



## Episode 24: **Business Growth Checklist for 2016**

[www.customapparelstartups.com/business-growth-checklist-2016/](http://www.customapparelstartups.com/business-growth-checklist-2016/)

**Mark S:** Hey everyone and welcome to episode 24 of the CAS Podcast. We are not only legal now, we are starting to worry about our future, if we were actually a person instead of a Podcast. My name is Mark Stephenson from ColDesi.

**Mark V:** And I am Marc Vila from Colman and Company, and today we're talking about the business growth checklist for 2016, so the steps for success in this new year that's come upon us now.

**Mark S:** I think that's a great name with that we decided on. That's always a big debate by the way folks before we get started – is what are we going to call it, because it kind of sets the theme for everything else and we want this to set the theme for your 2016 and we've called it a Business Growth Checklist instead of a 'Business Plan' or anything more official because we want it to be a light kind of document that you use to plan out your year and not something that you are going to use to fill out a loan application for a bank.

**Mark V:** When I have to do something on the marketing side of the business here at Colman and Company, if I have to come up with the entire marketing plan for the year with everywhere I want to advertise and everything that I want to do, and it takes pages and is giant spreadsheet, it's a dreadful thing to do.

**Mark S:** Right.

**Mark V:** That is not what I enjoy doing about my job, I enjoy the marketing side of things and not so much to making a giant plan. And if you go into this making like you said right before, this isn't a 57 page document, that's what Mark had said right before we started this. If you go into this trying to make it into a big huge giant plan, you are probably going to procrastinate it and it is going to be April and you're going to have the beginning of this document that you never finished and you are not going to do anything different.

**Mark S:** Yeah, so our idea is that you have a legal pad in-front of you and a nice new pen that writes well. What you are going to do is just write down a couple of bullet points, we are going to go through some suggestions on the business side of things and then on the sales and marketing side of things and we'd like you to take these to heart and kind of look forward over the year and see where they are going to fit into your growth lane of your business.

**Mark V:** I think it is great, I am all about interaction in the Podcast, I like that, in my opinion if you've got the opportunity now to get some paper or take out your computer and open up a notepad and just make some notes of the things that we said or things that you find important that we said and you got a cheat on your list right there.

**Mark S:** Right, that's true and if you have any questions during the podcast just raise your hands, I mean we won't be able to see it but it'll be fun.

**Mark V:** We'll figure it out. Technology is getting good. I just got a new phone; it has all sorts of great things.

**Mark S:** I saw that, one of those I-phone things. So I think the business growth checklist for 2016, I think we are ready to go, because honestly the most common question that we get on the Custom Apparels Startups on the Facebook side of what we do, so if you are not already a member, you should look us up on the Custom Apparel Startup Facebook group. Hey I've got a cutter, I've done some shirts locally, how do I grow my business or I've got this kind of technology and I want to get into the business, I want to start a brand... or I want to grow my business and I don't know what to do. So that's what we are going to go through.

**Mark V:** So the first thing is if you want to look forward to the future, maybe you should take a look at the past.

**Mark S:** It is one of those kinds of shows that I refused to watch at the end of last year, they always do a thousand best of 2015... best reality show of 2015 and things like that. So what we've got here on our screen, on our legal pad is best of 2015 review. Marc, what are couple of things that you think that people should look at from last year that might help them grow or be more successful this year.

**Mark V:** Well, the first note that I have here is, we just wrote the best blanks to work with.

**Mark S:** Alright, now what do you mean by blanks?

**Mark V:** So, what we mean by that is you probably throughout the year, you probably tried some new shirts that maybe came out last year, some new T-shirts or Tote-bags or Jackets, you may have had a customer that requested something different than you've used before and it's a time to go back and take a look at that, so consider the things that you order or maybe pull up your old invoices or go into your account wherever you order your blanks from and take a look at really good ones that were easy to work with and your customers liked it.

**Mark S:** They had good stock.

**Mark V:** They are going to continue for 2016 and pick out your favorites, these are going to be the staple blanks that you offer to your customers when they say "I need some T-shirts or I need some hats".

**Mark S:** And that'll save you some time this year because you are not going back to your catalog and wonder what you should be doing or you can completely ignore the new-flyer that's got the new four brands of T-shirts or four types of T-shirts to come out, you are going to look at what you did last year and pick your favorites and that's what you are going to offer and that goes for shirts, it goes for caps, it goes for jackets, whatever apparel you have decorated over the year.

