

Nine ways to use technology to make business easier

In today's fast paced business world, technology has become as essential to success as a great idea. It's a real equalizer that puts even the smallest business on equal footing with the big players.

To grow your business you'll need to harness the power of technology and use it to your advantage. Here are nine ways you can do just that.

1. Ditch in-house hardware

Out with the old and in with the new. Can you downsize some of your business's hardware to become a more mobile, flexible organization?

Getting rid of excess baggage like desktops, monitors, servers and network switches will save your business money and reduce clutter. You may even be able to move offices into a smaller space that's more cost effective.

2. Look for sustainable solutions

Savvy business owners are constantly looking towards technology to reduce their expenses and to become more sustainable. Finding the right sustainable solutions for your business can translate into time, waste and cost savings. Ask yourself:

- Can you team up with another business to save on IT costs?
- Do you really need to travel to meet clients when you can collaborate on the cloud or via Skype?
- Can you implement some simple sustainability steps, such as recycling, choosing energy efficient equipment, and switching off when not in use?

3. Utilize sales data

You can find out a lot about your customers simply by examining your sales data, or by installing a system that collects certain information about each customer and their purchase.

For example, you might want to find out the times of day when most customers purchase from your business. Knowing this information could be a catalyst for running price or bulk specials at these times of the day.

4. Advertise with social media

There are opportunities to advertise to your target market on social media. For example, Facebook lets you make an advert and choose what type of audience you want viewing it.

If you have a Twitter account for your business and you want to get more of your tweets viewed or gain more followers, create some Twitter ads. First choose the location where you want to reach potential customers and then set a budget for your promotional tweets. Be sure to promote tweets that link back to your website or blog, rather than general tweets about your industry.

5. Embrace mobile solutions

The modern smartphone is essentially like a mobile office. Use it to manage meetings, track expenses, autotype emails, and stay organized.

Provide your sales staff with mobile ordering software that's linked to your inventory so they can process sales on the go. And speed up your receivables process to get paid quicker.

6. Create a virtual workforce

How much could your business save by dropping your premises and going virtual? Many businesses are already completely virtual, with no physical office and employees spread across the globe. The advantages for your business include:

- Flexible work hours, and potentially staff working round the clock from different time zones.
- Happier staff and fewer overheads.
- Easier to scale your business without having a restrictive office space to utilize.

7. Adopt an innovative business model

Changes in technology have helped shape the way for businesses to try alternative business models. Some examples of the past few years, like Airbnb (which facilitates person-to-person exchanges) and FedBid (which harnesses reverse auctions to sell products and services to the first willing buyer) show that an innovative business model can be successful.

Is there an online model that you can utilize to make your business easier and ultimately create more sales opportunities?

8. Take back time

By making changes to your business using new technology where possible, you can begin to take back more of your precious time – time that could be spent working on gaining new clients.

If you and your key staff members can spend less time doing their routine tasks that simply have to be completed, they'll have extra time for more productive tasks such as keeping old customers happy or winning new ones.

9. Automate your processes

The more processes in your business that can be automated (without the loss of customer satisfaction), the more efficient your business will become. For example, many businesses these days have an automated phone system in place for when customers call to make an enquiry.

A smart automation system can help your business to retain customers better than before – while creating greater job satisfaction for your employees.