

Business Bullet ~ Small Business Trends to Watch Out For This Year

Small businesses are driving the U.S. job recovery, according to [a recent blog post](#) by Maria Contreras-Sweet, the administrator of the Small Business Administration. In her post she points out that about 7 million of the 10.9 million jobs added since the Great Recession were created by startups and small enterprises.

“Small businesses have led our comeback from the downturn,” she writes. “For 15 straight quarters, small firms have contributed to employment growth – accounting for as much as 80 percent of job gains in any given quarter.”

The past is not always an indication for what might happen next, but there are certainly reasons to believe small business growth will continue in 2015. Here are some trends that might contribute to that growth.

Small Businesses Will Enter The Internet Of Things

The Internet of Things is not just for large companies anymore. It will have an impact on even the smallest of businesses. “No longer does your company need data scientists to unlock actionable insights for your business,” IBM’s Midmarket GM John Mason says. “Small businesses will turn to open application programming interfaces designed to simplify the process of accessing data from Internet-connected devices and using that data for business goals.” The result, he says, collaboration, innovation and the removal of barriers to turn ideas into businesses.

The Cloud Will Be Critical

More and more small businesses are adopting cloud computing. Parallels SMB Cloud Insights says the global market for cloud services for small and mid-size business will expand to \$95 billion by 2015. Traditionally thought of as an IT decision, SMBs will learn that the cloud enables company functions with benefits that can’t be ignored, from efficiency gains to improved employee mobility, Mason says.

Content Will Be King

Content marketing isn’t a new concept, but it will be more important than ever in 2015, particularly for small businesses with limited resources to spend on advertising and media relations. More small businesses will work with journalists, writers and editors as they move from a product-focused to a customer-focused message, says Joe Pulizzi, founder of the [Content Marketing Institute](#), which is launching [a platform](#) aimed at helping entrepreneurs and startups with content marketing needs. “As more content creators lose their job with traditional media companies,” he says, “this will present a clear opportunity for smaller companies to work with expert talent in particular industry niches.”



Here Are Some Trends To Consider Following This Year

This year will be an important one for every small business as powerful trends shape the direction of the economy. Here are some of the shifts that companies can expect:

Less Employees, More Freelancers

The nature of work has profoundly changed. Small businesses now are easily able to match new revenue to needs in increased resources. This means less permanent employees and more part time resources. This is a beneficial small business trend that enables the small business owner to make their workforce a variable expense as their sales goes up and down.

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Less Office Employees, More Remote Resources

While it can be comforting for small business owners to look out from their office and see their team, this version of the company is a thing of the past. Instead, all managers need to get comfortable with leading and building a team culture with remote resources that they do not see every day.

Less Email, More in Person Meetings (or at Least Video Chat)

People have opted for email instead of phone calls. But the small business trend this year will be to have more in person meetings with employees, vendors and customers as everyone wants to make true connections that build lasting relationships.



Less Features, More Relationships

With the spread of information almost instantaneously worldwide, there are less differences in product features. The customer can always choose the lowest price. The focus in the future will be to continue to service the customer to build value in a personal long term relationship that ensures loyalty. This includes less mass marketing and more one-on-one personalization through technology.

Less Secrecy, More Transparency

With social media instantly communicating and every phone having a camera, nothing in business is a secret any longer. This will force every small business to be much more transparent in dealings with customers, employees and product developments. This will also boost more social

responsibility for these companies.

Less Organic Social Posts, More Boosted Advertising

With the sheer glut of millions of posts every day clogging feeds, small business owners will be forced to boost their message through social media paid advertising on all the major platforms in order to be seen by their customers.

And What About Predictions From Experts?

Business News Daily asked small business owners and business experts what they think will be the next big thing in 2015. The good news? The experts agreed that 2015 will be a good year for small business and that things are looking up. However, that doesn't mean there won't be some big changes to adapt to in the coming year.

From the ever-changing technology sphere to ideas about the economy and business growth, here are a few big ideas, predictions and trends to look out for in the small business world in 2015.

