

HOW TO SELL YOUR BUSINESS

A Practical Guide for New Zealand Business
Owners Wanting to Exit on Their Terms

HOW TO SELL YOUR BUSINESS

Maximise Value,
Minimise Stress

PETER NOLA

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You can only sell your business once.

*It pays to do everything you can to get the
best possible result when you do sell.*

Peter Nola

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Foreword

What Kiwi Business Owners Really Want

Most New Zealand business owners heading into a sale have remarkably similar goals and expectations and, having walked that same path myself – I get it. I’ve owned businesses, sold them, and helped others do the same. I know firsthand what matters when it’s your name above the door.

At the core of it, we want a sale price that reflects all the effort, risk, and sacrifice we’ve poured into the business. Not just the financials, but the early mornings, the late nights, the missed holidays, and the sheer emotional investment. If there’s a premium on the goodwill or a performance-based bonus thrown in, even better.

But once we’ve made the call to sell, we want it done. Now.

Not months from now. Now.

Today, if possible. Tomorrow at the latest.

Whether it’s burnout, retirement, or just time for a new chapter, most sellers reach a point where they’re ready to move on, quickly, cleanly, and with as little fuss and as much value as possible.

We also want the process to be discreet. We don’t want to rattle the staff, spook the clients, or have the market speculating. A whisper of a sale can lead to doubt, hesitation, or even defections, from employees, customers, and suppliers. And no seller wants to watch their business performance dip just because word got out too soon.

If we had it our way, the ideal scenario would be a premium price, a fast turnaround, and complete confidentiality, with only the buyer ever knowing the business was even on the market.

How do you do this?

I know how.

Just ask me.

It's what I do.

Peter Nola

Introduction

Why This Book Exists

If you're thinking about selling your business, you're not alone. Every year, thousands of New Zealand business owners reach a point where they ask themselves: *Is it time?* Maybe you're ready to retire, take a step back, or simply move on to something new. Maybe you're tired, burned out, or looking to free up time, capital, or both.

But here's the uncomfortable truth: most small business owners don't know how to sell their business the right way. They either wait too long, choose the wrong buyer, or get caught out by issues that could have been avoided. Deals fall over. Good businesses go unsold. Or worse, they sell for far less than they're worth.

Whatever your situation, selling your business is one of the most important things you'll ever do. Unlike virtually every other decision you've made over the years, this one happens once. You get a single chance to put a price tag on possibly decades of hard work.

There are no second chances. And that's why this book exists.

Most Owners Only Do This Once

There's no doubt it's incredibly hard work to build a successful business. And when the time comes to sell, of course you'll want to get the best price possible, in the shortest reasonable time, with the least amount of drama. But wanting a good outcome isn't enough, you have to know what you're doing.

And the truth is, most owners don't. Not because they aren't smart, they

are. But because selling a business is a specialised process, with different rules, risks, and rhythms than running one. Over the past 20 years, I've advised on hundreds of business sales across nearly every industry, from small owner-operators to multi-million-dollar deals. I've seen what works, and more importantly, what doesn't.

Here's what I've learned:

- Most owners wait too long to prepare.
- They assume their accountant or lawyer will 'sort it', but most don't specialise in business sales.
- They overestimate value, underestimate risk, and get caught off guard during due diligence.
- And many aren't truly committed to selling – they'd 'consider it for the right price'. That dollar-each-way attitude kills more deals than you'd think.

Sure, you'll hear stories about someone who sold their business because a buyer knocked on the door with an amazing offer. Those stories are real, but they're about as common as winning Lotto. You can't rely on luck. You need a plan.

What This Book Will Do for You

This isn't a textbook. It's not written by a lawyer or accountant. It's written by someone who's spent nearly two decades doing exactly this: working with real owners, real buyers, and real businesses in the New Zealand market.