**Mark V:** Yeah and have your night shortlist and when customer comes and says "we need some dress shirts for all the sales people in our company" you can come out and say "these are my three favorites" and they are and the thing is, don't just strictly go by straight memory on this, this is something where you should look at some part numbers, look at some styles, look at the order and really focus on it for a few minutes.

**Mark S:** It is funny because last night I was watching the Prophet, which is a great business oriented show on CNBC and this is the guy who invests in business and he takes a look at small businesses and tries to figure out what they are doing wrong because they are not growing or they are failing and the one last night was a shoe company and their biggest mistake was they were offering 40 or 50 different kinds of shoes, different styles and different fabrics and things like that and the first thing he did was get rid of the 95% that weren't selling, so 80% of that business was on 5 sets of shoes, so take a look at your business with that look in mind and what blanks have you ordered and what are the 4 or 5 that work the best.

**Mark V:** Yeah, and then there is a lot you can do with that from a marketing standpoint in regards to whether you put it into a brochure or you put it on to your website, whatever you do and you have these focused ones that you can take the time because we talked about before in regards to creating a website and if you want to put a garment on a website, it was with Marco.

**Mark S:** Yeah Marco Pena from DecoNetwork.

**Mark V:** Yeah, he had said we have a team of people, so every shirt can come in multiple colors and sizes, so you pick a few and you want to adapt that into some of your marketing materials or your website, now you've got a nice short list.

**Mark S:** And most of your customers are just going to go, I want that one.

**Mark V:** Most of them are going to take your suggestion, "This is a great shirt, you're going to love it" awesome!

**Mark S:** So the next thing we want to look at 2015 is what was your most profitable deal? Now not your biggest revenue deal, although that's great, find out what's your most profitable deal was and I hope you've listened to our know your numbers podcast, so you know which customers and which deals have generated the most profit for you but this is really important, because imagine if you took your most profitable deal and that's the one by the way in which you made the most money on at the end of the day, what if all of your deals have that same profit margin or the same profit model, how much money you would've made in 2015. So you've looked at the skinny deals, you've looked at the fat deals and what's your most profitable deal?

**Mark V:** And how can you replicate that.

**Mark S:** Right.

**Mark V:** Can I replicate deals like this? And there is a balance in all of that because in your profitability you have to factor in all of the costs that come along with this, how much work was involved in it? all of that, so factor all that in and find out the deals that were this great mix and the pay cheque and the cost was low and see what you can do to do more of those.

**Mark S:** And you may find a gem there because maybe, maybe it was a gym bag that was particularly easy to embroider on or print on, so it meets your blanks test (if that's one of your favorite blanks to work with) and it was also your most profitable deal and so now you are going to take that and put it on your brochure or put it on your website and feature it when you are walking around talking to people for 2016 and think what that'll do for business next year.

**Mark V:** It could be something as simple as your Direct to garment printer and it was a light tan garment and you did a 150 of them and it was just CMYK, no white ink, the labor was low the cost to the shirt was low, the hand finish was great.

**Mark S:** Production speed is fast.

**Mark V:** Yeah all of it was great and that's a great thing to talk about to your customers, you bring that up and you say, listen, I didn't order last year and there were these light tan garments, it was full color on the front and the back, and we did this, the customer loved it and I was able to produce it fast, I am going to make that suggestion for you to do that and you'll be surprised at how many people will take that suggestion.

**Mark S:** I like that, as a matter of fact I think we're done, if they just wrote down those things, I think they will have a better 2015 But! We have one more in this kind of 2015 kind of category. What gets the 2015 award for your worst mistake? So that worst mistake is that you pick completely the wrong shirt to print on or you let a customer bring you their own garments for you to decorate and you ruined half of them... what's your biggest mistake and this is probably something that you're obsessed over again and again and if you have a partner, it's one thing they talk to you and bring up all the time (whenever you want to do something different). It should not be hard for you to figure out.

**Mark V:** Yeah and it might be, it might go back to the testing podcast where a gentleman that works here was talking about an embroidery story from some years ago where they had a new gym bag that they were going to embroider, they never did it before, they ordered a thousand of them, got them in and there was a rubber backing right behind where they were going to embroider and it was just constant thread-breaks and it took them three weeks to produce something they thought they were going to do in maybe 4 or 5 days.

