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Scaling Up: Unlocking and managing business growth

Expert tools, tips, and strategies for taking your business to the next level

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of bigger small businesses say their goal is fast or steady *growth* over stability

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Expert tools, tips, and strategies for taking your business to the next level

When starting a small business, growth might not be your biggest goal. You want to make that first sale, land that first customer, and ultimately survive those first few tough months. But what happens when you've surpassed those milestones and your business isn't just surviving, but thriving? The goal post shifts, and now, the objective is growth.

This is especially true for bigger small businesses – those with 10-100 employees. These businesses have overcome the many hurdles that new businesses face and are sprinting toward sustained long-term growth. According to Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Insights, a quarterly survey of ~3,000 US small businesses, **83% of these bigger small businesses say their goal is fast or steady *growth*** over stability. And they're doing what it takes to reach that goal. **Over half (54%) of these bigger small businesses say they're currently growing**, compared to only 24% of small businesses with 0-10 employees.[1]

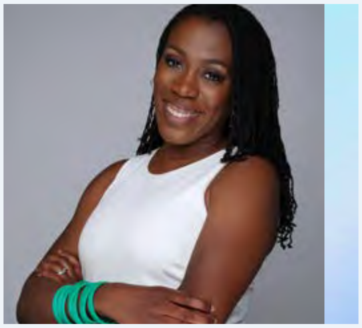
But the path forward isn't without hurdles. With growth comes added complexity and new challenges that emerge along the way. For bigger small businesses, these include business intelligence, financial reporting, scaling your team, and implementing new technologies to take your business to the next level.

What’s inside

This guide aims to address each of these challenges with practical solutions and guidance from financial experts to help bigger small businesses overcome these obstacles and unlock even greater success.

1. Manage cash flow
2. Combat rising costs
3. Get financing
4. Scale your team
5. Invest in the right tools

Meet the experts



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CEO & financial educator

Tiffany Aliche is a personal finance educator, CEO of The Budgetnista, and author of the New York Times Best Seller, *Get Good With Money*.

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Christopher Picciurro is the executive officer and co-founder of Integrated Financial Group, and co-host of the Teaching Tax Flow and Mr. R Show podcasts.

Manage cash flow

Cash flow is the lifeblood of any business. It's what keeps your operations running smoothly, ensures your employees are paid on time, and allows you to take on new opportunities to grow your business. Cash flow problems can spell disaster for new businesses, but even profitable, established businesses can face cash flow challenges. For bigger small businesses, the stakes are even higher. With more money-in/money-out transactions to manage, tracking cash flow can be even more difficult. It's no wonder that **almost half (44%) of bigger small businesses say they struggle with cash flow**.[1]

Cash flow problems can be caused by a variety of factors, but with the right strategy, you can head off these cash flow issues and keep your business moving forward.

1. Build a cash reserve

A cash reserve, or rainy day fund, protects your business from unexpected expenses or dips in revenue that threaten your cash flow. "Having a cash reserve is critical for any business, especially a growing business," says Tiffany Aliche, a financial educator.

"It will allow you to be a bit more experimental as you create the business model that will help you expand and maintain your business. Having a cash reserve gives you time to be creative, take risks, and hire for help without worrying about turning a profit. This creativity and experimentation can lead to growth for the business… and nothing kills creativity like being broke. A few bad months can take a good business out. If you have six months, eight months, a year's worth of emergency funds saved for your business, you will

Almost half (44%) of bigger small businesses say they struggle with cash flow

be better prepared to navigate difficult times." According to a recent survey commissioned by QuickBooks, more than **4 in 10 bigger small businesses say they've tapped into their cash reserves to address cash flow problems.**[1]

> "Cash reserves are critical. They allow you the space and grace to pivot."
>
> **– Tiffany Aliche**

Aliche recommends that small and growing businesses have at least **six months** of operating expenses in their cash reserves. "Know that it's likely going to take you a year or more to get that six months set up, and that's okay," she says. "First, identify how much it costs to actually run your business on a monthly basis. Then, multiply that number by six to see what you need to save toward – that's the goal number for your cash reserve."

When times get tough, "You will be able to tap into this reserve and lean into it to see you through," says Aliche. "Because now you have a timeline of when you need to turn things around for your business. You know that you have six months of cash reserves, so you have six months to turn things around."

However, Aliche warns, "Don't let the money just sit there in a general savings account where it doesn't yield anything. You want to put some of your reserves away and put it to work while it's waiting to be used. Work with your financial institution to save that money in a place that is going to allow it to generate some income."

"Your cash reserves should be working for you," she continues. "When it generates additional income, you can reinvest it back into your business –

Growing businesses should have at least six months of operating expenses in their cash reserves

to make changes, to be experimental, and to allow yourself to pivot as needed. It can also make it easier to reach your cash reserve goals over time."