In plain English, this book will help you:

- decide if now is the right time to sell, and if you're truly ready
- understand what buyers are really looking for (and why it might not be what you think)
- prepare your business so it's attractive, credible, and saleable

- value your business realistically, and understand what drives or limits that value
- avoid the traps that derail many small business sales
- navigate brokers, buyers, negotiations, and due diligence without losing your mind
- structure the deal to protect yourself legally and financially
- plan a clean, professional handover, and move into the next phase of life with confidence

This is practical, New Zealand-specific advice. You'll see terms like GST, vendor finance, working capital, and net surplus explained in plain language, with examples drawn from real-world business sales, not corporate mergers or American case studies.

Who This Book Is (and Isn't) For

This book is written for the medium-sized business owner, the engineer, the importer, the tradie with a team, the franchisee, the manufacturer, the consultant, the couple running a business together, anyone who's built something substantial and saleable, and is now wondering how to exit it well.

It's especially for those aged 50 and up, who've put years into their business and want to make sure they don't drop the ball at this late stage. Maybe you're still a few years out, or maybe you're ready now. Either way, the decisions you make from here matter.

If you're a corporate group divesting a division, or a private equity firm flipping assets, this book probably isn't for you. And if you're hoping someone will just show up with a cheque and make it all easy, well, you might be waiting a while.

But if you're serious about selling, and want to do it properly, with minimal stress and maximum return, you're in the right place.

About the Author

I've been a business broker in New Zealand for nearly 20 years, advising on hundreds of transactions across virtually every industry, from small owner-operator businesses to multi-million-dollar acquisitions. I'm also a former business owner who's sat on the other side of the table, and a professional coach and mentor to other business owners. What you'll find in this book isn't theory. It's what works in the real world.

My Promise to You

I won't sugar-coat it: selling a business can be hard. There will be moments of doubt, frustration, and complexity. But with the right preparation, advice, and process, it can also be one of the most satisfying, empowering things you ever do.

My goal is simple: to help you sell your business the right way, the first time, and walk away proud of what you achieved, and what you got paid for it.

Let's get started.

Common Exit Strategies

Selling your business isn't something you should leave to chance, or to the last minute. If you want to walk away with the best possible result, you need a plan. That's what an *exit strategy* is: a clear, considered approach to how you'll leave your business and what happens next.

Whether you're planning to retire, try something new, or just want to cash in on what you've built, a well-thought-out exit strategy increases your chances of achieving the outcome you want, financially, emotionally, and professionally.

Why You Need One

The most successful business owners often start with the end in mind. They know how they'd like to exit long before they're ready to walk away. That doesn't mean they're constantly trying to sell, it means they're building with options.

An exit strategy gives you clarity. It helps you make better decisions while you still own the business. And when the time comes to sell, you're not scrambling. You're in control.

Five Common Exit Strategies

Here are some of the most common ways business owners in New Zealand exit their businesses, each with its own pros, cons, and considerations.

1. Sell on the Open Market

This is the most common approach. You list the business for sale (often through

a broker), attract enquiries, negotiate terms, and eventually sign a contract with a buyer.

Buyers might be strangers, clients, employees, or even friends. The key here is preparation. A well-prepared business that's marketed effectively can draw competition and result in a strong sale price.

Best for: Owners ready to walk away cleanly, ideally after a short handover.

Watch out for: Surprises during due diligence, unrealistic price expectations, or waiting too long and losing momentum.

2. Sell to a Competitor (Mergers & Acquisitions).....

If your business holds market share, valuable IP, or loyal clients, it might be attractive to a competitor. These kinds of sales often fall under the banner of 'mergers and acquisitions' (M&A).

Competitors may see your business as a faster, cheaper way to grow than building from scratch. If structured well, it can be a win-win: you get a solid exit, and they expand their footprint.

Best for: Businesses with a strong brand, customer base, or regional advantage.

Watch out for: Confidentiality breaches during the process and culture clashes post-sale if staff are retained.

3. Bring in a Partner or Manager.....

If your business generates consistent profits and can run without your daily input, you might consider stepping back rather than stepping out. This could involve:

- Promoting a manager to take over operations

- Selling shares to a key staff member over time
- Bringing in a family member to take the reins

This option allows you to retain some ownership or income, while reducing your day-to-day involvement.

