

Dear Client,

Welcome to our monthly newswire. We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter and find it useful.

Best wishes

John Harrison

SAMSUNG SMART WATCH

Samsung's Galaxy Gear is among the first smart watches to be released by a major mobile phone manufacturer and is intended to lead the way in the emerging field of wearable, connected technology. The new Samsung Galaxy Gear Smart watch lets you take calls, send texts, and perform various other tasks from your wrist without touching your phone.

The Gear has no SIM card or data connection of its own. Instead, it links to your phone over Bluetooth, acting more as an external display so you don't have to fish your phone out every time it rings.

The smart watch works with a range of Samsung devices such as the Galaxy S4, S3, Note 2 and Note 3, that's few compatible devices. Those of you who have splashed out on a HTC One, Apple iPhone 5S or Sony Xperia Z1 will be out of luck.

There's only a single button on the watch itself, which acts to power up the display, or fires up Samsung's S Voice software with a double click. Navigating around the watch is done using the touch-enabled display. The 1.6-inch display might be miniature, but its 320x320-pixel resolution is sharp enough to make small text easily readable. It's also vivid enough to let you enjoy the photos you've snapped with the camera in the strap.

The Samsung Galaxy Gear smartwatch is attractive, comfortable, and makes it easy to see incoming calls. However, a lack of e-mail and social network support, limited compatibility with other devices, the external charging case, and hit-and-miss voice control seriously limit its usefulness.

So, Samsung's take on the smartwatch has potential, and it does get some things right, but its inability to perform truly "smart" functions means it falls short of expectations. With online prices ranging from £200 - £250 it's an expensive mobile phone accessory and is probably more attractive to gadget fans than corporate users looking for genuinely useful technology.

WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMMES

Workplace wellness programmes are pretty common in large businesses. However, such initiatives have largely been ignored by small and medium sized firms. The following are some tips for smaller businesses who want to implement a workplace wellness programme.

Solicit Employee Input

Periodically ask employees for their input and ideas regarding the work environment, work processes and their needs and interests. Host focus groups and ask individual employees for their input. Employees can also contribute to safety surveys, cultural surveys, etc. Asking your employees for feedback will allow you to create a programme that appeals to your people and focuses on their needs.

Provide Educational Opportunities and Materials

In order to make your business a "great place to work in", you will need to provide information to your staff and also provide educational opportunities. This does not have to be particularly expensive - local community agencies such as chambers of commerce, etc can provide educational opportunities for your employees. You can also provide regular monthly or quarterly internal newsletters for your staff.

Make your workplace better

Small businesses can invest in making their premises a better place to work for their staff. Simple things like creating an employee break-out room with a sink, tea and coffee facilities and comfortable seating can create an environment in which your employees can de-stress during their breaks. Business owners and managers can also create opportunities for staff recognition and reward through bonus schemes, employee of the month schemes, etc. You could also organise talks for your team from local experts in areas such as nutrition, general health and wellbeing, stress management, etc.

Promote Community Engagement

Many businesses promote community engagement as part of their CSR programmes. A workplace wellness programme can further promote community engagement by giving staff the opportunity to get involved in anything from local committees such as the chamber of commerce, local council business groups, etc. If your staff are particularly sporty, you could enter a company team into a local 5k or 10k run in order to encourage team building, health and wellbeing among your people. Some small and medium sized businesses also encourage general health and wellbeing by supporting staff with quitting smoking and fundraising for charitable organisations.

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS IN 2014

As we move into 2014, many businesses and their management teams are taking a step back, looking at the business, considering how the market will develop over the next 12 months and creating plans to grow the firm and take advantage of changes in the business environment.

A typical approach to planning suggests multiplying last year's financial results by an acceptable growth factor. Industry standards vary, often from 5% to 25%. Add to that number any enhancements to your product or service lines plus solutions to key problems you've been meaning to address, and that will essentially give you an outline of a business plan.

What can you learn from last year's performance

What did you do right - what worked - what should you do more of? What did you do wrong - what didn't work - what should be stopped immediately? Business owners and managers should also ask themselves what is missing from the business. What could be added which will make a big difference in the overall business. For example, does the firm need to review pricing, do some market research or develop a new training plan for staff.

Focus on objectives and set targets

Targets for sales, financials, etc should be aspirational and dynamic. They should inspire everyone responsible for making them happen to do whatever it takes to get the job done. The objectives should be SMART - specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. E.g. a true objective is not simply "increase sales". Instead it would be "increase sales by winning 3 new contracts in the banking sector by August 2014 by leveraging our existing contacts at Bank AB and Accounting Firm CD".

Map out your plan for achieving these goals

Your implementation plan should consider who is responsible for what. You should map out specific milestones and assign a manager or accountable person to each. They should then be fully briefed and it should be made clear that they are expected to deliver their specific part of the overall plan. These key people can now work with the management team to develop the strategies necessary to deliver the objectives. They can estimate costs too so that finance can assign a relevant budget.

Make an effort to improve a few things to achieve steady growth. You are trying to build a sustainable business model, not something that grows too quickly and falls over in 18 months time.

DEFINING YOUR BRAND

Branding is much more than a logo. Whether you sell products or services, your brand is as much about a customer experience as it is about corporate colours.

So, now that we are entering 2014, why not take a look at your brand. Can you write down, in a few lines, what your brand is and what it represents? If not then it is time to look at building a brand for your business.

If you run a business you probably spent a huge amount of time thinking about your brand when you started out. That would have equated to spending hours with a graphic designer to come up with a cool-looking logo. Once that was done, your next job was to find a web designer and begin work to create a nice website that had all the latest functionality. Your logo was inserted into the header and there you go, your business was launched.

So you have a logo and website but you do not have a brand. You must now focus on the attributes that you wish to attach to your brand. Regardless of the industry you operate in, your brand should focus on differentiating your business from the competition. You cannot afford to be the same as everyone else - otherwise why would any customer choose to do business with you instead of a competitor?

Think about your unique selling point (USP). For example, your business can be the fastest, the cheapest, the best, the highest quality, the most prestigious, etc. It cannot be all of these but it can be one or two - for example, high quality, low price or high price and best customer service.

Once you realise the complexity of your brand you can start to work on your image and that of your business to project a uniform message. This can then be reflected in your pitches, your marketing, your brochures and the ethos of your staff. Your brand is ultimately what your customers say about your business when somebody asks them to describe your firm. If you want to be the "fastest", "the cheapest" or "the best service ever" then you better start delivering these values to your customers and have your team start to live your brand.

Please contact a member of our team if you would like to discuss any of the issues raised.