**Mark S:** Right.

**Mark V:** So, consider that stuff and see what you could do to avoid those.

**Mark S:** Right, so figure out your worst mistake and don't do this lightly, really think about it, was there a deal that you lost a lot of money on then -unexpectedly, and was the deal because you ordered the wrong item? Or you ordered from a new vendor and it didn't work? Or like Marc said in his example: the item turned out to be not what you expected, using customer garments, something that your equipment couldn't handle. Did you promise a turnaround time that you couldn't meet?

**Mark V:** Yeah.

**Mark S:** So what was your worst mistake, maybe even write down the amount of money or time that you lost doing it as a motivator and remember that throughout the year (don't get depressed) just remember it throughout the year so you don't do it again.

**Mark V:** Yeah, that is one of the simplest things to adjust, if you over-promised on somebody, when you are about to do it again, when you get that feeling like: "ooh I don't know if I can do that by Friday" then you really need to consider about just telling them that "I am not too confident that I can get it done by Friday" and that's it.

**Mark S:** And these are three business oriented things but they could be not just restricted to the examples that we've given you, your worst mistake this year may have been getting the wrong piece of equipment, maybe it was making a financial deal that did not work out for your company, maybe it was taking on a partner that you have to get rid of, or hiring a wrong employee, look back and keep an open mind, see what your worst mistake was and don't do it again.

**Mark V:** We should also talk about money and finance.

**Mark S:** We're going to do that, we're going to talk about money and finance and then we are going to talk about sales and marketing.

**Mark V:** Okay, on the financial side, that might be part of the biggest mistake – a lot of times folks are not taking the proper steps to manage their finances, manage their sales order, their inventory and all of those things they didn't keep track.

**Mark S:** I just thought of a good one.

**Mark V:** Okay.

**Mark S:** If you are about to or have recently met with your accountant or you are trying to do your taxes and you realize that a lot of first time business people do this their first year that you didn't pay any income tax or sales tax for your first year, that is a huge financial mistake and it's one that affects a lot of businesses, so that's what we're talking about here is getting your money in order.

**Mark V:** So, you're going to have to do your taxes as you mentioned sales.

**Mark S:** Yeah.

**Mark V:** So if you have a CPA that you work with or somebody specifically that handles this, during that meeting you can just say "Hey! at the last -after we're done doing my taxes, can we take 30 minutes or 15 minutes or an hour -however long we need, I would like to go over on what I can do better in 2016 as far as managing all of this, so when I see you next year it is going to be that much easier and that much better".

**Mark S:** And often they will come up with surprising, there are some really good financial experts CPA and accountants -even bookkeepers out there that really know their stuff.

**Mark V:** Yeah.

**Mark S:** You could get a suggestion that will literally make you more money, maybe it is to organize your business as a LLC instead of a sole proprietor or maybe they might suggest that you pay your taxes on a quarterly basis or a different way to handle sales tax or even comment on your cash-flow which is a big deal for a small businesses.

**Mark V:** And particularly pay attention if it is a successful CPA business owner, if they are particularly successful on their end and they are doing well and they seem to be managing themselves well then follow their lead.

**Mark S:** If you are both working out of your back bedrooms then you are probably both in the same situation, you are not really up and running, you are not making a huge amount of money yet, so find somebody with an office and a business and some experience that can help small businesses in particular.

**Mark V:** And there is nothing wrong in getting a second opinion too, so you trust your tax person, but maybe you want to schedule an hour with another CPA who is maybe a little more expensive, you may not afford to keep them on your books all the time but they are willing to be paid for an hour of their time to give you some advice.

**Mark S:** Yeah and I would say this to – one of the first pieces of advice if you are not already doing this that any of these guys is going to give you is an accounting software package.

**Mark V:** Yeah, we've talked about it a bunch it is important.

**Mark S:** It really is, whatever it is, QuickBooks or FreshBooks or Bob's Books whatever you decide to do, anything that keeps, if you are managing your finances for your business through your E-mail account or through your cheque book then that is going to be a problem and that is something that you will be happy that you corrected in 2016.

**Mark V:** And there is going to be more work in the beginning because you will have to get used to it, but once you are in it.