Entrepreneurship

"I predict there is going to be a resurgence in small business formation as Americans get back to their entrepreneurial spirit. Millennials, in particular, are going to embrace owning their own business as they realize the freedom it offers and reject the more stringent corporate world [to] create their own wealth." – *Cody Gunn, president, [Gunn Capital Management](#)*

"I think the economy overall is improving, and while the recovery isn't as robust as it could be, there are indications that growth will continue in 2015. That is positive for small business owners and incentivizes others to either launch or expand. There is a strong and growing innovation economy that will add to the underlying optimism that we are starting to see." – *Scott Hirsch, CEO, [Appsbar](#)*

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Business growth

"In 2015, we'll continue to see a split between those businesses positioned to take advantage of the major trends and those that aren't. It should be a great year for companies that are involved with the transformation of the economy that is increasingly screen-based, big data [and/or] artificial-intelligence driven. These companies don't need to be directly involved in these types of businesses to benefit from them — although that would help." – [Owen Shapiro](#), *author and market strategist*

"We predict an even broader shift towards contract employees and utilization of freelance personnel to fill expertise gaps, as well as roles traditionally performed by full-time employees, to help ease business costs and increase cash flow. Many small businesses will continue to employ the Hollywood model, whereby small, expert teams are assembled to meet the demands of a particular client or project, then disbanded after completion. The focus towards lean, efficient employment strategies are essential to promote top-line growth. This becomes paramount given the increasing costs of retaining full-time staff, and rising health care costs," – [Jason Snagusky](#), *founder and president, eKoffee.com*

"In 2015, I see small business interested in investment capital to increasingly turn their attention to crowd-funding. This new type of funding is gaining traction and understanding, as the government has set guidelines and new platforms are being created to organize the capital into larger and more meaningful amounts for small businesses." – [Chris Ragland](#), *COO, Noble Capital*

Marketing

"I see small businesses with aggressive growth plans getting serious about digital marketing and their customers' experience. There is a huge talent, technology and strategy gap with small businesses trying to do it all themselves." – [George Schildge](#), *CEO, Matrix Marketing Group*

"The use of videos and visuals will be on the rise for marketing. You no longer have to pay for commercial time, but you can use the power of YouTube to reach your customers. Consumers are more likely to purchase after seeing a video than if there was no video at all. In addition, it shows that you are personal with your customers, that you care about your products and services, and are there if they have any questions." – [Tom Malesic](#), *president and CEO, EZSolution*

"Influencer engagement will grow. With consumers demanding more authentic engagement, brands will invest in influence as a marketing strategy, versus just a tactic. Brands are now recognizing the massive reach of influencers in terms of social engagement, connectivity to celebrity and their own communities. While every brand believes they have an effective influencer strategy, next year, they will activate more efficiently and effectively than ever before to resolidify relationships with current consumers and organically engineer conversation with new consumers." – [Coltrane Curtis](#), *founder and managing partner, Team Epiphany*

"Marketing is changing fast, and business leaders will be wise to consider these changes as they plan for 2015. First, marketing teams will need to be increasingly staffed with more technical personnel rather than just creative types. The creative side of marketing is critically important to develop clever ads and copy. However, marketing increasingly involves things like online advertising, re-marketing and social media promotion. Therefore, marketing staff will require more technical skills. Ideal candidates will have a balance of creative and technical skills." – [Dave Scarola](#), *vice president, The Alternative Board*

Social media

"With the upturn in the economy, small businesses have more potential for success than ever. The most significant increases will go to businesses that have a flexible and effective online strategy, and who can rapidly respond to changing desires of customers. The growth of social media as a platform for connection is causing more and more people to get their recommendations from others online. Businesses that have a significant online presence will be in the forefront of the new referral and relationship marketing systems." – [Pamela Bruner](#), *business coach, Make Your Success Real*

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"As Facebook's organic reach continues to decrease, small business owners are taking notice. If they want to get in front of their customers for 2015, I believe it will be essential that they start looking more into social media advertising to expand their online marketing efforts." – *Jason Parks, owner, [The Media Captain](#)*



"Gone will be the days where companies allow employees to post content without conducting a deep dive into their audience first. Executives are getting more sophisticated and realize that unless their corporate social media plan is formulaic with clear, set goals, metrics and tools to provide those metrics, they're paying top dollar for employees to spend time on online efforts that have questionable value." – *Ingrid Hansen, director, [Launch Media](#)*

