ARRINGTON CONSULTANCY

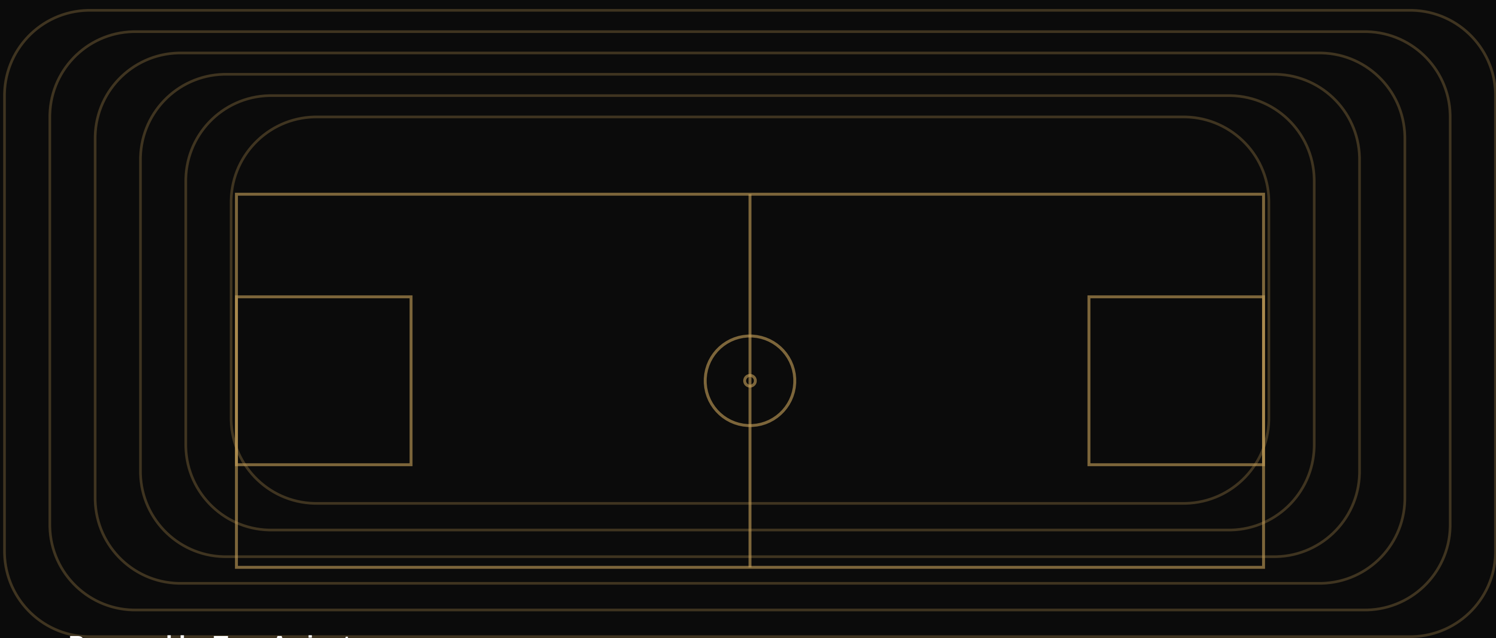
OWNER-RUN SERVICE BUSINESS | PUBLIC VERSION

THE MIND THAT BUILT THE BUSINESS KEEPS BUILDING THE NEXT STADIUM

“The business keeps building the full stadium before checking whether anyone is coming to the match.”

A blunt commercial review of the projects, platforms and “big answers” that absorbed time, money and attention before the basics were proven.

Public version: names, organisations, locations, dates, figures and other identifying details have been redacted or generalised.



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THE POINT

The business does not have an ideas problem. It has a finish line problem.

The owner built something real. He sees opportunity quickly and his mind does not switch off. That same trait is now producing nine starts for every finish, and AI has made the gap between a rough thought and a finished-looking programme almost disappear. He needs to apply the Tom Rules and the eight questions to himself before an idea leaves his head.

A business decision has an owner, a cost, a deadline and a way of knowing whether it worked. Too many projects have had a name, a grand promise and a large document, but no proper finish line.

1. A real problem appears
2. A new magic bullet is found
3. The idea becomes a huge plan
4. Time and money go in
5. The result is not measured
6. Attention moves to the next idea

THE ONLY QUESTION THAT EARNS THE NEXT POUND

How does this recruit, support or retain more clients through the business?

If the business cannot answer that clearly, agree the owner and show the evidence, the project does not start.

