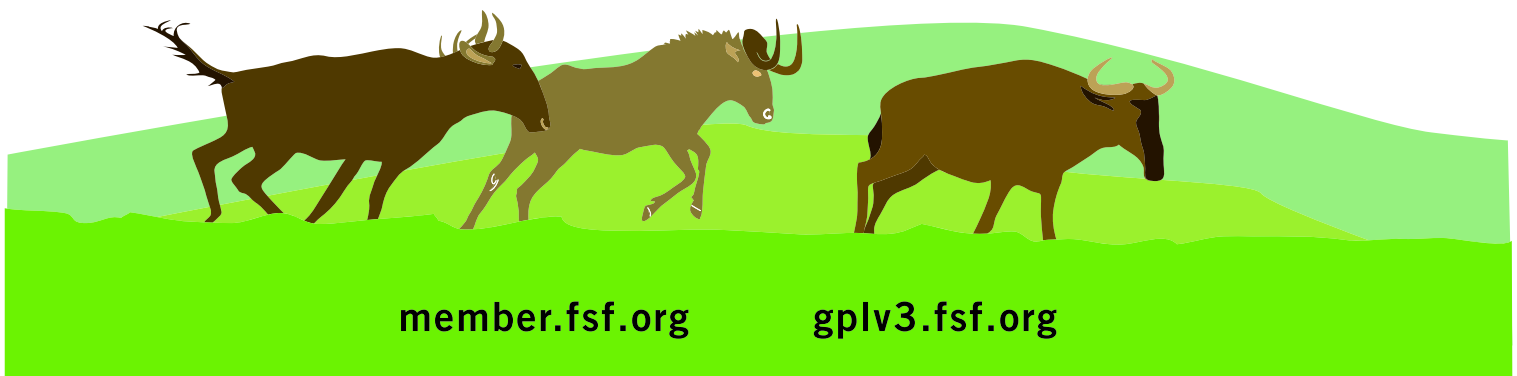
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