

Scrum & Agile Practices for Small Businesses

Every business carries some type of risk with it, but statistically speaking, small businesses have many more cards stacked against them. Within the first year, about [20% of startups](#) end up failing. After five years, only 50% of startups are still in operation. The biggest reason these businesses fail is that the market simply doesn't need their product or service. However, management practices and the overall operation of the startup can also greatly impact its chances of survival.

Two frameworks that a small business might consider adopting are agile practices and scrum. Agile practices are broader, while scrum falls under the agile practice umbrella and is more specific. Both approaches have unique benefits and can help businesses ensure that their projects are seen through to completion. Utilizing one or both of these frameworks within your small business has the potential to make a positive difference and is worthwhile to consider.

What Are Agile Practices?

Agile practices are those that focus on project planning, team development, and consistent feedback in order to get the best possible results. Often, it is a methodology utilized for software development, but it can have other uses as well. Project management is one of the biggest reasons a business chooses to implement these practices.

Agile practices are grounded in the idea that nothing is permanent. Constant changes are being made in the world and market, such as new opportunities, technology, and competition. These end up affecting a business whether it's in small or large ways. Often, small businesses feel the effects of these changes more strongly. Some aspects of agile practices for a small business include:

- **Teamwork:** Agile practices rely heavily on teamwork and open communication among team members. Everyone has a part and carries responsibility for ensuring it's taken care of. Working together enables the business to accomplish more than those businesses that depend on more traditional, outdated tools and processes.
- **Collaboration:** Small businesses need to be in constant communication with their customer base. Customers should feel seen, heard, and taken care of. When they offer suggestions or complain about a product or service, it's vital they feel the company cares.
- **Planning:** Successful businesses don't rush through projects, deadlines, or goals. They carefully plan how they'll accomplish their objectives and how they'll respond to consumer feedback. When problems arise, they confront them head-on and ensure all aspects of the issue are taken care of.

- **Ranking:** It's a reality that some things require more attention than others. A business should focus on the most prominent tasks at hand. If there's a new project they've taken on, it should be broken up into smaller parts and ranked in order of importance.
- **Accountability:** Since every team member has a role in the company and/or project, everyone feels valued and needed. They contribute their unique ideas readily and offer solutions as they arise. As a result, they are held accountable for their actions or inaction within the business. Employees are more likely to be motivated when they know they'll be held accountable.
- **Feedback:** The world is always shifting and evolving, and a small business must adapt and keep up with these changes. Agile practices involve analyzing what worked in the past and what improvements could be made in the future. When something isn't working, the business addresses it right away. It's only through consistent feedback that a business can know what is and isn't working. This feedback comes not only from customers but from employees as well. There is an open line of communication and a continuous feedback loop.

When a small business adopts agile practices, improvement becomes the norm. Rather than *talking* about what to do, the focus shifts to actually *doing*. The benefit is a company that takes action right away instead of sitting back and letting things unfold naturally. In other words, agile practices can make a small business proactive. They gain a better sense of control rather than being pulled along every time a change or obstacle comes their way.

What Is Scrum?

Scrum is another popular method that falls under the agile framework. It's popular among businesses because its processes and methodologies are relatively simple to follow. The results are usually promising as well.

Its focus is on product development over short periods of time, which is accomplished through collaborative team effort. These periods of time are referred to as Sprints and they last anywhere from two to four weeks. During each Sprint, the team breaks down the larger project into smaller tasks, ranking them in order of importance. This makes it less likely the team will become overwhelmed because each task becomes more doable in a shorter amount of time.

If any challenges or obstacles pop up along the way, they're eliminated before they grow into larger issues. Therefore, scrum makes it easier to progress and adapt to changes. Much like agile practices, scrum also focuses on flexibility and consistent evaluation of the company's priorities.

How Do These Frameworks Differ From Traditional Methods?

Traditional methods of project management center around detailed planning with a fixed budget, schedule, and scope for the project. It is much more rigid, leaving less room for improvement, mistakes, or challenges along the way. Agile practices and scrum, on the other hand, take unpredictability into account. These frameworks know that things usually don't go according to plan and allow room for growth, change, and alterations to the original plan. Whereas traditional methods think longer-term and have an ultimate focus on the end goal or future, agile practices and scrum operate more in the present. Here are some other ways in which the two compare:

- Agile practices/scrum focus on team members and individual people. Traditional methods focus on a set process.
- Agile practices/scrum center around customer experience and involve the customer base heavily. Traditional methods center around following a specific process, which might ignore customer feedback at times.
- Agile practices/scrum have a decentralized management style while traditional methods have a centralized style.
- Agile practices/scrum measure performance by the value it brings to the business. Traditional methods are concerned with how much one strays from the original plan; it's all about conformity to the established process.

Whether you choose to go with a traditional project management method or opt for agile practices and/or scrum, consider the benefits and downsides of each. If you currently use a traditional method and it isn't working for your small business, it's always possible to make a switch.

How Can These Frameworks Benefit Small Businesses?

To stay ahead of the competition and remain efficient, small businesses should seriously consider project management tools like agile practices or scrum. While traditional tools can work well, especially if you are running a large project, they might not be suited for a small business in everyday matters and other smaller projects. However, no two businesses are alike, and they each have unique challenges and needs.

Often, small businesses can't spend large amounts of time and money planning far in advance. Agile practices and scrum are beneficial, therefore, because they operate in real-time. Instead of spending a bunch of money upfront on things that might change within a few weeks, a small business can spend as they go. Rather than wasting time planning months in advance, they can plan as they go.

Agile practices and scrum are also great for small businesses because they can reduce the possibility of human errors. When you rely on a traditional method of project management, you are held to a predetermined course of action that offers little room for

flexibility. If mistakes are made, they can be harder to recover from, especially as a small company.

Finally, traditional methods may not allow a small business to run as efficiently. Scrum and agile practices focus on teamwork, open communication, and consistency. As a result, employees are continuously updating one another on their progress, reaching out when there's a problem, and collaborating at every turn. Tasks take less time to complete, making the company more productive and saving money along the way. Teams are more motivated, focused, and committed to doing even the small tasks well. All in all, agile practices and scrum will be the best option for many small businesses as opposed to older, more traditional methods that were once utilized.

Considering Agile Practices and Scrum?

From changing responsibilities and shifting obligations, it takes a lot of work to make sure a business is functioning well. Small businesses often have much more responsibility than larger companies have, which is especially true for the owner. When a small business has just begun to emerge in the startup world, they often face even more challenges. Small businesses can benefit tremendously from adopting project management tools like agile practices and scrum. These frameworks can help them become more profitable, efficient, competitive, and ultimately successful overall and are worth taking into consideration.