Nine ideas. Only the basics get first-team money.

CRM merry-go-round	Paid, changed and still not reliably usable	RED CARD
Website rebuild	A year of rework. No proven lead engine	RED CARD
AI-enabled service platform	A full platform designed before a single pilot	PAUSE
High-profile partnership programme	A real relationship. Repeat demand not proven	CONTROLLED TEST
Tiered paid-service offer	Designed offer. No clear evidence of launch	PARK
Partner consortium	Referral value may be real. Formal model is unproven	MEASURE
Third-party national platform	Third-party moonshot, not a current business priority	ARCHIVE
Digital Workspace Programme	Finish the basics before building the umbrella	STRIP BACK
Staff development plan	A genuine need. Test the small version first	30-DAY PILOT

TOM VERDICT

Nothing on this page is banned forever. But none of it gets to jump ahead of working lead control, one finished website, clear numbers and cash collection.

RED CARD

Four directions in a short period. Still no settled working system.

EARLY STAGE

Another CRM is next

The owner records an intention to leave the old bespoke system and move to a larger platform once the website forms are ready.

SOON AFTER

More than £2,500 committed

An annual licence is bought. Within weeks, the implementation is already being questioned.

WEEKS LATER

The warning is written down

The files warn that changing systems without fixing the process could recreate the same mess in another platform.

NEXT

A replacement becomes the answer

A rapid full build is proposed at several thousand pounds in year one.

THEN

A full week goes into development

The owner allocates a week to the replacement CRM while basic import and structure questions remain open.

AFTER LAUNCH

The team records nine failures

Staff cannot reliably see, create, report on, notify or move leads. Duplicate data can overwrite an existing contact.

THE PROMISE

One clean client journey from enquiry to conversion and income.

THE REALITY

The product changed faster than the business process. Staff were left with a system that blocked basic work.

THE COMMERCIAL RISK

More missed follow-up, unreliable data, another sunk cost and another round of retraining.

TOM VERDICT

Do not buy another CRM.

Fix the current CRM, formally accept it, or recover the cost. The next system will not rescue a process that has never been settled.

Evidence: Internal website note; CRM invoice; implementation review; replacement CRM proposal; owner brief; staff defect report. Source titles and dates redacted.

RED CARD

A lead engine that has spent more time being rebuilt than being tested.

clientwebsite.com / another-new-version / final-final-2

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

The platform, copy, positioning, developer route and definition of “finished” kept moving.

EARLY Launch promised. Campaigns held back while the business waited.

NEXT Another website request document appears.

LATER The basic positioning is reopened across every page.

THEN Another build route, more briefs, more archived versions and more rework.

SEVERAL THOUSAND

Website spend reported by the client. The full invoice trail still needs verifying.

NO PROVEN ENGINE

The site has not been left alone long enough to prove qualified enquiries, qualified enquiries or conversions.

TOM VERDICT

Pick one route. Finish it. Measure it.

No further strategic rewrite until the chosen version has had a fair

Evidence: Internal website notes, supplier requests, positioning paper and revised website folders. Source titles and dates redacted.

PAUSE

A full stadium drawn in less than an hour.

In less than an hour, staged documents turned an idea into a website, CRM, messaging system, client portal, advice centre, AI assistant, readiness scoring, live reviews, dashboards, funding proposition and international growth model.

WEBSITE
CRM
MESSAGING
CLIENT PORTAL
ADVICE CENTRE
AI ASSISTANT
READINESS SCORE
LIVE REVIEWS
DASHBOARDS
FUNDING
GLOBAL SCALE

WHAT IS NOT THERE YET

- × Approved business case
- × Confirmed development budget
- × Named delivery owner
- × Working client portal
- × Live AI assistant
- × Measured pilot
- × Business data proving return
- × Staff operating agreement

TOM VERDICT

Interesting idea. Not a programme.

Pilot one useful component with a small group of real clients. No portal, no investor document and no platform spend until the pilot proves something.

Evidence: Four staged platform documents created in one sitting. Project title and date redacted.

CONTROLLED TEST

One real relationship became a flagship programme in days.

WHAT IS REAL

One genuine client relationship exists.

The records contain an offer, acceptance, payment and completed case-stage evidence. There is a real connection and a real first case.

WHAT IS NOT PROVEN

There is no evidence yet of a repeatable high-profile referral pipeline: no confirmed referral codes, additional qualified enquiries, further conversions, income or operating commitment from the external partner.

