

## **Ask SCORE**

*I own a downtown restaurant. When we opened six years ago, we were quite successful, but over the last year or two our momentum seems to have stalled. We're still profitable, but barely. What can we do to resuscitate the business?*

Are your competitors getting ahead? Do your employees appear to be doing little more than going through the motions? Have those bright ideas stopping coming?

If so, a makeover could be just the thing to re-energize your business. It need not be a major overhaul; some minor tweaks may be enough. What's important is that you recognize the need for action, and learn all you can to make informed decisions.

In order to identify where changes are most needed, you'll have to dig for details about various aspects of your business. Remember to focus not just on the individual elements, but also how they all fit together.

For example, has your customer base changed since you first started? Is it broader or narrower? Older or younger? More upscale or less? You may need a new image, revved-up branding or perhaps just a rewrite of your marketing materials to address the needs of this changing customer base.

Take a hard look at whether your products or services are performing to customer expectations. Remember that your goal should be to exceed expectations, not simply meet them. Perhaps competitors are doing a better job, or maybe they've created add-on products and services that you haven't. Your own customers can help with your makeover if you ask them for feedback.

If your marketing message has never changed, perhaps it's time to reevaluate and devise a new one. Try revisiting your original business plan. You might be able to recapture some of the insight and enthusiasm you originally had from that document. Think back to your most successful promotions, presentations or sales efforts. Rather than reinventing the wheel, you might be able to update and expand an approach that has already worked for your business.

Don't be afraid to seek out other perspectives. After all, you may be "too close" to the issues to understand the sources and solutions. Meet and brainstorm with your trusted advisors, mentors, friends, partners, employees and outside consultants. Ask customers to give you a frank assessment of what you're doing, how you're doing it, and what you can do to better serve their needs. The more ideas you receive, the more options you'll have for getting your business back on the fast-track.

*This column is brought to you by the Southern New Hampshire Chapter of SCORE, with more than 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business counseling and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit [www.score-manchester.org](http://www.score-manchester.org) for information on counseling, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.*

*Have a question you'd like answered in this column? E-mail it to [info@score-manchester.org](mailto:info@score-manchester.org), with "Ask SCORE" in the subject line.*