How tech is leveling the playing field for small businesses

And how you can use it to compete with the big guys
Small businesses. This is your big moment.

These are glorious times to be growing a small business.

The evidence is everywhere. US business openings have consistently outpaced closures for every year since 2010.¹

At the same time, US small businesses — yours included — are currently creating the lion’s share of our country’s new jobs.² (Thank you.)

Why are small businesses thriving?

Right now, you’ve all your traditional advantages over bigger players:

• You’re closer to the customer, and their needs and frustrations, letting you deliver better, more personalized customer service.

• You’re flatter and leaner, that flatness helps great ideas spark and travel more easily. The leanness lets you act on them without delay.

• You’re attractive to the best young talent, because of that flatter structure, and because in a smaller company, they can have a greater stake in its success.

But you’ve one massive, fresh advantage, too.

The latest technology is playing straight into your hands...

Tech: the great leveler

Those time-proven advantages of being small? Modern tech is giving you the tools to work them like never before.

Tech is on your side

Digital, cloud and mobile — they’re all helping small businesses get even closer to customers, to stay flatter and leaner even as they grow, and to turn their organization into an even more exciting, attractive place to work.

At the same time, they’re pulling down barriers to market entry, speeding distribution channels, and generally taking a steamroller to the old, wildly uneven playing fields.

With the right tech on its side, any small business can now come from nowhere and score a breathtaking touchdown against the big guys.

Just don’t leave it on the bench

Or course, new, innovative tech is available to everyone. Your advantage depends on one thing, your ability to adopt it faster than the big, slow-turning competition.

If you don’t, you give up that advantage. And you may well get trampled on by more tech-savvy competitors.

Here’s how to make sure you’re using modern technology to the greatest possible effect...
How to turn tech to your advantage. Your checklist.
01 Embrace apps

As mobile devices have grown smarter, and cloud delivery more widespread, there’s been a surge in the number of apps available to help you run your business. CRM, Accounting, HR, Project Management, you name it... there’s an app for that.

With most new businesses born mobile, embracing such apps can be an easy decision — helping you and your team work virtually anytime, anywhere, and act even faster than ever.

Get inspired by:

Everyone from Coca-Cola, to switched-on one person shops

Companies of every size are seizing the opportunities presented by mobile business apps.

Coca-Cola general manager, Ulrik Nehammer, now runs most of his business from a phone, while one-man handyman business, Dan Perry uses his smartphone for managing customers, quoting, tracking, taking payments and more.

02 Put data to work

Today, data analytics services aren’t just for big businesses. They’ll help you take the information you’re rapidly building up about your operations and your customers, and turn it into fresh insights, and opportunities.

There are a host of services out there to help. Here’s just a few:

- Google Analytics, the popular web analytics service lets you understand how well your website is serving your business
- IBM’s Watson Analytics promises new insights throughout your business, answering key HR, Finance and Operations questions
- Canopy Labs lets you crunch customer data to learn more about your customer journey

Get inspired by:

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

Predicting zoo attendance is tough, and that makes planning how many staff to bring in tough, too. But this Tacoma zoo has used analytics to crunch historical weather and attendance data, and make smarter staffing decisions, time and time again.
Stay light

If there’s one technology trend that’s really hitting the home runs for small businesses, it’s cloud.

Many small businesses would traditionally have had to invest in servers, storage, a private branch exchange, business software, and IT support just to get moving.

Now, by choosing cloud-based apps and infrastructure — i.e. accessed over the internet, and supported by someone else — it’s possible to grow without creating an IT department, and sacrificing your invaluable agility.

Get inspired by:

Coupa

This leading procurement services company has built itself entirely in the cloud using email from Google, CRM from Salesforce, and a server from Amazon Web Services.
Stay lean

It’s not just cloud tech that’s letting small businesses keep both headcounts and costs in check. Business automation and savvy support models are helping, too.

From the function-specific (think marketing automation suites) to the extremely flexible (think ‘automate anything’ tools) business automation can cut down the number on names you need on your payroll.

When it comes to delivering customer support, online communities can also help smaller businesses punch above their weight — giving customers a space to help each other, and you a way to employ a smaller in-house team.

Communicate without cost

The internet has gifted the world, and your small business, with simple, cost-effective communication.

Why pay to travel to meetings, when you can meet in Google Hangouts or via Skype? Or pay for email, when you could use Gmail — or a next-generation team messaging tool, like Slack — instead?

If you outsource IT support too, you can really drive down your communication costs.

Get inspired by:

Ears of Experience

This travel concierge business automates everything from emails to monthly payments, trimming down its costs.

Get inspired by:

Spotlight Parking

The self-professed ‘Uber’ of valet parking has relied on Google Hangouts for its corporate meetings from day one.
Once upon a time you needed deep pockets to grow a business. But now, pay-as-you-go tech — from cloud apps and infrastructure to mobile devices — is breaking down barriers to market entry. The best pay-as-you-go options offer:

- Next-to-no upfront investment
- Simple ways to scale up as you grow

Get inspired by:

**Slack**

How did the real-time messaging service achieve its meteoric rise? With rapidly scalable cloud infrastructure.
Look beyond borders

Technology has given every business access to a global marketplace of suppliers and customers.

Now you can source from the best, lowest-cost suppliers, regardless of where they’re based, and sell globally as well, all with a small, local team. All you need is a trusty internet connection and a trusted e-commerce platform.

And with widespread adoption of social media, marketing to those global prospects and customers is getting cheaper and easier, too.

Own the space

Really want to make waves? Many of today’s most famous small businesses are building peer-to-peer marketplaces, and overturning existing industries in the process.

By owning the space where business happens, companies like Uber and Airbnb have been able to go huge, fast.

Get inspired by:

**Gelb Music**

The decision to embrace global sales can make a massive difference to a small business. This Redwood City music store started selling internationally on eBay seven years ago, and exports now account for almost 30 percent of its total sales.

Get inspired by:

**Airbnb**

In 2007, Airbnb founders Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbi needed money for rent — so they built a site to help them let out their loft space. By 2014, Airbnb was valued at $10 billion.
What new opportunities could you create by connecting your business’ assets or products to the internet? We don’t know. But you should.

The technology that underpins the Internet of Things is getting cheaper, and effectively harnessing it depends on having big ideas, not big bucks.

Get inspired by:

EllieGrid

The award-winning start-up is building a smart pill box that may soon revolutionize medication-taking, and even save lives.
Let’s talk

Business technology is evolving at an astonishing pace. And that’s great news for small, agile organizations like yours. Not sure where to start? We help small businesses make smart tech decisions every day.

Contact your local Sprint representative today to learn more. Call 1-877-633-1102 or see more details on smallbusiness.sprint.com