

# HOW I GREW A BUSINESS 400% IN A FLAT MARKET

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**PLAN  
CANVAS**

## THE SITUATION

Several years ago I was hired to lead a business that had recently been acquired. On the surface, the business model appeared sound and secure. Below the surface, it was **at high risk due to the digital business transformation of client markets**. Further, it was missing out on opportunities to expand services.

Complicating matters, it **functioned almost as if it were 4 completely separate companies**, each one serving a unique market - but with largely similar services.

The founders, who had led the business for 25 years, were ready to move on and start new ventures. Under their leadership, the **business had grown from a startup to over \$20 million in annual revenue with 170 employees**, many who had been there for the entirety of their professional careers.

Employee engagement was high. **Revenue was recurring and net profits were healthy**. None-the-less, the risk was looming.

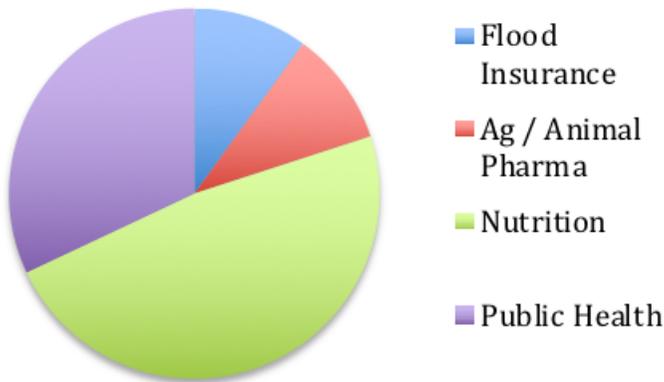
## THE IMPACT

**Growth had stalled** and, in one market, the business had already **begun to lose share**.

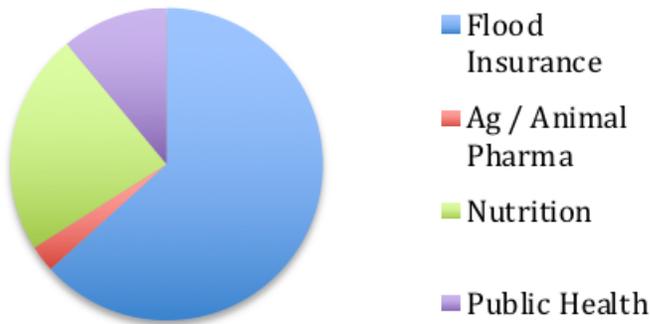
The client contracts we served tended to be structured such that there was one base contract year followed by 2 to 4 option years that would automatically renew unless either party chose to terminate - which almost never happened.

So, **at best, we had about 3 years to reverse** the loss trend and get back to growth mode in the face of 2 major challenges - 3 of the 4 major **markets we served were fixed and flat**, while **all were saturated** with competitor providers.

### Beginning Revenue Share by Market



### Ending Revenue Share by Market



## THE RESOLUTION

Fortunately, this business was not yet in a turn-around situation. We were working to avoid a turn-around situation. But through that effort, we saw opportunity for tremendous growth.

**The first order of business was to “do no harm.”**

We had an opportunity to thoughtfully plan our strategy without having to make dramatic and immediate changes. So we took advantage of that opportunity, **developing a strategy execution approach that I call ART**, an acronym for Articulate, Revise, and Track.

We began our ARTful journey by **first creating a vision and agreeing to a mission**. As the leader it was my job to “own” that vision.

Next, we **hired a consultant**, not to tell us how to realize our vision, but **to extract from us how we would do it** by asking us the right questions and helping us make sense of the often conflicting, seemingly disparate answers.

**We included everyone**. The consultant couldn’t feasibly meet with all 170 employees, so we scheduled several lunch meetings with cross-functional teams and placed suggestion boxes in each of our facilities to collect employees’ thoughts in addition to management’s and leadership’s.

Everyone had the opportunity to be included in the plan. This was an important step because it **produced buy-in and engagement** across the enterprise.

Based on this information and our knowledge of the markets we served, **we built a multi-year plan** that focused not only on our respective markets, but on the way we did things internally. Just as our client markets were going through business transformation, we too had to transform.

**We took on initiatives to find commonality and create efficiencies** across teams. We established internally shared services where it made sense to do so.

We implemented standards for managing projects and outcomes, creating a central Program Management Office and Quality Assurance team.

Importantly, **we took on initiatives to develop technical and product roadmaps** so that we could meet our clients’ digital and other demands.

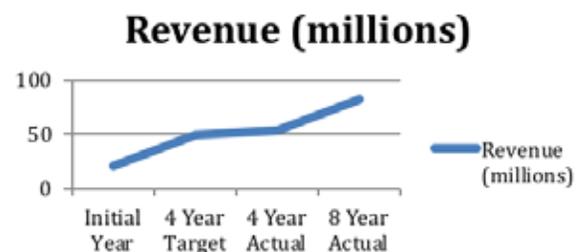
As we did all of this, **we realized a tremendous growth opportunity** was staring us in the face.



A – Articulate what you want to accomplish

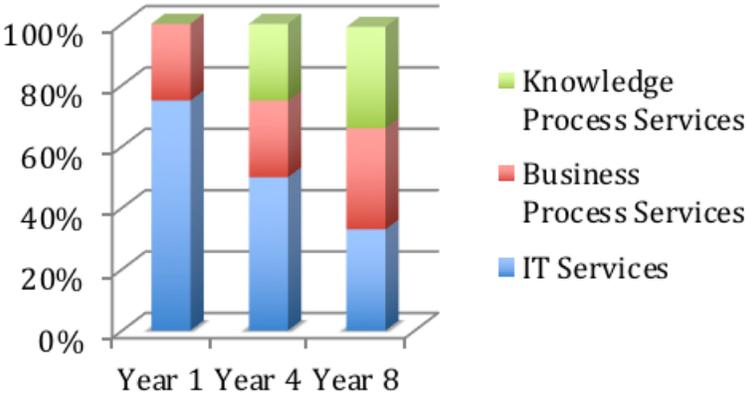
R – Revise your plans as you progress

T – Track your progress so that you can make more informed decision



If we shifted our focus from being an excellent technology company that provided a few business process services to one of being an outstanding business process services company enabled by our excellent technology solutions, our next biggest challenge would be to manage our massive growth – which turned out to be the case. The move paid off and we added more 530 employees over the next few years. 4 waves in particular required the on-boarding of 40, 50, 60, and 150 employees at a time.

We managed that employee growth the same way – as part of our overall documented plan.



There was no one, single thing that we did to subsequently grow, profitably, by 400% in flat markets. It was a collection of things we strategically did.

Some things worked exceptionally well. Some did not. Whether they did or didn't, **we took note, learned, and adjusted accordingly.**

We were not lucky. We were purposeful.

We were focused. We knew our priorities. We engaged our employees. We were results oriented.

We had a plan and we managed the plan.

### THE EPILOGUE

This experience is chronicled in the book *Business is ART*. It describes **the strategy execution process** defined, introduced, and tested out while growing that business to well over \$80 million in annual revenue. It also includes **simplified templates** for developing and managing plans.

The book, in turn, effectively served as the **functional requirements document for the Plan Canvas** software.

Of course, no one can guarantee 400% growth by simply using Plan Canvas or the Business is ART process it enables. But I can guarantee that **everything we did to purposefully grow that business by 400% is encapsulated within Plan Canvas.**

