

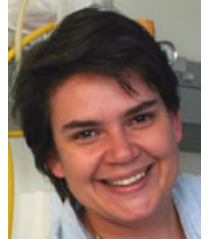
10 startup tips for success in media, marketing

 By [Tara Turkington](#)

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South Africa must be one of the few places in the world where you can start a company with zero capital and turn it into a success. But it's going to take loads of hard work, a great sense of humour, and plenty of glasses half-filled with optimism.

I started Flow Communications in a small spare bedroom in my house five years ago and have learnt plenty along the way. Here are 10 tips from my experience.



1. Do the best job you can. Always.

Do the best quality work possible, no matter what. There is *always* a niche for high standards. But doing great work can be hard. Clients can be difficult. Murphy can intervene. Budgets may be low. Which brings me to...

2. Don't worry about the money

When you're starting out, you need to establish a track record so that you can sell yourself and your company with conviction. In the beginning, it will be harder for people to trust you. Do work for free to win clients if you have to, but make sure that you use *pro bono* opportunities to build relationships that will last a long time - even when you're much larger and charging much more.

3. Lead from the front

You've heard it before - starting a new business takes time, effort and passion. Success doesn't come easy. Be resilient. Put in long hours. Don't give up, no matter what. Don't leave the important things to others. Be committed and work, work, work! Take things personally enough to care, but not so personally you become debilitated.

4. Build a great team around you

Find people who are cleverer than you are, but who have a similar value system, and persuade them to join you. You are going to spend a lot of time together, so make sure you like and respect the people you work with.

Try to find people who have skills that are complementary to yours. If you're not good at numbers, for example, get a maths whiz on your side.

Realise that you can't do it all on your own. Make sure your team is motivated, and that you are all working towards the same goals. Winning teams train hard and practise a lot together.

5. Stick to your knitting

It's ok to take a while to figure out your business proposition, but once you do, focus on delivering this well. Don't be tempted to cast off in too many different directions, or you may end up spreading yourself too thin. Decide exactly what it is you're going to do, focus on it and become expert at it. Your business will forever be evolving, but get the basics right.

6. Laugh

A business without laughter is a very sad place. Laugh at yourself, and with (but not at) others. Sometimes tequila on a Friday morning just for fun is ok. A game of foosball can help you focus. Make your workplace a fun place to be and your team will be more motivated and more productive.

7. Be honest and fair

Be honest with yourself and others. Admit mistakes quickly, and be quick to fix them. It's often what you do after making a mistake that's more important than the actual mistake itself.

There may be times you are tempted to make a fast buck at someone else's expense. Don't. You have to sleep easy at night, so don't do anything that will make you lie awake.

There will be ethical dilemmas that will come at you out of the blue at 4pm on a Wednesday afternoon. Stall for some time if you can on the tricky decisions, but if you have to make choice involving ethics quickly, trust your heart over your head.

When making tough calls, think to yourself, if your actions were led as evidence in a court of law, would you be comfortable hearing the testimony?

8. Read, read, read

There will be lots you don't know. The more you read, the more you'll realise how much you don't know, which can be a good thing. Read books, read blogs, follow relevant links from Twitter, Google like crazy to find out more about the stuff you know you need to know.

9. Value diversity

As you build your team, think about race, gender and age, though never hire just for these reasons. Diversity, if harnessed correctly, brings energy, depth, balance and stability.

Cultivate diversity in your client base, too. Small clients might give you insights into work for big clients and vice versa. A client in the tourism sector might give you an idea for a client in banking. That said, try to find things you and your team are interested in and good at, and specialise in a few areas.

Use this as a base from which to expand. Don't put your eggs in one basket - make sure you build a diversified client base so you don't rely too much on any one or two clients. Similarly, make sure you build a varied skills base amongst your team, so you don't rely too much on one or two individuals and risk losing too much if they decide to leave.

10. Be positive

As a leader, always try to see the glass half full. There will be days when you want to throw it all in the air; there will be times when you want to crawl in a hole in the ground and never come out. But you need to remain upbeat for your team to perform at their best.

Positive energy is infectious, but negativity even more so. Positive energy is constructive, negativity is destructive. Be passionate and positive about what you do, and the chances are high your business will flourish!

Tara Turkington is the CEO of Flow Communications (www.flow.sa.com), which specialises in web development, e-marketing, journalism, design and media training; has over 80 clients; and employs about 30 staff in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. With a background in journalism, she's worked for a variety of newspapers and magazines and as a journalist, teacher and heritage manager. Follow her on Twitter at [@taraturk1](https://twitter.com/taraturk1).

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