**Mark S:** you can do it.

**Mark V:** Yeah and at the end when it's time to actually do your taxes, it is literally going to be that you export something out to your CPA, out of your finance software

**Mark S:** Yeah.

**Mark V:** You would do a few clicks and you hit send and your taxes are almost done.

**Mark S:** It is almost like a file my taxes button.

**Mark V:** Yeah, and they are going to use software like that or their software is going to accept that and it is going to sub that information in and spit information out that is going to be easier and better and more accurate and less likely to get you in trouble and all of that.

**Mark S:** In the same vein, I've got order entry written down here in my notes.

**Mark V:** So, I think we are talking about taking invoices and orders in and how you are managing that, so if your orders are typically now on – order sheets or if you've got the carbon copy yellow and white paper and that is how you take your orders, it's time to upgrade.

**Mark S:** Absolutely.

**Mark V:** Again the cost is going to be almost nothing or... free. it will take time to get used to it, but you probably got a great phone, you probably have an I-pad or some sort of other tablet, there is a lot of apps that are free, there is a lot of software that is free or inexpensive or software as a service stuff or its a monthly fee... \$9 a months and you will have access to do online invoicing and it is going to automate a ton of things for you, it is going to keep track of it, you can do orders on your computer or on your tablet, you can E-mail it directly to your customer right from within the application, it is going to save you a ton of time, you are not going to lose anything, you are not going to have to worry about chicken scratch handwriting.

**Mark S:** I think the theme here for 2016 should be just to get a handle on the money, a lot of people that get into the custom apparel business are creative or they just want to do the work (we've talked about that on a bunch of podcasts too) but more that you just bear down and get this money side of the business handled, become a little bit comfortable with the way you put it in order or talking to an accountant and using the right software and filing your taxes, just get this stuff -learned and handled and out of the way so that you can focus on what you are good at in 2016.

**Mark V:** Yeah, baby steps on everything too. You don't have to get 30,000 dollar software integrated into your website, just get something that works and that is easy to use.

**Mark S:** That's right.

**Mark V:** With managing the money, it is also important to manage your information.

**Mark S:** Right. And by information there is a lot of things that we need, one of the top ones and we have done entire podcasts on both of these, one of the biggest ones is the information on what you have in stock and what you have on order, what you need to complete your work and that is kind of an inventory management.

**Mark V:** You should have something that you use to manage what you've got in your stores, shop or closet, that is inventory for your business and it's important to have a schedule to check up on that, to count it again and verify it again, because I mentioned this maybe every episode...

**Mark S:** Yeah, tell the stories, because it is important.

**Mark V:** But every single day we will ship out a gallon of pre-treat for Direct to Garment printing or two cones of black thread overnight to somebody that costs them twice as much as the product or for thread the 100 times... maybe not a 100

**Mark S:** Maybe 10

**Mark V:** But a ton more than the actual cost of this product in UPS. So, we don't make any money on it, you don't make any money on it, the shipping carrier does and not only is it money it is stress.

**Mark S:** You know what I want to do, I want to go back to the best of 2015 review part and say I want you to pull your invoices from your suppliers -including Colman and Company and any other supplier that you use for your business and I want you to go down to that stack and I want you to look at the freight line on every invoice and I want you to add all that stuff up or flag the two days or overnight shipments that you had to do, because you made a mistake and weren't keeping track and that is going to add up to real money, think about if you could just add that back into the bottom line.

**Mark V:** Yeah, you can and for example we have a free shipping threshold, we're going to pay for shipping and we have customers that a 100% of the times take advantage of that because they manage their ink particularly well.

**Mark S:** Right.

**Mark V:** So they go through, they call u once a month or once every six weeks, once every month however they order and they are re-upping their inventory and I need an extra white ink this time because

I used some more and the same thing with thread, you should never run out of black and white thread, they are the two most common colors.

**Mark S:** And bobbins they don't wear out sitting in the box.

**Mark V:** It would take a really long time for all of those things to degrade, so the often thing I tell people is you should have a 60 day of supplies in your shop for all of the major staple supplies that you use and then after thirty days when you've used up 30 days -when you've used up thirty days of it, re-up on that, so you are always a full month ahead at any given point, so if you get that weird order when somebody wants a giant white print on DTG, you normally don't use that much white ink, you've got that, you've got full month's worth and hey if you get an order that uses sixty days worth of supplies in that one order...

