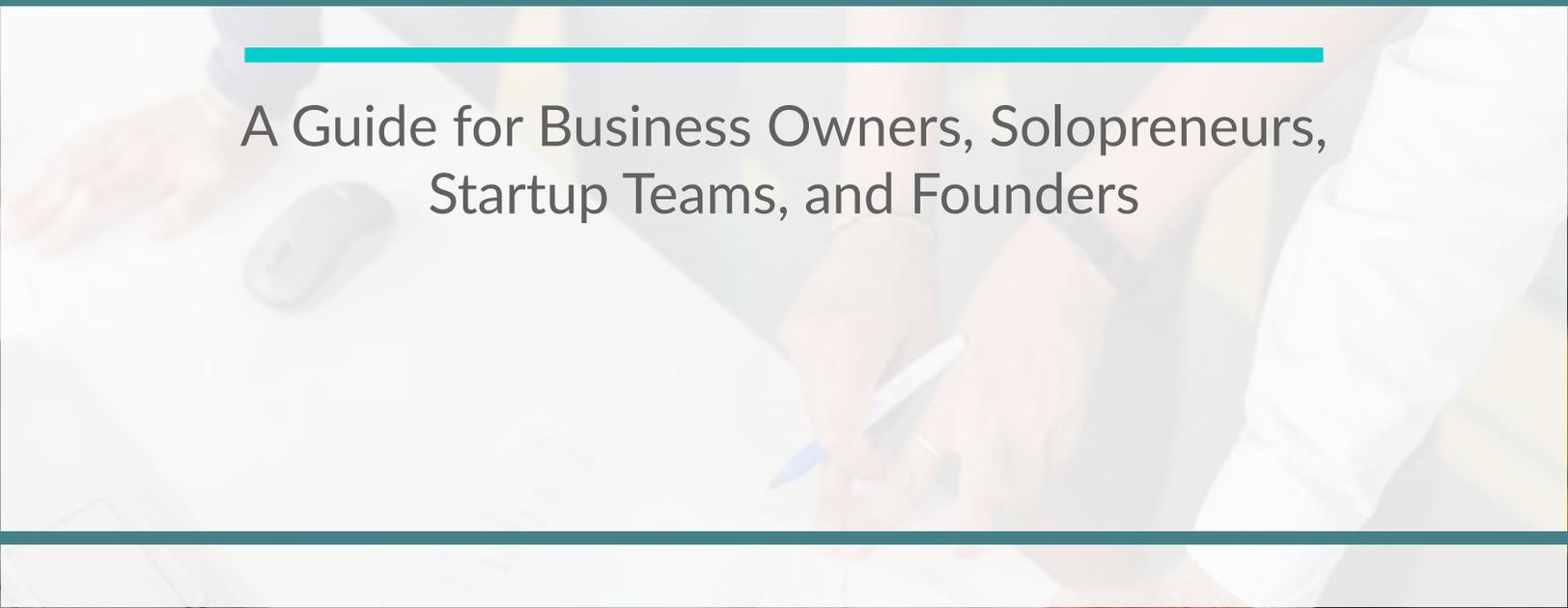


A photograph of two women looking down at a laptop screen. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a black and white striped shirt. The woman on the right has dark hair pulled back, wears glasses, and a black top. The image is faded and serves as a background for the top half of the page.

OWN YOUR MARKETING

A Guide for Business Owners, Solopreneurs,
Startup Teams, and Founders

A photograph showing hands writing on a document. One hand is holding a blue pen and writing on a white sheet of paper. Another hand is visible near a computer mouse. The image is faded and serves as a background for the bottom half of the page.

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WHAT IT MEANS TO OWN YOUR MARKETING

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OWN YOUR MARKETING?

Over the last decade and a half, I've worked with and for businesses of all sizes and structures, across industries, in business-to-consumer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) markets.

The most common issue? **Businesses do not own their marketing programs.**

It may sound counterintuitive, but you can own your marketing and still use outside contractors, agencies, and freelancers. Ownership does not mean you do all marketing-related activities yourself (if you're a solopreneur) or even in-house (if you're a growing business). In fact, ownership is less about who is doing the day-to-day marketing tasks and more to about who contributes to the development of the big picture.

The Bakery Owner

Think of it this way: the owner of a bakery doesn't need to know how to grow, harvest, and prepare grains into flour. But a successful bakery owner knows which recipes and ingredients will provide consistent, quality products. They also know which products their customers like best—and therefore purchase.

