Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 69: How to avoid a major trap that keeps you stuck as the bottleneck in your business

Speakers: Audrey Joy Kwan

Audrey Joy Kwan
Do you know how to avoid the A to Z thinking trap?" It's a major pitfall that keeps service-based business owners trapped as the bottleneck of their business. In this episode, we'll give you step-by-step actions to avoid the trap or, if you're in it, how to get out - so you can grow your business and do it with a lean team. Tune in.

Audrey Joy Kwan
Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you're a marketer or consultant, or a creative on a journey of growth from solopreneur to agency owner, follow along because I pull back the curtains on the realities of growing and running a scalable, service-based business and building lean team. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan, I know what it takes to build an agency, whether it's from solo to three, five or twenty. I've done it, including supporting an agency owner to sell and exit. I've coached and consulted over 120 marketers, creatives, and consultants. And I've been behind the scenes of seven figure businesses. I also have a master's degree in communications specializing in organizational development. All this to say, I know what it takes to grow lead and operate a multiple six, and seven figure small but mighty agency. And here on this podcast is where we'll dive right in.

Audrey Joy Kwan
Hi Friends, welcome back to the Small But Mighty Agency podcast. We're in the middle of a series on intellectual property and how it will help you create a better business that is positioned to attract clients who want and are looking for fresh, creative and innovative services and help you get out of being the bottleneck in your business.

We're talking about intellectual property in a service-based business – finding and developing your IP is strategically important. And I want to help you avoid the traps.

Externally, IP makes it easier to market your business apart from others, and internally it helps you grow your business without you being the bottleneck.

Part one covered 'How Intellectual Property can transform your service-based business.' In Part Two, we identified the foundations that make developing IP easier and help differentiate you in the market. I'll link both episodes below.

Today, let's work on finding the intellectual property that is "hard to see" in your business. It's typically hard to see because you're so close to the work.

Do you need to distill it and are you ready to find your processes and frameworks, in other words, your intellectual property? Yes.

You might think you only need Intellectual Property if you're scaling OR at capacity and need to build a team, but that's not true.

A key advantage of IP is that you spend less time looking outward for answers to your messaging, value proposition, marketing, and sales. How much easier would it be to look inside your business where the answers exist in the form of Intellectual property?

From your IP flows, "strengths and opportunities" that you might not see right now.

Think of it like putting on 3D glasses. What happens when you put on 3D glasses? You see new angles, textures, and depth in a way you can't see without it.

With IP, you gain 3D glasses, which help you see angle, texture, and depth. In other words, it gives you a new lens to grow your business.

The struggle can feel very real for you if you started as a solopreneur or freelancer to find and develop intellectual property for your service offerings.
It's not because you don't have it, it's because you are so close to the work.

You're not alone.

I lovingly call it the curse of being good at what you do; it can frustrate you because you're thinking, "I'm the expert; I should be able to figure it out."

And to be fair, I never get asked, "Can you help me figure out my intellectual property" for my service. It's way too jargon. The ask that I get is to help with strategic systems, processes and leadership support so they can get more time back in the business.

But the highest value approach is to help you find and develop the IP in your service business. I want to help position you and your services in a way that makes you stand out in the market, and I do that with strategic systems and processes that reveal your IP.

There is a difference between tactical processes, tech systems and automation VERSUS strategic systems. You and I are working on strategic systems today, using organizational design and organizational thinking to develop assets in your business.

So, what is the curse of the expert?

The curse of the expert is the curse of knowledge and happens to service-based business owners who are highly knowledgeable about a subject and underestimates the difficulty of others who are less familiar to understand that subject.

In simpler terms, as the expert, you struggle to communicate your expertise in a way that others can easily understand. And you struggle to break down complex concepts into digestible pieces – it feels like a lack of clarity when you distill things down to processes or intellectual property. It can lead to longer learning curves or underperforming when building a team.

If that's you, it's a common challenge because you get stuck in A to Z thinking.

A-to-Z thinking is when you are so close to doing the work; you can't stand outside yourself to see how you and your brain zip from A to Z to deliver your services.

It's one of the main reasons service-based experts get stuck in the curse of being an expert. You need help breaking out complex concepts into digestible pieces that become your intellectual property and help you grow your team without being the bottleneck.

See, you get to solutions fast because you're naturally gifted and good at your work.

You go from A to Z in your brain, thinking you've gone from A to B. The challenge is you haven't broken down the framework enough.

Let's use the alphabet as our analogy.

A to B is one step, but when you have the expert's curse, you naturally go forward by 26 letters in the alphabet. In other words, you don't see B or C; instead, you arrive at Z.

Why does this happen?

When you're close to doing the work or have natural gifting, you have shortcuts, and you can't stand outside yourself to see how you zip from A to Z unless you slow down and apply a few steps that I will share.