**Mark S:** Congratulations.

**Mark V:** Okay, that overnight cost is perfectly fine.

**Mark S:** Right I agree, so give me an example Marc, like: how would you keep track of that?, because that is where a lot of people go like "I am looking in my closet or I am looking in the cabinet in the office and I've just got a bunch of blanks piled all over the place and I've got a box full of threads and I've got a spot for my ink" How would you suggest that they organize that what they need and how do they figure that out.

**Mark V:** My keep it simple approach is there is two, one is if you've got that software we talked about before, the finance software, if you've got that, more than likely it has some kind of inventory in the software, so you are going to be able to put your part numbers down and put how much you have of those and then every week or month or however, depending on how busy you are you count and you run an inventory report.

**Mark S:** Run an inventory report.

**Mark V:** And then you can print that out or you can bring a tablet over to where you keep your inventory and verify what you have and then adjust.

**Mark S:** Right, and maybe you could look at that if you don't know, if you are little bit more basic than that and you are not ready for that, just look at the invoices that you've paid on the supplies for the past maybe 60 days and add all that stuff up, write down everything you have ordered for the last 60 days, have a drink because you are going to be really surprised at how much you have ordered in the past 60 days and then maybe add 10 or 15 percent on top of that for growth and make that your base line.

**Mark V:** That's what you want to have in stock.

**Mark S:** That's what you want to have in stock, and when you go below that then you can order new,

**Mark V:** and if you are not order for the tech side yet, then you can have it as simple as have everything written down on a nice neat paper, make it neat and keep it in that room, wherever you store things, wherever you store things or keep it in a drawer in a safe place and if you don't have a massive inventory then it might all fit on one sheet of paper on the left hand side you've got – these are the five shirts... and again if you are going back to our beginning your best blanks, here is the five shirts I ordered, here is the five blanks I ordered, here is my list, here is what I have of those, and then which is probably not a huge amount.

**Mark S:** Right, here is what I should have.

**Mark V:** Right, and then the same thing, here is my ink or my thread, and thread is a challenge, it can be a challenge because there is 400 colors that we carry but it is important to know, it is important to know and thread is not going to take forever, you can check what you have gone through, you can look to what you have gone through, but at minimum if you are not going to do every a single color, so maybe you are not going to use that light green leaf color.

**Mark S:** 15 Colors, 15 most popular.

**Mark V:** Yes, exactly, your 15 most popular, keep that on the list.

**Mark S:** And honestly if you have to fast ship or overnight a spool of thread, it is a pain but it is only a few dollars.

**Mark V:** Yes it is, but it is not the most ridiculous thing. So that's it and then you will also need the other info that you need to manage is your customer info.

**Mark S:** Right and this is one of the things that most small business don't do very well and you really set yourself apart if you do and that's CRM (Customer resource management) There are a lot of ways to manage your customer information but what you really want is, you want a place where you can put their name, their address, their phone number, notes about the account and in some way write down what they ordered, what they like to order, do they like to be called Steven or Steve, do they like to be called and reminded of things, or do they prefer to do business by E-mail.

**Mark V:** Yeah, manage all of their info, any notes you have about them and this is something where there is plenty of free and very inexpensive software that will really help you.

**Mark S:** Yeah, ZOHO CRM is a free one upto a certain number of users, sales-force I think you can still get for free, but there is a bunch,

**Mark V:** VTiger, base and there is more than you can name, there is always a new one coming out, find one that feels right for you, watch their videos.

**Mark S:** It is honestly not important which once you pick

**Mark V:** My thought is Google search CRM and try to find the pricing first so that you don't waste a ton of time because you don't need to do some big giant builds, watch their videos on YouTube or write on their website and see how it works, watch somebody do a workflow because you will see a bunch of those for everybody and say "this one looks cool for me, I like this" Pick that one and just do it.

**Mark S:** That's the thing that this is something that you are going to commit to actually doing throughout the year, your outlook or your Gmail is not how you manage your customers.