You, the business owner, are the bakery owner in this analogy. You don't need to know how to game the Instagram algorithm, which hashtags are trending on Twitter, or which TikTok sound is viral today. What you *do* need to know are your products/services and what your customers want.

To that end, Owning your marketing requires two parts:

1. **Conceptual Ownership:** You understand and actively engage with how your marketing plan, strategy, and on-going efforts tie into your business and goals; and
2. **Practical Ownership:** You have access to and administrative (or account owner) control over all your marketing assets, tools, apps, and outlets.

We'll start with what Conceptual and Practical Ownership mean.



The image features a light gray background with several white chalk-drawn lightbulbs. The largest lightbulb is in the upper center, with several short, radiating lines above it. To its right is a smaller lightbulb, and to its left is another one. At the bottom, a hand is shown holding a bundle of white lines that loop and swirl across the lower half of the image. A dark teal horizontal bar is positioned across the middle, containing the text 'CONCEPTUAL OWNERSHIP' in white, bold, uppercase letters.

CONCEPTUAL OWNERSHIP

Conceptual Ownership



As the owner or founder of your business, you are the default Subject Matter Expert (SME) on your business. (Remember the bakery analogy).

Your marketing team, on the other hand, is the expert on marketing.

Regardless of whether you have an entire Marketing Department full of specialists and generalists *or* have contractors managing your marketing, they need input from the business SME. They need *you*.

You know your products and services, as well as your clientele and target market (the people who need and want your products) better than anyone else.

Conceptual Ownership of your marketing means you actively engage with and inform your business' marketing plan, strategy, and activities.

Why? Because *you* are the expert on *your* business.

Conceptual Ownership of your marketing looks like:

- Matching your marketing activities to your target market and products/services
- Making adjustments to your marketing activities based on data
- Establishing and reviewing performance metrics and analytics
- Not using a one-size-fits-all marketing plan and strategy

You should be able to trust your team to be the SMEs of their areas of specialization, like strategy, social media, content, SEO, events, or website design. They're specialists because they spend *lots* of time thinking about their area, keeping up with trends, learning new tricks and tools, and changing how they work to fit with industry standards and best practices.

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT

(commonly referred to as an SME). An SME is someone who is the expert on a particular subject or area. For example, a social media consultant is an SME on social media marketing generally, or may be a specialist SME on a particular platform, such as TikTok or YouTube.

You trust your SEO (Search Engine Optimization) manager to use the right tools, tactics, and knowledge to give your business an edge over competitors. Obviously, right? They spend all day using nifty tools to do keyword research, analyzing the latest reports on whether Google prefers videos or blogs this week, and reading whether anyone still uses Bing anymore.

But, how does the SEO manager know what your prospects are searching for and how to relate those searches to your products and services?

CONCEPTUAL OWNERSHIP

means actively engaging with and informing your marketing plan, strategy, and activities.

Hint: Who spends the most time thinking about your business?

Answer: YOU, the business owner.

You are the SME on your business, on your customers, and on your products. You know both why you started your company (or bought it) and how it best serves its target market.

Without your input, your marketing team is working at 75%¹ effectiveness *at best*.



Again: it doesn't matter if you have full-time employees or you're hiring out to an agency. Unless you, the Expert on your business, actively contribute to and engage with your company's marketing plan and strategy, your marketing simply won't be as effective as it could be.

The Personal Trainer Analogy

Think of it this way: you want to improve your fitness. You could follow a pre-made workout routine, maybe even one that includes its own eating plan. Or, you could hire a personal trainer.

The ready-made program doesn't know you have an old sports injury, so you don't have full range of motion with your right shoulder. It doesn't know you're allergic to eggs and lactose-intolerant. It doesn't know your goal is simply to be able to lift

¹ This is a completely guesstimated statistic. The point is: without input from the expert on the business (that's you!), your marketing team is making best guesses and using generic methods, which means they won't be as effective as they could be.

a bag of soil for your vegetable garden without wincing, not to be able to pull a pick-up truck.

The personal trainer, on the other hand, builds a customized workout to fit your ability, tastes, goals, and lifestyle. They'll take into account your food allergies and preferences to design an eating plan that you'll follow because it makes you feel better *and* doesn't require six hours of prep work every week.

You are the personal trainer and your business is the client. Just like a fitness program, your marketing program needs your input to optimize its effectiveness and match it to your business' needs and goals.