Best for: Owners who aren't ready to fully retire or want to ease out gradually.

Watch out for: Misaligned expectations, unclear leadership transitions, or underestimating how involved you'll still need to be.

4. *Let's See What the Market Says (The No-Plan Plan)*

This is, unfortunately, an all too common approach, and the worst.

It goes like this: the owner keeps running the business with no exit plan, until one day they wake up exhausted or burned out. Then it's a mad dash to the broker: *'What's it worth? Just get me out.'*

At this point, it's often too late to make the improvements that would have lifted the value. The result is usually a disappointing sale price and a feeling of regret.

Best for: No one. This isn't a strategy, it's a surrender.

Watch out for: Letting emotion or fatigue drive the process instead of preparation and timing.

5. *Liquidate and Close*

Not all businesses will sell, especially those with limited assets, declining profits or a business dependant on the owner alone. In these cases, the only option might be to wind things up: sell off equipment, pay off creditors, and shut the doors.

It's not what most owners envision after years of effort. And while it might be the right choice in some cases, it's usually the result of no planning, rather than poor performance.

Best for: Microbusinesses, side hustles, or businesses that were never truly scalable or saleable.

Watch out for: Emotional impact and failing to protect what value is left.

The Bottom Line

You only sell your business once, and how you exit matters. The sooner you start thinking about it, the more options you'll have, and the better your chances of walking away satisfied.

A good broker (that would be me), accountant, and lawyer can help you shape your exit plan based on your goals, your timeline, and the current market.

The right exit strategy isn't always obvious, but not having one is a mistake every time.

CHAPTER 1

When is it Time to Sell?

If you're asking the question, *'Is it time to sell?'*, you're already further down the path than you might think.

Many business owners don't make the decision to sell in one bold moment. It creeps up quietly, a sense of restlessness, frustration, or fatigue. Or perhaps just the feeling that something else is waiting for you on the other side.

For most business owners, a kind of inevitability precedes the decision to sell their business.

Often, owners tell me, *'It just feels like the right time.'* And they're usually right.

But what makes it *'the right time?'* And how do you know you're not selling too early ... or too late?

There's no one-size-fits-all answer, but there are a few patterns that come up again and again.

Life Happens

The most common trigger for a business sale is life itself.

- A health scare.
- A family shift, maybe the kids are leaving home, or the grandkids are arriving.
- A divorce, a death, or just the realisation that you've been running hard for 20 years and would rather spend your mornings on the golf course than stuck in emails and staffing issues.

Sometimes it's a financial need.

Other times, it's emotional, a growing disconnect between you and the business you once loved. You don't bounce out of bed anymore. You're tired. You're over it. That spark that drove you to grow, build, and push through the hard stuff – it's flickering. And if you're honest, you don't really want it back.

If any of this sounds familiar, don't ignore it. Those feelings are signals, and they're telling you it might be time to let go.

The Business Life Cycle

Every business, like every person, has a natural life cycle. There's the start-up hustle, the growth years, the consolidation stage, and eventually, maturity.

The best time to sell? Just *before* the business reaches its peak.

It might feel counterintuitive, why sell when things are going well? But that's *exactly* the time when buyers get excited. Strong numbers, a stable team, clear systems, and growth potential? That's gold. You'll attract better offers and more motivated buyers when your business looks like it's still climbing, not coasting or declining.

Leave it too long, and signs of fatigue, in the numbers or in you, start to creep in. Revenue plateaus. Staff turnover increases. Innovation stalls. And buyers notice.

If the thought of making the next big investment, a rebrand, new machinery, system upgrades, or staff changes, makes you sigh instead of smile, that's a clue. A new owner may be more willing (and energised) to take that leap.

By exiting early, you give them the runway to create new value, and you walk away before things get tough or tired ... and with maximum value

The Market Matters

Sometimes the best time to sell has less to do with *you* and more to do with *what's happening around you*.