DAY 1 A partnership pathway appears with reference codes, a landing page, an application fee and discounts.

DAY 2 The idea expands into two pathways, events, visits, placements, alumni activity and adoption by similar networks.

DAYS LATER A substantial legacy document is prepared and sent.

THE SIX-MONTH TEST

- One named external contact
- A limited number of referral codes
- Target for qualified enquiries
- Target for completed conversions
- A fixed review date
- No events or bespoke technology before referrals

TOM VERDICT

Treat one client as one client, not proof of a market. Earn the right to call it a programme through repeat referrals.

Evidence: Partnership proposal, expansion paper, legacy document and first-client records. Names and dates redacted.

Designed. Named. Expanded. Not yet made to pay.

TIERED PAID-SERVICE OFFER

PARK

The idea: Charge clients for enhanced support for enhanced support.

The evidence: A detailed offer and website table existed. I found no clear launch approval, payment trail, assigned clients, delivery procedure or sales result.

Decision: Park it. Do not revive it until the business knows whether charging supports or damages trust, and what the promised service actually costs to deliver.

THE PARTNER CONSORTIUM

MEASURE

The idea: Several businesses combine partner agreements, share commission 70/30 and use a shared tracking tool.

The evidence: The proposal is real and the business does have genuine referral relationships. What is not proven is that the formal consortium launched as described or that its shared tool was built.

Decision: Measure the relationships that already work. Do not build consortium software until referral volume earns it.

THIRD-PARTY NATIONAL PLATFORM

ARCHIVE

The idea: A national, publicly funded AI service platform targeting hundreds of thousands of users and tens of millions of pounds in annual revenue.

The evidence: This is third-party material, not clearly a client-owned project. I found no client pilot, funding, users, revenue or defined delivery role.

Decision: Archive as third-party material unless someone can state the business’s role, commitment and next commercial step.

One needs cutting back. One needs proving small.

DIGITAL WORKSPAC PROGRAMME

STRIP BACK

The programme joins the website, document system, CRM, communication tools, permissions, a staff portal, learning hub, knowledge base and future AI, dashboards, lists and automation.

The problem: This can make unfinished basics look like a transformation programme. The CRM was still broken, the website was unsettled and the commercial reporting was fragmented.

Tom decision: Strip it to three outcomes only:
1. The CRM works.
2. One website is finished.
3. Staff know where the right documents live.

STAFF DEVELOPME

30-DAY PILOT

This starts with a genuine need: develop a team member's specialist knowledge and confidence.

The concern is not the aim. It is how quickly the answer grew into multiple market guides, partner profiles, weekly presentations, advanced topics and contributions to the wider AI-enabled platform.

Tom decision: Run the 30-day version:
- one market guide
- one priority partner profile
- one presentation
- agreed time allowance
- review with the team member and managers

Expand only if the pilot works.

TOM VERDICT

A large plan can feel like progress. It is only progress when somebody uses it, it improves the work and the result can be seen.

Evidence: Digital workspace programme and staff-development programme. Names and dates redacted.

The invoice is only the visible part of the cost.

£2,500+

Verified.
Annual licence paid for a CRM later questioned.

HUNDREDS

Verified invoice.
IT support, equipment setup and CRM integration work. Not all of it is CRM cost.

SEVERAL THOUSAND

Proposed.
Replacement CRM first-year options. Actual payment still needs confirming.

SEVERAL THOUSAND WEBSITE

Reported directly by the client. The full invoice trail has not yet been matched and should be verified.

AT LEAST ONE FULL WEEK

The owner recorded that a week had been allocated to CRM development, before counting meetings, rework and staff frustration.

THE HIDDEN BILL

The biggest cost is not the invoice.

It is the campaign that waited for the website, the lead that was not visible, the manager's week lost to configuration, the staff meeting spent discussing the same fault, and the useful work pushed aside by another rebuild.

Before any more money is committed, the business needs one reconciled schedule showing software, suppliers, website work, CRM work, refunds available, subscriptions still running and the staff time being consumed.

Evidence: CRM invoice, supplier receipt, replacement-system proposal and website cost supplied by the client. Names, dates and exact figures redacted.

Protect the clients, the leads and the cash already within reach.

1

MAKE THE CRM PASS AN ACCEPTANCE TEST

Resolve the nine defects. Prove that staff can see, create, move, notify, report and close leads. No replacement CRM.

2

FINISH ONE WEBSITE

Choose one route, put it live, track qualified enquiries and conversions. Stop competing builds.