Conceptual Ownership in Practice and Reality

The most important component of Conceptual Ownership is communication and transparency between you (the business owner or decision maker) and the people running your marketing.

While you don't need to understand or even know the granular details of how your social media (SM) manager developed the audience and targeting for an ad, you should at least know their justification for running paid ads on particular social media platforms.

For example, if your target audience is new parents, your SM manager might suggest paid

Unless **you**, as the Expert on your business, actively contribute to and engage with your marketing plan and strategy, your marketing simply won't be as effective as it could be.



Pinterest ads. They might explain that Pinterest users skew female, and the content on the platform commonly centers on family and home, so it's a logical platform for your brand.

Your SM manager should also communicate with you on budget and creative content. You don't need to go eight rounds with them on creative ad copy, but you should know how much the ads will cost to run and what

the results are during and after the ad campaign. After all, ownership is *not* micromanaging.

Business owners who don't use social media often find social media marketing the most difficult to wrap their heads around and, in turn, to own. Even if you don't like to use social media for your personal life, make it a point to check your company's social media content before meeting with your SM manager.

A common challenge for many business owners is communicating their knowledge to their team. It's really an inverse problem of Conceptual Ownership: information lives only in the business owner's head.

The opposite side of this problem is when a team member or contractor is the *only* person who knows how to access, manage, or do something.

The solution is the same: Document knowledge.

Think of it this way: if you disappeared tomorrow, would your business be able to continue without you? Would your team know what to do and how to do it?

The same question goes for your marketing team: if one of your team members disappeared, would you or another team member be able to fill the gap?

Obviously there is some cross-over between Conceptual and Practical Ownership here, but the point remains. Many business owners simply haven't made the time to document what they know, what they're planning, or how they work.

The more you communicate with your team, the better equipped they are to develop effective marketing strategies for your brand. The more you understand about what the marketing team does, the more you can tailor your feedback and input so everyone is as effective and efficient as possible.

Conceptual Ownership doesn't mean micromanaging, but it does require consistent, clear communication between key people. In larger organizations, this means intradepartment communication between Sales, Marketing, and Product, but the same holds true for small and solo businesses.



Conceptual Ownership Checkpoint

- I have reviewed my Marketing Plan in the last 12 months
- I know my business' Marketing Goals and Objectives
- I understand why my business is on which social media platforms
- I know my brand's marketing ties into overall growth and sales goals
- I know my team/staff use on-brand language when interacting with clients
- I know where my brand runs paid ads (and why)
- I know my brand's clearly defined Target Market
- My marketing team knows my brand's Target Market

I know where to find my business'/brand's:

- Marketing Plan and Strategy
- Social Media Strategy
- Social Media Profiles, Pages, and Accounts
- Paid Advertising Plan
- Communications/PR Plan





PRACTICAL OWNERSHIP

PRACTICAL OWNERSHIP



Marketing is such a diverse and complicated endeavor now, it's rare for a business not to outsource at least one aspect of their marketing. It may sound counterintuitive, but your business could outsource 100% of its marketing efforts and still maintain practical ownership.

Practical ownership simply means your company has access to and control over the many facets of your marketing program, from your website to your analytics.

Practical Ownership of your marketing looks like:

- Control over and access to your website
- Control over and access to your social media accounts
- Control over and access to your blog
- Access to design files
- Access to Google accounts (e.g. Analytics)
- Reporting or transparency from contractors

Hands down, the most common practical ownership failure I see is with companies' websites. Every business has a website (and if your business doesn't...it *really, really* should), so it's an easy way to examine practical ownership.

I wish I could tell you not owning your website is an issue limited to entrepreneurs or small businesses who don't have the in-house capability to design, develop, and maintain their website. Really. I wish I could. The truth is, I've seen companies with an in-house web developer held hostage by that same developer—just as I've seen businesses with beautiful agency-built websites stuck with no way to access or log-in to their sites.

PRACTICAL OWNERSHIP

means having access to and control over the elements of your company's marketing program, plan, and strategy.

A Tale of Two Websites

Let's look at two examples of businesses who didn't have practical ownership of their websites.

We'll call the first Tech Corp.

Tech Corp.'s \$100,000 Website

Tech Corp. had a website, but it was outdated, slow, and built using custom code. In all likelihood, the site was great when it was new, but technology changes quickly and their site hadn't been updated.