2. Get paid faster

Late customer payments are the source of cash flow problems for many growing businesses – especially bigger small businesses. Less than half (42%) say they request immediate payment on receipt of invoice. Another 55% request payment anywhere from 30 to 90 days after a sale, leaving them susceptible to late or forgotten payments. **Two in three (66%) say they currently have invoices overdue by more than 30 days – and these businesses report roughly $40,000 of unpaid invoices, on average.**[1]

It's awkward to remind clients about payments on bills or invoices, but past-due invoices can significantly impact your cash flow. To avoid conflict, take proactive measures to get paid on time.

"2023 was a really hard year for many small businesses. There was a shift in consumer spending, inflation was still an issue, and people just didn't have the money to buy things the way they used to. As a result, businesses like myself found that there just wasn't the same revenue from their B2B or B2C businesses as there was before. As a result, I didn't make much money that year, but I had six months of cash reserves saved and ended up using five months of it. Although no one wants to dip into their cash reserves, I am happy I had it available for use. That's exactly what it was there for, to be used in this situation, to allow my business to keep running until revenue picked back up."

Try this:

- **Set clear payment terms for every payment.** Outline when, how, and by what method your customers must provide payment to your business.
- **Offer a wide range of payment options.** Make it easy for customers to pay however they prefer. Accepting a wide range of payment methods increases the odds of getting paid on time.
- **Invoice customers quickly and consistently.** Send invoices as soon as possible once a project is completed. If customers are making regular payments, send invoices on a consistent payment schedule to avoid confusion about when payments are due.
- **Send payment reminders.** Being proactive ensures your customers are always aware of upcoming due dates.
- **Incentivize early payments.** The sooner you get paid, the better your cash flow. Consider offering a small discount to customers who pay early. Or, a small fee to those who miss the due date.

How to avoid past due invoices

- ✓ Set clear payment terms for every payment.
- ✓ Offer a wide range of payment options.
- ✓ Invoice customers quickly and consistently.
- ✓ Send payment reminders.
- ✓ Incentivize early payments.

Most importantly, review your accounts receivable weekly to stay on top of outstanding invoices. As a growing business with lots of transactions, unpaid invoices can easily fall through the cracks. The sooner you catch outstanding invoices, the better for your cash flow.

3. Monitor your budget

Managing your business budget is an important step in setting financial goals, especially for growing businesses. Budgeting helps bigger small businesses track towards planned financial goals and make data-backed choices. Decisions like business expansion, hiring new employees, increasing product lines, and investing in new technology can be made with greater confidence when you have a clear budget.

But budgeting can also be a major pain point. As your business grows, your financial transactions and reports become more complex. Without the right tools and processes in place, managing these finances can quickly become overwhelming. Small businesses, even bigger small businesses, are often still running on lean operations – which means you might be taking on tasks, like budgeting, yourself. But Aliche warns

that taking a DIY approach to budgeting could be a big mistake.

"The number one thing a small business can do to stick to and create an effective budget is to not do it by yourself," says Aliche. "You can't just be using paper and pencil, you need the support of a tool, and even better if you can use the tool in conjunction with a professional, like an accountant or bookkeeper."

Nearly 2 in 10 bigger small businesses say they're still using pen and paper to manage and record financial transactions. Another 48% are doing it manually in Excel. But business owners who work with accounting professionals say their accountant helps them save an average of $39,000 annually, according to a 2022 QuickBooks survey. The majority, 9 in 10, say working with an accountant or bookkeeper contributes to their business success and helps their business grow.

The biggest reason a business owner might *not* work with an accountant is cost – 45% say accounting professionals are too expensive.[2]

But if cost is the issue, Aliche says a book-keeper is a good place to start. "They typically aren't extremely expensive," she says. "The cost pays itself back in the lack of financial mistakes you might make on your own. A bookkeeper may cost you a few hundred dollars a month upfront, but they will save you money (and may even help *make* you money) in the long run."

"A financial professional can help you navigate your numbers and see what your numbers are telling you about your business," she continues. "How much money are you bringing in? How much money are you spending? Are you spending more than you're making? You don't want to wait too long to find out the numbers aren't making sense.

Nearly 2 in 10 bigger small businesses say they're still using pen and paper to manage and record financial transactions

Using a tool and leaning in with a book-keeper will help you identify where you're going before it's too late. So start with a bookkeeper, use good tools, and monitor, monitor, monitor that budget."

"The number one way to stick to an effective budget is to monitor it and make adjustments in real-time."

