Ascendus®

BUSINESS RESOURCE · FINANCIAL PLANNING

Planning ahead: a financial checklist for what's next

Know your busy and slow stretches, then watch the cash flow that carries you through them.

Every business has a next busy or slow stretch coming. For some, it is a seasonal rush like the holidays or back-to-school. For others, it is a predictable dip: a slow month after a big push, or a quiet stretch between projects.

> *Planning ahead is an investment in the version of your business that gets through the next slow month.*

Planning works best as two habits: knowing your own pattern, and watching your cash flow closely enough to act on what you know.

3 ways to know what's coming

01

Look back before you look ahead

Pull up last year, if you have it. What month was your slowest? Your busiest? Most businesses have a pattern, even if it does not feel that way in the moment.

02

Name what drives the shift

School calendars, holidays, weather, local events. Most shifts follow a cause you can name, even when they feel sudden.

03

Put a date range on it

A shift you have marked on a calendar is a shift you can prepare for.

Cash flow through it: what to watch

A shift in revenue can take a while to show up in your bank account. Cash flow shapes whether a slow stretch stays a manageable dip.

Fixed costs keep running	Rent, payroll and debt payments stay the same whether business is fast or slow. Know that number before the season starts.
Billed and banked are different	Revenue on paper becomes cash when it arrives. Watch the gap between when you invoice and when you are paid.
A small buffer changes the outcome	It can be modest. What matters is that a slow month becomes an inconvenience you can absorb.

The U.S. Small Business Administration points to cash flow problems as one of the most common reasons small businesses struggle, even profitable ones. Planning ahead is largely a cash flow exercise.

YOUR ACTION STEP **Every quarter**

Make planning a habit

Revisit your calendar of predictable shifts every quarter. After each stretch, write down one thing that worked and one thing you would change. If you are not sure where to start, a loan consultant can help you build a plan around your specific business.

TRUSTED SOURCES

- SBA, Manage your finances
- Ascendus, Strengthening Your Cash Flow, One Bold Step at a Time
- Financial Health Network, Research on financial health and resilience

Keep building

Every guide gives you one practical step on cash flow, credit or growth. Find the next one at ascendus.org/resources.

Read this guide online: www.ascendus.org/resources/planning-ahead-a-financial-checklist-for-whats-next/