Although Tech Corp. had a multi-person marketing department and a substantial team of software engineers, they did not build their new website in-house. One of the C-level executives hired a website design firm owned by his friend's son. (See where this is going?)

The marketing team was not involved in the selection of the firm, which was the first sign of trouble. The website development agency almost immediately fell behind its deliverables and timeline.

Months after the final site was supposed to have been delivered, Tech Corp. finally got the new site—only to discover it was largely custom coded (despite being a Wordpress site), it was missing important pages, and it was nowhere near ready to go live. The death knell came when the in-house engineering team got a hold of the site: even with "fixes," it would never be capable of housing the customer dashboards it was supposed to host.

Business decisions should never be made in a vacuum. Make sure the right SMEs are in the room from the beginning.



This story does not exactly have a happy ending.

After the failed initial site delivery, Tech Corp. required one of the web development team to work on-site in the hope that it would facilitate better communication and timeliness. (Spoiler: it did not).

Over \$100,000 later, Tech Corp. finally received a website the marketing team could at least edit. Once the marketing department had access to the site, they immediately went to work rewriting every single word of content and building new pages to replace those built by the contractor.

The moral of the Tech Corp. story is this: Business decisions must be informed by the appropriate SME. In this case, the SMEs left out of the purchasing conversation were the entire marketing department *and* the engineers responsible for the customer dashboard.

And if it needs to be said, do *not* hire your golf buddy's kid to build a website for your \$300M company without at least getting quotes from other agencies and talking to his references.

This next story has a much happier ending. We'll call this next company Local Boutique.

Local Boutique's Agency Pains

Local Boutique also had an outdated website, so they hired a creative agency to design, build, and maintain a new Wordpress site. To make a painful story short, the website was so poorly built, it essentially never worked. Frustrated and out several thousand dollars, the owner found another agency to build a brand new site all over again.

Local Boutique was luckier the second time around: The *new-new* website looked nice *and* did all the basic things a website is supposed to do. In fact, all seemed well for a while!

The problems started when the website needed support and new content.



Suddenly, the developer who was supposed to be managing the site was more difficult to reach. Local Boutique's owner was forced to call the agency owner every time a change was needed. The agency owner would then pass on the request to the developer. Not only was this frustrating and time-consuming for the owner of Local Boutique, but the agency owner must also have been annoyed.

As the site aged, the situation only worsened. When the owner of Local Boutique hired a social media consultant and a marketing strategy consultant, the website was the first concern she raised with them. The owner was *delighted* at the prospect of getting rid of the grumpy developer and lukewarm agency.

The first time the marketing consultant spoke to the old developer, the developer went on a long rant bad-mouthing the client. It should go without saying, but it was beyond unprofessional.

That would have been bad enough, but even after the marketing consultant spoke to the developer and requested the hand-off, he dragged his feet. Keep in mind: it's fairly easy to hand off a website to a new developer or even back to the client.

In order to get the information, the agency owner had to get involved *to tell the developer to hand over the information*. At this point, it became clear the developer was merely a contractor for the agency, so even the agency owner had minimal control over him.

Eventually, the new web agency was on-boarded, the Wordpress administrative email changed to a Local Boutique email address, and Local Boutique owned their site again.



The new agency sends monthly care reports on the website, responds to support and change requests in a timely manner, and even moved the entire site onto a new theme because the existing framework was due to be deprecated (meaning Wordpress would no longer support it).

Between the marketing consultant and the website agency, Local Boutique now knows exactly how to access their website, how their site is performing, and how to make changes and additions to the site. They also meet regularly to plan for changes and new content to fit their marketing plan.

Ownership, achieved!



Practical Ownership Checkpoint

- I know who manages my business' website
- I know who to contact about a technical problem with email or the website, etc.
- I know who manages my business' social media
- I know who has access to our social media
- I have visited my brand's social media profiles in the last month *and*
- I know my business' social media content is on-brand
- I know who is responsible for responding to online reviews
- I know who receives responses to forms/sign-ups on my website

I get reports (or know where to find them) on:

- Website Performance
- Social Media Performance
- Paid Ad Performance
- Ad Budget
- Overall Marketing Budget

A group of people are gathered around a wooden table in a meeting. One person's hand is pointing at a document. A laptop is open on the table, and another person's hand is near it. In the foreground, there are several documents with charts and graphs, including a pie chart and a bar chart. The background is bright and out of focus, suggesting a window or a bright room.