The magic of breaking down a concept or framework in your business is in your shortcuts. There's intellectual property in your shortcuts.

I want to help you slow down to see them so that you can go further. Slowing down is not stopping. It's getting to the stage of business where you know you need to prioritize specific strategic activities if you want your business to thrive now and into the future.

We all know the marathon analogy. Building a business is not a sprint; it's a marathon. In a marathon, you can't be running at sprint pace the entire way; you will burn out. To

finish strong, you need to slow down your pace at strategic points to conserve energy so you can finish stronger in the later stages.

So, let's understand and figure out how to break through A to Z thinking.

The first step is identify where you are zipping from A to Z.

The easiest way to mark A to Z thinking is to name the things you do that make other people think you're a magician.

In service delivery, magic looks like you're effortlessly pulling ideas, strategies, and solutions out of thin air. Audit where those things exist and make notes.

Next, we need to Analyze.

To get the intellectual property out of your head, we need to tease out A to B, then C to D and E to F. You get the pattern. I'm not saying there are 26 steps to everything; what we are after in a service-based business are the digestible pieces.

If you want to figure this out by yourself, you need to create opportunities to look at how you do things from 10,000-foot view so you can analyze your own process.

For example, you can record and analyze your client meetings. In this example, you're not just capturing notes from the meeting; you need to get into the headspace of analyzing and exploring what you did so you can distill what matters.

Once you identified and analyzed, now it's time to clarify.

Let's define the milestones in the service. Milestones are the key checkpoints. It's the key activities that measure progress toward the delivery of your promise.

Clarifying milestones helps you identify your roadmap for your Intellectual Property.

Without the milestone, the results don't happen. So milestones are like pillars in your intellectual property. You have to know your pillars.

Last but not least, we capture all of it into a system. This includes the invisible work that goes unnoticed by clients but plays a crucial role in your decision-making process for service delivery?

I call that the invisible workload.

Your invisible workload is the research, analysis and brainstorming sessions required to extract valuable insights, find solutions and provide fresh perspectives to help clients thrive.

It's investigating market trends, analyzing competition and identifying opportunities.

And it's the creative force behind the scenes, connecting dots and shaping strategies.

It sets the stage for those big "a-ha" moments.

Much of the heavy lifting happens in the invisible work, and the invisible work can get lost in translation when you are defining your intellectual property.

The common challenge I see when working with my clients to strategize their service delivery systems is how often they overlook the invisible work in their intellectual property.

The invisible work is where we identify tools, resources and templates to support consistent delivery.

If we don't investigate the invisible workload and tease it out, it's like baking a cake without eggs. You can't taste the eggs in a chocolate cake, but eggs are the binding agent; it gives the cake structure and moisture. Without eggs, the cake has difficulty holding together.

The invisible work is your binding agent. It's how you create intellectual property for service delivery.

In summary, how do you break down A to Z thinking so that you can develop Intellectual property?

First, you name and identify where A to Z thinking is happening in your business.

Then you break down A to Z thinking into more digestible pieces, like A to B and C to D. If you work with someone like me, we audit and analyze by workshopping. If you are doing this yourself, create opportunities -- like recordings -- which allow seeing things from 10,000-foot view for better analysis.

Next, clarify your milestones. Again, milestones are the key checkpoints that measure progress toward the delivery of the promise. A promise is essential to
IP in a service business; we cover that in Part 2 of this series, and the link is in the show notes). Your milestones are pillars in your framework and your IP.

Last but not least, capture everything into a system, including the invisible work in each milestone.

And that's how we help you distill and identify intellectual property— it's a fancier way of saying I use a process to break down your A to Z thinking into parts that are easy to understand and follow so you have a strategic system. It means you can communicate your expertise in a way that others can easily understand. And It leads to more clarity in

your marketing and processes, plus assets you can scale with a lean team without being the bottleneck.

I hope I've highlighted for you what can happen for your business's growth when you do this strategic work in your business.

Friends, thanks for joining me for Part 3 of this five-part series. Intellectual property in a service business is only an asset if it's pulled together strategically and structured into a system so others can follow – and we'll be exploring structure in Part 4.

And before you go…

If you don't want to stay stuck finding and developing your money-making intellectual property for your service-based business so you can stop being the bottleneck, I'm here for it; if you want to build a business that is an asset and not a job, I'm here. And remember, just because you've proven that you can learn how to bootstrap and do things yourself does not mean it should be your go-to habit for figuring out your strategic systems, processes and workflow. You know where to find me; click the link in the show notes.

I'll see you on the next one.

Audrey Joy Kwan
Hey, there. Thanks for hanging out with me at the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean the world to me if you hit the follow or subscribe button in your podcast app and share it with a friend and I'll see you in the next one.