



Top Trends for Small Businesses



None of the financial, economic or trend forecasting experts seem able to clearly predict trends for 2012. Could it be that 2012 is destined to be pretty much like 2011? We all know how unpredictable last year was for business owners trying to plan for 2012 and beyond. 2011 was a year of ups and downs, advances and reversals, peaks and valleys, general uncertainty, instability and confusion. With so much confusion and vagueness tied to economic issues around the globe, let's take a look at a few trends that small business owners and managers can be more certain about.

Steven D. Strauss, attorney, author and speaker, is a columnist for USA Today's 'Ask an Expert' column. Strauss has written a number of books focused on small business and entrepreneurship. Earlier this year, Mr. Strauss revealed what are in his opinion the top 5 small business [trends](#) for 2012. One of Strauss' top five trends for 2012 does involve our economic situation. He seemed cautiously optimistic that things are moving in an encouraging, although tentative direction. As indicators seem to change on a daily basis, there is no reason for us to address that issue any further. As you might expect, technology will continue to play a major role in the success of small businesses in 2012 and most likely well beyond. Four other trends for 2012 pointed out by Strauss are as follows:

9 to 5 workdays are becoming a thing of the past.

'Work' no longer needs to be performed between 9 AM and 5 PM or Monday through Friday. With technology taking on mobility at an extremely rapid pace, the need for employees to sit at desks in offices forty hours a week has become questionable. Routine office tasks can be performed from anywhere in the world, 24/7/365. From home, in a car, in a coffee shop or on the beach; employees can now remain connected to their office, including access to company computer systems and files and working on projects 'in the cloud' of cyberspace.



Technology is smaller and more mobile than ever.

Hewlett-Packard recently announced it will be laying off 27,000 employees around the globe over the next two years in a restructuring plan. Like so many other companies over the past few years, profits were down. I have to believe at least part of the reason for their drop in sales and profits is that demand for desktop computers has dropped significantly as demand for laptop and tablet computers has increased. The same goes for rapid growth in sales of smart phones that allow phone calls, texting and Internet access. Thousands of smart phone and tablet apps are hitting the market to

expand the usefulness of these hand held devices. Retail and eCommerce have been influenced by the mobile movement as well.

Internet Video is growing in importance.

According to [YouTube](#), over 4 billion videos are viewed each day. Over 3 billion hours of video are viewed on YouTube each month. YouTube is localized in 39 countries and across 54 languages. In 2011, YouTube had more than 1 trillion views or almost 140 views for every person on Earth. Yes, video use on the Internet is here to stay. There are no signs that the growth of video on the internet will not continue to grow. When they say that a picture

is worth a thousand words, just imagine the impact of a video in place of a static image on your web site. How much more personality could you reveal using a video instead of static head shots of your key personnel? How much more powerful would customer testimonials be if video is used? Telling your company's story 'live' can be



pretty impressive. You can create videos to talk about your products or services, show how to assemble a product, or create a live chat with customers to increase sales. Take customers on a video tour of your studio, showroom or factory. The opportunities with video on-line are enormous.

The importance of Social Media continues to grow.

If you have not yet embraced social media, you are behind the curve. We now operate in a world of relationships. Customers do on-line research before contacting a company. That research is done through social media sites. Consider how much time it would take to personally call or meet with your existing, potential and even past customers. Relationship building at this rate would be more than a little bit daunting. However, social media provides new tools to accomplish this important part of doing business virtually. Connecting to customers and clients through social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and hundreds of others can reduce that time drastically. Many companies use Facebook to handle customer service. Monitoring social media is a great way to keep your ear to the wall to hear what happy -- and not happy -- customers are saying. As fast as bad news can spread on the Internet, you can find out about issues quickly and deal with them.

Pull out your strategic plan today and review how these top trends can help you achieve your goals and objectives better. If you haven't yet embraced social media, now is the time to add it to your marketing mix. Is your web site set up to take advantage of increasing numbers of customers with smart phones and tablets? Look at your web site and marketing plan to see where you might include video to enhance visitors experience there. Review your company's processes and see if any can be done outside of your office, shop or showroom.

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