

6 Questions to Ask to Propel Your Business Forward

Home remodeling and design experts share key areas to focus on to reach even your loftiest goals.

Looking to take your business to new heights? Here are six key questions to ask yourself about your progress in the first quarter of the year, and how you can work smarter for the rest of the year to hit your targets. They're all based on the wisdom of successful design and building pros, to help you get your business where you want it to be.

QUESTION 1

Are you attracting the right type of clients?

By understanding exactly who your ideal clients are and identifying their lifestyle patterns and desires, you'll be able to target your brand messaging to attract them. Interior designer Rosa Santiago Zimmerman of [RSZ Design & Development](#) has been nailing this; she's had only two clients that didn't click in the entire 27 years her company has been operating.

"For me, it's about having good synergy with the client — a two-way relationship of trust and friendship," she says. "Our design mantra is to create spaces you'll love to live in. Therefore, we go through an extensive vetting process at the beginning with a lengthy questionnaire to make sure we have that synergy, that our clients are comfortable financially and that they do not want a museum for a home."

For Matt DiBara of [DiBara Masonry](#), elevating his brand and getting the right exposure were critical for the growth of his building firm, and he attributes his success in these areas to [Houzz Pro lead generation](#). "One of my marketing mentors explained to me that not all marketing channels are created equally, and that I needed to run a marketing report to understand the cost per acquisition of each channel," he says. "It was then that I realized Houzz Pro was my third-highest income generator, attracting a certain type of customer who was more detail-oriented. It was a big light bulb moment, and I decided to triple down on this opportunity."

You can get a deep understanding of your marketing efforts with Houzz Pro's [Insights and Analytics](#) features, which measures how your profile is performing. You can see which of your project photos are attracting the most attention and getting saved the most, which will give you insight into which projects to promote and which to deemphasize. The feature also measures your response times to new leads, and you can compare those to the response times of the top pros in your area.

QUESTION 2

Are you scaling efficiently?

Scaling is essential to make the most of your business, but inefficient processes can be a huge roadblock. Jena Bula of [Delphinium Design](#) found that introducing project minimums helped her scale her business efficiently. "By tracking our time and profitability on each project, we figured out which projects were the most profitable and what our minimum had to be to essentially make it worth it," Bula says.

She also expanded her offerings instead of hammering hard into just one niche. "Growing your business is also about listening to what the market is offering and how my business ebbs and flows to meet the demand," Bula says. "We've learned to diversify, doing some great furnishing projects that have been profitable and working on new builds. Whereas before we were more niche, and we're a little bit broader now."

Transitioning to management software forced DiBara to really look at his business processes and find better, more efficient ones. "At one stage, we were trying to physically manage five different companies face-to-face, driving to one and then two hours to the next. I needed to upscale our management software and integrate the businesses, and using [Houzz Pro software](#) has been key to our growth," he says.

You can take on more projects without more stress by using [Houzz Pro](#), as it allows you to manage all of your business processes in one convenient place. The time you'll save by harnessing technology will give you more time to bid on more jobs, find more balance in life and run your operations more efficiently.

"Honestly, the software is one of the most complete tools out there, period, end of story," says Santiago Zimmerman of [RSZ Interiors](#). "And the [Clipper tool](#) is priceless. I love creating my [mood boards](#) too and allowing other people involved in the project to see it visually, as well as the clients, who can then make notes on items. Communication is key to everything we do. Without communication, the project fails."

QUESTION 3

Are you ready for upcoming challenges?

Consistent growth is fundamental for any company's continued success. So it pays to be aware of the new challenges your business growth could face each year and how to overcome them. Hiring the right candidates, for example, continues to be a big issue for DiBara in 2024, as well as responding to anticipating trends and integrating artificial intelligence. "At the moment, I'm keeping an eye on how artificial intelligence is going to affect and disrupt what we're already doing," he says. "It's [about] anticipating where we should double down and where we may want to take a little bit of a softer landing — that's the big challenge this year."