Work-life balance

"For years, companies were obsessed with making smarter devices that were portable so that we could connect to our work life from anywhere, at any time. We became technology addicts, and [being busy] became our form of existential reassurance. With several surveys revealing that over 90 percent of Americans feel they have a work-life-balance problem, we have finally decided that enough is enough. 2015 will see an increase in this rebellion against being always connected, always on. Businesses will put hard working-hour stops in place and provide tips to improve work-life balance, effectiveness, productivity and more. Hopefully, 2015 will bring much-needed balance to personal and professional technology usage." – *Heinan Landa, CEO, [Optimal Networks](#)*

"The belabored concept of work and life being two sides of one equation is out. With all aspects of life — including work, family, personal, etc. — blending into one, it is harmony — not balance — that employees should strive for. The phenomenon known as "homing from work" — employees completing personal tasks in the office — is found in 93 percent of today's professionals, and must be addressed by employers. So trash your 'no social media at work policy,' and get on board with the new normal with a modern take on workplace perks. Of course, small businesses might not be able to compete with the catered meals and on-site arcades of Google infamy, but they can certainly invest in a few small perks to make a big impact on engagement, retention and productivity." – *Dr. Ann Clark, founder and CEO, [ACI Specialty Benefits](#)*

Retail

"Earlier this year, the Wall Street Journal pointed out a three-year downward trend in retail foot traffic during November and December that left 2013 holiday retail foot traffic at 50 percent of 2010 levels. My prediction for 2015 is a continued downward trend as more and more consumers opt for the convenience of online shopping, especially where delivery speed and cost is not a factor. Small businesses need to address this downward trend in in-store shopping by changing the shopping experience so that it adds value and provides experience that cannot be replicated online." – *Elizabeth Krause, author and marketing manager, [DB Squared](#)*



"Same-day deliveries of nearly everything will grow e-commerce businesses by a minimum of 25 percent. It will be the 2015 game changer." – *Mark Stevens, CEO, [MSCO](#)*

Technology

"I believe technology will have the most impact on small businesses. 2015 will be the year of EMV chip and PIN cards and Apple Pay. Small business owners will be faced with the decision of whether to upgrade their payments equipment or wait until it's more widely adopted. Small business owners should communicate with their customers to gauge what forms of payments they will use and plan their timing accordingly." – *Jim Salmon, vice president of business services, [Navy Federal Credit Union](#)*

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"Internal business communication has been reliant on email since its inception, but more and more business owners are looking to corporate [instant messaging] communication platforms to streamline their internal, and even external, communications." – *Andrei Soroker, CEO, [Kato.im](#)*

"Small business owners have begun to see that single-point solutions don't work as advertised. [A single-point solution is a software that performs a single task, like scheduling or point-of-sale.] Trying to use a number of point solutions every day actually increases the burden on the business owner that technology is supposed to erase. In 2015, we believe that SMBs will continue to transition away from trying to manage and pay for a collection of [single] point solutions, in favor of all-in-one platforms that are best-in-class." – *Josh McCarter, CEO, [Booker Software](#)*

"Mobile commerce and mobile usage will continue to increase. SMBs will start to create a more mobile-integrated marketing plan to engage customers and compete in the mobile realm. Merchants will start to pay more attention to mobile analytics, and create separate goals and objectives for their mobile efforts." – *Chris Belew, CEO, [Apptive](#)*

SEO and the Web

"On the technology side, [there will be a] need to have more consistent content postings to help improve SEO, with newer search algorithm changes impacting how content is ranked. That said, it can't be just content churn — meaning lots of volume with no real meat to it. [Rather], it has to be substantive and carefully planned so search engines recognize and properly score or rank its relevance." – *Erik Mason, CEO and founder, [RYSE Marketing & Communications](#)*

"It's no longer acceptable for a business to have a rubbish basic website, or to say 'everyone finds us through word of mouth. The truth is, everyone Googles everything, and it's become plain weird to not have a website. Even a basic website is no longer acceptable. Businesses that win in 2015 will be those with great clear, user-friendly mobile-optimized websites." – *Natasha Courtenay-Smith, owner, [Natasha Courtenay-Smith Studios](#)*