COMMON PITFALLS & HOW TO AVOID THEM

How to Avoid Common Pitfalls

Fundamentals of Owning Your Marketing

While all marketing programs are different, these are some basics and standards to track from a Practical Ownership standpoint.

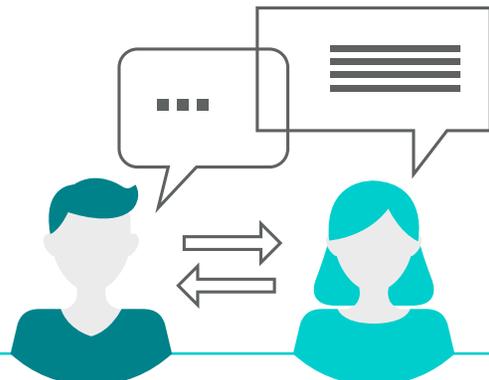
You *should* have:

- ✓ Access to your website (Admin)
- ✓ Access to your Hosting and Domain accounts
- ✓ Login credentials for all company social media accounts (Admin/Owner level)
- ✓ Administrative control of Google Analytics and Search Console
- ✓ Design files for logos and brand graphics (.ai, .psd, .eps files)
- ✓ Login credentials for all MarTech apps and platforms (ex: Email marketing)
- ✓ License keys for all software, apps, plugins (on your website), etc.
- ✓ List of users and owners of accounts you need to access
- ✓ Ownership of all advertising accounts (Google Ads, social media, etc.)

Not Sure Where to Start?

1. Ask any staff or contractors you currently work with about what they're doing for you and the tools they use. If you don't have anyone else working on your marketing, you can also confer with a marketing consultant.

2. Conduct a Marketing Audit to learn exactly what all your marketing pieces are, where they are, and everything else you need to know to ensure Practical and Conceptual Ownership of your Marketing.



Avoid These Common Pitfalls

This is far from an exhaustive list, but this is a good starting point to ensure you're on track to gain and maintain both Practical and Conceptual Ownership of your marketing.

- ✓ Create and use a standard catch-all email address (or alias) for account ownership (e.g. social@yourdomain.com)
- ✓ Use platform tools to delegate access or add users instead of sharing passwords
- ✓ Use an encrypted password manager to store (and generate) passwords securely
- ✓ Maintain a living document (ie: frequently updated) or Wiki listing the apps and platforms you use, for what, how to access them, and who has access--including contractors
- ✓ Ensure the administrative email for your website is an email address your business owns (@yourdomain.com)
- ✓ Use a social media scheduling tool to avoid sharing passwords to single-user accounts (e.g. Instagram)
- ✓ Ensure more than one person has access to accounts
- ✓ Require contractors to use an email at your domain to create or manage any accounts on your behalf (e.g. social@yourdomain.com)
- ✓ Request regular reporting from your team/contractors on key metrics and analytics (website traffic, social media, ad budget, etc.)
- ✓ Schedule consistent meetings with your marketing team to review and adjust tactics
- ✓ Ensure contractors/agencies include an off-boarding meeting to pass off all files, accounts, login credentials, etc.
- ✓ Review and update your Marketing Plan and Strategy *annually*
- ✓ Require graphic designers to save/share design files separately from final art
- ✓ Utilize cloud and shared storage whenever possible (instead of individual hard drives and computers)

Document, Document, Document!

Perhaps the single most important piece of advice you need for gaining and maintaining

ownership of your marketing is to *write down what you know*.

Get in the habit of keeping records of marketing meetings, marketing platforms you use, account usernames and passwords (in an encrypted password manager, please!), and anything else related to your marketing and business. One of the biggest pitfalls of being the founder or owner of your company is the sheer volume of information that exists in your head—and nowhere else.

Train your employees, contractors, and freelancers to do the same: document what they do, how to access accounts, who has access, etc.

If you make documentation an ongoing effort, you are less likely to run into a major issue down the road because you can't access an account or no one knows which email address was used to create your Google Business account.

Additional Resources

- [Checklist: Do You Own Your Marketing?](#)
- [My Marketing University™](#): Guides, Templates, Toolkits, Courses, and More
- [Marketing Terms Glossary](#): Free glossary of common marketing jargon and terms
- [My Marketing Coaching](#): 12-month, hands-on learning, community, tools, and more
- [MarTech Security & Access](#): Free and paid apps and platforms we like
- [BitWarden Blog](#): Resources and articles on securing your accounts and passwords

My Marketing University

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