**Mark V:** Yes.

**Mark S:** I just want to say that out loud once.

**Mark V:** My last company that I worked for when I was not in apparel, they managed everything out of a Gmail inbox, and it was because it was one guy who started it and he managed all of his orders out of his Gmail and then he brought a partner on and it was fine 2 guys, they were managing out of 1 inbox, no big deal and then they brought a third person and then a fourth, so now there are four people working out of an inbox and they might not have been in the same place and they were doing double work and forgetting, accidentally deleting all the time and it grew so fast that they didn't even realized that they got there before it was to the point where when I came on and I was like "what are you guys doing?" and he is like "I don't know"

**Mark S:** (Laughs) You mentioned the forgetting, you can actually make more money this year in 2016 if you adopt the CRM because what that will allow you to do is when an inquiry comes in or you get a new customer you are going to write it down and you are never going to lose them, I guarantee if you are not using a CRM then sometime this week you went "Oh I E-mailed a quote to this guy, I cannot remember, I think there was Dog in the name of the company, let me search dog in my Gmail account and see what comes up because I wonder I never got an order". if you are using CRM, you will never lose a customer, because you are going to schedule a followup in 2 weeks or in a month or next year so they order the same thing.

**Mark V:** Yeah and they have things called potentials, or sales orders, they have all these things after you talk to somebody and you quote them, you can create an event on the software that says "i quoted this person" and then the event stays open until you close it with -'never heard back' or 'closed the deal', 'lost the deal', 'won the deal', whatever it is then you will have these open events where eventually you will get to a point -okay I never heard from this customer back I am going to close it because they are done or you get the order and you close it, now you get to track a ton of cool information as well.

**Mark S:** Right that's true I like all that, for kind of information management what is cool is you get to type this on top of your legal pad and people that are going to see it will be really impressed, coz you are going to do "Inventory Management Plan" and that sounds very official and then you are going to do CRM or customer resource management or contact management as a way to keep track of your potential customers.

**Mark V:** So is there anything else on the business side for a plan.

**Mark S:** I was thinking about where we were talking I just wanted to add one thing in there, it is a part of the best of 2015 review -is do a little vendor review, don't just look at the products that you liked working with like blanks, look at the sources of products that you liked working with and didn't like working with.

**Mark V:** Yeah.

**Mark S:** So if one of the key vendors failed you in some way, so if you are ordering blanks and you love the shirt and everything but the guy that sells it to, didn't get it to you on time or they shipped you the wrong color two or three times and something like that, just put them on a red list and try to find somebody that is going to do a better job.

**Mark V:** And also because I am in the supply business, it is also important to manage how issues may have been handled and that's an important thing to deal with your vendor because you are not going to be free of mistakes and neither of any of your vendors but say, I order from the shirt company and they send me the wrong thing a couple of times and they charged me shipping on top of that and everything about them is unfriendly.

**Mark S:** They sucked.

**Mark V:** Yeah they sucked, I couldn't talk to anybody, I tried to call and compared to this company made a mistake with me, but I called them they rectified it; I was able to handle with my customer.

**Mark S:** That sounds like Colman and Company.

**Mark V:** We try.

**Mark S:** It really does.

**Mark V:** I think that will do it for the business side, let's move on to what we really like and that's the sales and marketing.

**Mark V:** I was wondering if that is the next episode, is it the next episode? We are half hour into this one, do we keep rocking it here or marketing growth checklist is Episode 25.

**Mark S:** I think they probably got a Legal pad full of stuff right now and maybe we should give them a week to work on this stuff, so, let's do that. For the business growth checklist for 2016 this is the business episode, this is the nuts and bolts episode and we will save the sales and marketing stuff for next week.

**Mark V:** And I think it is going to be really helpful to focus on two sides because on the first side you are going to say how and make it all organized and fresh and clean and know where I am going and where I want to be and then the next stage of it is how am I going to use that to get bigger and better and make more money.

**Mark S:** I like it, so let's recap the best of 2015 that we've done so far.

**Mark V:** Okay.

**Mark S:** So the first one is, the first section is to do that best of 2015 review, so you are going to figure out what the best blanks to work with and sell, you are going to look at your most profitable deal and try to duplicate that, and by try to duplicate that, that is finding similar customers to sell to or finding the most profitable item in there that you are going to push or feature.

**Mark V:** Yes if your most profitable stuff was when you made polo shirts for the sales people like I mentioned for that company, what other company in my area has sales people that wear shirts that either go to trade shows or outside sales people that maybe I can try to target some of those customers.

**Mark S:** Agreed and then you are going to look at the worst mistakes that you made and that worst mistake in 2015 could have been having to do with ordering the wrong shirts, trying a new material for a last minute job, it could have been working with customer blanks that you messed up, what else?