"I think that small businesses will start to see, whether in a small town or a larger city, that the differences between local search engine marketing and mobile marketing will disappear. Google has made changes to their inclusion of elements of their own platforms [Google Plus and Google Authorship Cards] by removing them due to their lack of synergy in mobile search results. The adoption of more mobile online marketing services will be most evident in paid advertising, specifically AdWords and Facebook ads, and in SEO." – *James Blews, online marketing and SEO consultant*

"In 2015, small and micro businesses will look to websites and complementary online engagement tools as the best way to create better interactions with current and potential customers, driving more direct communication while helping to increasing sales in the process. Additionally, by turning their website into more than just a placeholder for their address, phone and email, over the next year, small businesses will create a place where they can go to understand what the customers are looking for, directing them to the pages with the answers to their questions and, as necessary, to the right communication channel." – *Ran Oelgiesser, chief marketing officer, [vCita](#)*

Internet security

"In August 2014, Google announced that, in an effort to work toward making the websites people access through their search engine safer, they are taking into account whether sites use secure, encrypted connections as a signal in their search ranking algorithms. They [Google] maintain that, for now at least, the 'https' factor only minimally affects search engine results page [SERP] rankings and carries far less weight than other signals, such as load speed and high-quality content. However, this is the wave of the future; the recent and relentless cyberattacks have prompted Google to take action. In 2015, organizations will rush to transition their sites from 'http' to 'https,' to make their websites more secure — and to meet the latest in a long line of Google requirements to be search engine optimized and competitive." – *JoAnna Dettmann and Kaysha Kalkofen, co-founders, [tSunela Digital Marketing](#)*

"Data security will continue to be a major investment consideration for 2015, especially with the evolution of enterprise mobility and continued cloud integration. As evidenced by recent data breaches, regardless of the industry vertical, hackers are getting more sophisticated and staying a step ahead of security measures. This will escalate until companies start taking the threat seriously and put the resources and cutting-edge technologies in place to protect their devices, including mobile phones, laptops, etc. Moving into 2015, more organizations will begin equipping mobile devices with security software, taking the step from managing mobility to securing mobility." – *Marc Malizia, chief technology officer, [RKON Technologies](#)*

Politics, HR and beyond

"In 2015, more and more companies will be doing their manufacturing back in the USA, as more and more consumers will demand it. It's a matter of both product safety and consumers wanting to support jobs and industry here. You'll also see more and more regulations protecting people from imports that could be harmful. Over the last few years, these regulations have only increased, and it will continue to do so." – *Craig Wolfe, president, [CelebriDucks](#)*

"The raising of the minimum wage will be a key issue in 2015. The movement is growing, and the business is gearing up for a major battle. There is no general consensus among small business owners [on whether] a higher minimum wage will hurt business." – *Rasheen Carbin, director of marketing, [nspHire](#)*

"The influx of regulation and compliance criteria will be incredibly complex and demanding for small HR departments who will need to track the completion of mandatory IRS documents, streamline the filing and distribution of forms 1094/5-C, and prepare for possible audit situations where smart reporting strategies will be integral." – *Stacey Pezold, executive vice president of operations, [Paycom](#)*

"The transparency trend will thrive: From food to fashion, consumers are often rejecting the big brands for those that offer something unique, interesting and personal. This will continue in 2015 as consumers increasingly prioritize the stories behind the products they buy — stories about sourcing, ingredients and the individuals behind the companies they support." – *Li-at Karpel Gurwicz, vice president of marketing, [Como](#)*

These are just a few opinions that have been expressed. It is almost half-way through 2015. Have you thought about some of these trends and if they would affect you? Or do you need to do some research and find information that could affect your business, and then take action? For instance, many of us use the Cloud to store our data, even one-person businesses such as consultants. So, the data security is very important to consider. And there are regulations 'out there' that affect what you do, for instance, the Federal Trade Commission has become involved in the government's concern about online messaging and online endorsement advertising, with policy changes in 2009. This affects bloggers, websites, and social media. This then prompted action resulting in the FTC Settlement with Facebook Privacy. All of this information is 'out there' in the Cloud, just Google it. Just saying...



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