The team at [Etch Design Group](#) also continually focuses on staying ahead of the game, and this year they're looking to grow within the commercial sector. "Knowing where to put our time and effort in terms of marketing is always tricky," Etch cofounder and principal designer Stephanie Lindsey says. "We want to know we're putting our efforts in the right place to get the right clients that are the right fit for us and we're the right fit for them." Fortunately, Houzz Pro has the company's back with a [targeted marketing](#) solution that highlights the best features of the business and then reaches out to the right clients looking to hire.

QUESTION 4

What important lessons have you learned so far?

[Jay Jeffers'](#) golden formula of kindness and genuineness has been a big factor contributing to the success of his high-revenue design-and-building firm. "Being fair and nice goes a long way in this industry," he says. "There are a lot of people who get very upset about things if they are not going the right way, and it can be iffy, but I think if you have a great reputation and have been fair with your clients and vendors, it goes a long way." Plus, "when it comes time for needing a favor from somebody," he adds, "they will be willing to do it, because you've been good to them along the way too."

Many business owners also have discovered after doing things the hard way that technology makes their work easier. Lindsey recalls a time when spreadsheets weren't cutting it at Etch — they needed to switch to something that was more robust. "Now, not only do we use technology for our accounts, [integrating QuickBooks](#) and analyzing our data more quickly," she says, "[but] we also use technology for our designs, presentations, marketing, [collaborating with clients](#) and communicating back and forth with vendors. Honestly, you name it, and we use technology for it."

QUESTION 5

What can you do differently in 2024?

Being able to pivot on business strategy to stay in sync with the market or resolve internal issues is key to staying ahead of the game. Susan Wintersteen of [Savvy Interiors](#) is a great example of someone who is intensely in tune with her offerings, her audience and how to make it all work. In 2024, she is looking to change her business structure and create a traditional hierarchy, led by a

principal designer, to win more exclusive design projects. “We’re looking at less but larger-scale projects that are more high-end and complex,” she says.

[Jeffers](#) is looking to make more nuanced changes this year. “One thing I want to do for 2024 is develop a questionnaire to get to know the client before we start the project. At the moment it’s more casual,” he says. Jeffers also is keen to ensure that his team has a good work environment. “We used to arrange team outings, like museum visits or see a show, but we have gotten so busy that we don’t do it quite as much. I’d like to get back to doing that this year, and simply making sure everybody in the team is happy,” he says.

QUESTION 6

Do you have a healthy work-life balance?

Many smart business owners strive for that sweet spot of working enough hours to earn a good income while leaving enough time for rest and play. For interior designer Jessica Nelson, cofounder of and principal designer at Etch, it starts with valuing and respecting her team and clients. This practice has helped her build a joyful working environment for all involved.

“Without our people, we have nothing,” Nelson says. “Etch is centered around putting people first, whether that’s our clients, our employees, our vendors and ourselves. To this day, anytime we hire an employee, we tell them we don’t expect them to work weekends, evenings or overtime. We want you to have a solid schedule that’s reliable and dependable. At the end of the day, we go home to our families. We want everyone to be able to enjoy their time when they’re not at work. If you’re thinking about work the whole time or burning the midnight oil, it’s not good for anyone.”

Technology has been at the forefront of Etch’s significant growth in the past eight years, helping the team refine their processes, maintain efficiency and create a harmonious working environment. Everyone on the team uses software that saves time, such as tools for [invoicing](#) and [time tracking](#), while clients and contractors can stay in the loop with the [Houzz Pro Project Tracker](#). “I feel like the growth automatically comes if you have a great company culture,” Nelson says. “People will see that and gravitate towards your firm. I think having our employees at the forefront of everything and lifting them up have been a foundational element of our success and why we keep growing.”

Learn more about how to [work smarter](#) and make 2024 your best year yet!