3

FOLLOW CONVERSION THROUGH TO CASH

For every converted client: commission expected, purchase order, invoice, cash received, referral payment and net amount retained.

4

WORK THE TOP 20 PARTNERS

Current terms, last application, last conversion, last payment, next opportunity and net contribution.

5

RECOVER OR CANCEL OVERLAPPING COSTS

Confirm previous CRM, current CRM, website and supplier spend. Seek correction, credit or refund where work was not delivered.

NO MATERIAL SPEND YET ON

Another CRM • Full AI-enabled service platform • AI presenter • Client portal • Consortium software • Another website route • Partnership events or bespoke technology • Investor-grade platform brochure

No more projects that arrive with a name but no finish line.

1. WHAT PROBLEM ARE WE ACTUALLY SOLVING?
2. WHAT COMMERCIAL RESULT SHOULD CHANGE?
3. WHO OWNS IT?
4. WHAT WILL IT COST IN MONEY AND STAFF TIME?
5. WHAT EXISTING WORK STOPS OR MOVES?
6. WHAT EVIDENCE WILL PROVE IT WORKED?
7. WHEN IS THE REVIEW DATE?
8. WHAT IS THE KILL RULE?

THE TOM RULES

- No project begins on the day it is presented.
- No project is complete because somebody says it is. The evidence must exist.
- No project gets more than one extension without a full review.
- If staff recommend stopping and the owner continues, both positions and the reason are recorded.
- Ideas are cheap. Follow-through is the expensive bit.

Every current idea gets a decision, a deadline and proof.

CRM	Fix and formally accept. No replacement.	30 days	Nine issues closed. Five live cases completed end to end.
Website	Choose one route and stop the others.	14 days	Live, tracked and no competing build.
Partnership programme	Run a six-month controlled test.	Set now	Named contact, referral target, application target, review date.
AI-enabled platform	Park the platform. Define one pilot only.	90 days	A small pilot with real clients and measured use.
Tiered paid service	Formally park or close.	14 days	Written decision and no hidden delivery commitment.
Partner consortium	Measure existing relationships.	60 days	Clients, conversions, income, payout and net result by partner.
Digital Workspace	Cut back to three basic outcomes.	30 days	CRM works, one website finished, correct document homes agreed.
Staff development	Run the small pilot.	30 days	One guide, one profile, one presentation and team review.

TOM VERDICT

The test is not whether the documents look impressive. The test is whether the business can answer: what are we doing, who owns it, what happens next and did it make money or improve the client experience?

FINAL WHISTLE

AMBITION IS
NOT THE PROBLEM.

The business has real relationships, capable people and clients to serve.

The problem is treating every new idea as the answer before the last answer has been made to work.

BUILD THE CROWD FIRST.

Then build the next stand.

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What this judgement is built on, and what still needs checking.

E1 Website project note

Launch deadline, campaigns held back and proposed system change. Names and date redacted.

E2 CRM invoice

Annual licence above £2,500. Supplier and date redacted.

E3 CRM implementation review

Implementation concerns and warning against repeating the same problem in another CRM.

E4 Replacement CRM proposal

Scope and proposed year-one investment. Supplier and date redacted.

E5 Owner CRM brief

Week allocated to development and unresolved design/import questions.

E6 Staff CRM defect report

Nine material staff and system issues.

E7 Website positioning paper

Core website positioning reopened.

E8 AI-enabled platform stages

Platform scope, delivery claims and presentation ambition.

E9 Partnership proposal files

Pathway, flagship programme and legacy expansion. Names and dates redacted.

E10 First-client records

Offer, acceptance, payment and case-stage evidence. Identity redacted.

E11 Tiered paid-service paper

Client-paid service design.

E12 Partner consortium proposal

Multi-business model and proposed shared tool.

E13 Third-party platform draft

National platform and eight-figure revenue model.

E14 Digital workspace programme

Integrated digital transformation scope.

E15 Staff training programme

Proposed development scope.

E16 Supplier receipt

Support, equipment and CRM-integration work. Name, date and figure redacted.

DO NOT OVERSTATE THESE POINTS

- The website cost was provided directly by the client and still needs matching to invoices and bank payments.
- The replacement CRM proposal shows options, not confirmed payment.
- The partnership programme was new and may have informal enquiries not visible in the searched files.
- I have not proven that no client ever bought the tiered service, or that the consortium produced no client.
- The national platform appears third-party. Do not describe it as the owner’s failed project without further evidence.