

Case Study



“Firing up
our
Business”

It's a problem faced by owners of many small to medium sized businesses. They get embroiled in the day-to-day demands of running a company and end up spending too long working *in* the business rather than *on* the business. But with the help of ActionCoach Chris Ellis, Director of Detect Fire and Security, managed to break out of this pattern and as a result has seen turnover rocket from £1.6 million to £2.1 in two years.

Detect Fire and Security supplies, installs and maintains electronic fire and security systems – everything from fire and burglar alarms, to CCTV and access control - to predominantly commercial premises. Based in Hamble, near Southampton, the company's customers mainly come from south of the M25.

When Chris Ellis set up the business with his partner Andy Derrick seven years ago they began with a plan and various goals, all of which they achieved within four years of trading. They'd built a successful business and reached the £1 million turnover mark. The trouble was they didn't quite know where to go from there. Or more to the point, they didn't know that there was anywhere they should be going, as Chris explains.

“We'd reached the top of our mountain and a year later we were still standing there at the top of it, not even realising that there were other, bigger mountains waiting for us to climb. We'd fallen into the common trap of not knowing what our next goals should be or how to address them.”

Chris had met an Action Coach at various networking meetings and was aware of what they did but the time wasn't right. But six months or so later when their paths crossed the Action Coach suggested a meeting and Chris agreed.

“We asked lots of probing and thought-provoking questions about the business,” Chris says. “Things like, where the business was at and where it was going? What was the end game? Where did we want to be when we retired?” We realised we had no answers to those questions. Our Action Coach's tactic was to start with the end game and work backwards. To establish where we wanted to be and then work out how best to get there.

“He also made us look at our personal lives and how they interacted with our professional ones. The ActionCOACH philosophy is that a business should provide for your personal life – giving you freedom and financial security. So if you know what you want from your personal life, you can identify what the business needs to do in order to supply that need, and then plan how best to do it.

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"We began to gradually adjust from acting like employees to acting like directors. When you set up a business you have to answer the phone, do invoices and various other operational tasks, but when you reach the stage where you can afford to pay staff to do these jobs for you, it's often hard to change and let go."

But it's crucial if the business is to grow. It comes back to working on the business rather than in it.

But part of Detect's problem was finding the right people to entrust with the day-to-day running of their offices. They'd made several bad recruitment decisions in the past but the ActionCOACH programme enabled them to identify the right skills base and find people with the right attitude and aptitude.

So what changes have been made?

Back office systems have been put in place to control purchasing, sales, and finances, so that the company continues to operate smoothly when Chris and Andy are away from the office. There is a proper structure for the sales team that allows them more time to sell and means that their paperwork and quality of service is consistent. Everyone knows what they have to do.

This, combined with a newly built team that understands the philosophy and vision for the business, means that Chris has been freed up to manage people, focus on growth and the future.

Systems also mean that the financial information available to Chris and Andy is of far greater depth and detail, allowing them to track top line sales, bottom line profit and the return on investment.

New ambitious but achievable goals have been set to push turnover to £5 million over nine years. A major part of this growth will be achieved through acquisitions. The Coach's overall business knowledge as an Action Coach has been invaluable in identifying potential businesses to buy-out.

Detect now has a marketing department. Its industry is traditionally considered difficult to market but ActionCOACH has helped Chris identify new ways to target customers so driving sales.

The results have been spectacular. Turnover has shot from £1.6 million to £2.1million since ActionCOACH's involvement.

"Most businesses get to certain size and then stay there," says Chris. "Sometimes businesses need help to get to the next level. Our Action Coach has helped put in the infrastructure to make that move and get profitable growth. We've moved to bigger offices and increased staff from sixteen to twenty-two. We now know where we are going, how we are going to get there and are already making great progress towards our new goals."

To see what ActionCOACH
can do for your business
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