

10 TIPS



Small Business
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FOR THRIVING IN AN UNCERTAIN ECONOMY

A new year is here, but for small business owners, 2012 presents many of the same challenges as did 2011. With economic uncertainty the “new normal,” how can your business move forward? Here are 10 tips that will help you not only survive, but thrive.

1. **Tighten your belt.** Running lean and mean is essential for small businesses hoping to stay competitive. Look for ways to trim costs whenever you can. Eliminate unnecessary expenses like redundant subscriptions, phone lines or memberships. Review agreements with key vendors annually.
2. **Adjust prices.** Don't let rising costs for inventory, materials or supplies take you by surprise. Monitor trends and be ready to increase prices as needed to stay profitable.
3. **Find new customers.** In tough economic times, keeping a steady supply of new prospects in your sales pipeline is more important than ever. Don't skimp on marketing activities that help your business generate leads. Consider expanding to new markets or targeting a different subset of customers.
4. **Get creative with hiring.** You probably need more manpower, but hiring full-time employees is not the only option. Look for lower-cost solutions that also offer flexibility, such as retaining temporary employees, part-time workers or interns, or outsourcing to independent contractors.
5. **Maximize productivity.** Make sure your staff has the tools they need to be productive. Create systems and processes that streamline operations, and provide training so employees know how to use them.
6. **Harness technology.** Technology tools like tablet computers and smartphones for your team can quickly pay for themselves in increased productivity. Assess what IT changes make sense for your business. A small outlay to upgrade technology is worth the cost if it helps you stay ahead of the competition.
7. **Use social media.** Social media is a buzzword for a reason. As more and more Americans join social networking sites, social media is influencing everything from the stores and restaurants customers visit to the services they use and the products they buy. If you haven't yet explored this marketing tool, make 2012 the year you do so.
8. **Monitor your cash flow.** Slow-paying customers can put your business at risk. Get accounting software and learn how to use it. Then track your cash flow on a weekly, even daily, basis, and take action to speed income and delay outflows.
9. **Keep up with trends.** Now more than ever, you need to know the trends brewing in your city, your industry and your market. The needs and wants of both consumers and business-to-business customers are changing rapidly, and if you don't keep pace, you'll get left behind.
10. **Think strategically.** To succeed in business today, you must stay one step ahead of the game. Consider how the trends you're monitoring will affect your business and your competitors in the years to come. Develop a plan for dealing with threats and taking advantage of opportunities.

By Rieva Lesonsky

Rieva Lesonsky is founder CEO and President of GrowBiz Media, a content and consulting company that helps entrepreneurs start and grow their businesses. Before launching her business, she was Editorial Director of Entrepreneur Magazine. Follow Rieva at [Twitter.com/Rieva](https://twitter.com/Rieva) and visit SmallBizDaily.com to sign up for her free TrendCast reports.



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