**Mark V:** Not testing something before you promise it. Over promising where you can't deliver a promise that you made, selling something for too inexpensive because you felt you really needed the deal and you might not have lost money on the deal but you lost so much time that you did lose money because you didn't make it anywhere else.

**Mark S:** Actually part of the 2015 review is I want you to go back and listen to the Know Your Numbers episode

**Mark V:** Yeah.

**Mark S:** Because those two episodes will help you do rest of what we are talking about for 2016. And then I added the vendor review, so I want to make sure that in 2016 you still want to do business with the same vendors that you did in 2015. The next thing is to work on the business side of your business.

**Mark V:** Money, making sure that you as we said, meet with somebody who knows about money and managing money and get some advice, you might do really well now but is there is a zero that you can improve? Are you literally that good that there is nothing you can improve?

**Mark S:** You are not in the finance business, you are in the apparel business.

**Mark V:** Yeah, so even if you do a good job it is still worth it at the end of that CPA meeting that say "hey I am trying to do think of doing one thing that I can do better" and even if you can get one thing better then I would say great, then get a second opinion maybe if you need to, maybe if your accountant works or maybe if your cousin who works out of his spare bedroom, maybe that is fine for finalling your taxes, but maybe you want to meet with somebody who is more of a financial expert for an hour.

**Mark S:** That can talk to you on things like cash flow and tax liability management and things like that.

**Mark V:** And if the person who does your taxes just had their car repossessed, take somebody different.

**Mark S:** Okay, the other things is you need to use software to manage your orders and to manage your financial life, so I want you to take a look at the available software packages out there and pick one to work with and that's also something that you can work with your accountant on.

**Mark V:** And as I mentioned pick something that you are going to feel comfortable with, watch the videos, look at their pricing and in the beginning do not go with something that is crazy expensive unless your business can really afford it.

**Mark S:** Right, that's true.

**Mark V:** And if you cannot afford it, there are plenty of things that are free or inexpensive or you can pay a non committal monthly agreement to and in 90 days you could say this one is not for me and then you can adjust.

**Mark S:** Try something different. And the other thing we have was order entry and order management which is also part of managing your financial life.

**Mark V:** Yes and it is keeping track of your customer and their orders in a good organized place where you can keep all the invoices and sales quotes and receipts.

**Mark S:** Which we recommend that it's the accounting software, that's our recommendation. We don't often make an actual recommendation that's why.

**Mark V:** Yeah, exactly, so have sort of Customer Relationship Management software a CRM where you can do quotes in that CRM and save them and create reminders for yourself and you and your customers.

**Mark S:** Yeah in 2016 make yourself a pledge that you are never going to lose another customer or another deal because you didn't call back or you didn't follow up, you decided not to send the next E-mail.

**Mark V:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mark S:** And also as a big part of the information management it is managing your inventory, make sure that you have enough in stock so you can do what you estimate is the next 60 days worth of job is going to be.

**Mark V:** I think that's all great.

**Mark S:** I do too actually, I think if you did those thing there is no reason to listen... that's not true, you still need to listen to the next episode, but I think if you do those things, if you take your legal pad, rewrite your notes, listen to this podcast again if you missed something then you will be better.

**Mark V:** You will be better, it is one of those things, I am not always great at re-evaluating things myself but I always try to focus on a couple of things to re-evaluate and really put a focus on it and anything in life and if you do that and you pay attention to it, just actually the act of doing that means you will do better. Almost a guarantee.

**Mark S:** Yeah, I agree, I am kind of proud of this episode, I think this is the one that you could share, you can share it with anybody that is starting a business or just kicking off their business and they will be able to get something out of it.

**Mark V:** Yeah that would be nice to do. I would like to ask you to maybe just share it with somebody else because we put some work into it for you.

**Mark S:** Yeah put it on your Facebook page or Google + it (if anybody still does that) or tweet it or Instagram it or whatever it is.

**Mark V:** Yeah, Instagram it.

**Mark S:** Instagram it, take a big picture of yourself listening to the podcast with a happy expression on your face.

**Mark V:** Okay great.

**Mark S:** Okay, guys this has been Episode 24 of the Custom Apparel Startups Podcast my name is Mark Stephenson.

**Mark V:** And I am Marc Vila thanks for listening

**Mark S:** Have a good business.