– Tiffany Aliche

Combat rising costs

Across the board, small business owners say "rising costs" is the greatest challenge for their business, and bigger small businesses are even more likely to pinpoint rising costs as their biggest hurdle. **Nearly 6 in 10 (58%) bigger small businesses say this is the greatest challenge facing their business today**.[1]

Small businesses often don't have access to the same resources as larger corporations, making it harder to absorb rising costs. It might feel like the cards are stacked against you, but there are a few steps you can take to mitigate the impact of rising costs so you can stay competitive and focused on your continued growth.

1. Evaluate and optimize expenses

Operating expenses, or overhead costs, include any expenses that are required for your business to operate day-to-day. As your business grows, the range of expenses required to sustain and support that growth can become more complex. Conducting a regular analysis of these expenses is essential for understanding the cost of doing business and identifying areas for potential savings.

"With this current economic climate and the ongoing effects of inflation, there are a few steps small businesses can take to maintain their profitability and growth trajectory in the face of rising costs," says Aliche. "First, I want you to look inward as a small business and ask yourself, 'What are we actually spending our money on?'"

Review all the expenses your business incurs on an ongoing basis, like rent, payroll, insurance, taxes, and more. Then, prioritize those expenses based on importance. Are there any tools you're no longer using? Expenses that aren't contributing, either directly or indirectly, to your bottom line? "Do an audit," says Aliche. "I do this at least annually."

> "Doing a regular audit will make sure that the way you are spending your money is leading to profitability at the end of the day."
>
> **– Tiffany Aliche**

2. Price for growth

Rising costs can have a significant impact on a small business's profitability margins. If that's the case for your business, it might be time to increase your prices. According to a recent survey commissioned by QuickBooks, nearly **4 in 10 bigger small businesses say they've raised prices within the last three months**. Another 35% plan to raise prices soon.[1]

"Focusing on the top-line, and revisiting pricing strategies can enhance profitability without compromising customer experience or quality," says Krystal Todd, CPA. "For instance, value-based pricing, recurring revenue streams, and tiered pricing can help a company capture a broader market. By offering a mix of premium options that command higher revenue and more economical choices for customers with varying needs, you can maximize profitability while maintaining strong customer relationships."

4 in 10 bigger small businesses say they've raised prices within the last three months

Try this:

- **Review costs and expenses.** Conduct a cost analysis to determine how much it costs to produce and deliver your product or service. When determining price, ensure that costs associated with overheads, supplies, materials, marketing, and other expenses are fully considered.
- **Consider market trends.** Review market trends to understand how your competitors are pricing their offerings. Plan to have prices that are competitive while maintaining profitability. Pricing appropriately for your market can help your business increase sales and stand out among the competition.
- **Test and tweak.** Try different pricing strategies on a small scale and evaluate their effectiveness before fully investing. One way to do this is to run price tests among smaller groups of customers that can help measure customer response to different price points. Based on the results, make necessary adjustments to the pricing strategy.
- **Communicate with customers.** Price increases can be jarring for customers. Let them know about upcoming price increases well in advance, offer a clear and honest explanation for the increase, and keep the lines of communication open.

3. Plan ahead

In addition to optimizing your expenses and pricing strategy, "You should be monitoring your current market for trends," says Aliche. "It's not enough to just pivot, you have to learn to pre-pivot – to make changes before they are necessary. The worst thing you can do is a forced pivot because that's when you make errors."

> "Making the pivot as early as possible gives you the time and space to pivot without the frantic, chaotic energy."
>
> **– Tiffany Aliche**

"This is why studying your marketplace is so critical. Ask yourself, 'What is the market telling me? Is it telling me that they don't like this thing anymore, or is it telling me they just want it to be delivered differently?'" As an example, Aliche cites the transition from cassette tapes to CDs.

"People didn't just stop listening to music when they stopped buying cassettes, they just stopped listening to music through that medium. They still wanted to listen to music, they just changed how they wanted to receive it."

"If I can be a market leader in that new delivery," she explains, "I can protect my profits and continue to rise. The art of the pre-pivot is critical." To stay on top of ever-changing market trends, she recommends leaning into other business owners both in and outside your industry.

"One of the best ways to check the market is to network with other business owners,"

87%

of small businesses say their accounting professional helped them reduce the impact of inflation

she says. "I am a big proponent of leaning into other people in my spaces, having conversations, and asking, 'What are we seeing?' It's even better to go beyond that and talk to business owners in other industries as well. This allows you to capture trends and industry direction, but it also lets you see if there's something shifting across the board in other industries. You will have a better view of where the trends are coming from, who they are affecting, how long they might last, and how you can pivot your business in response."

Try this:

- **Connect with industry leaders.** Attend conferences/trade shows or connect on LinkedIn. Networking with industry professionals is a great way to stay in the know.
- **Lean on your accounting professional.** According to a 2022 QuickBooks survey, **87% of small businesses say their accounting professional helped them reduce the impact of inflation.**[2]
- **Follow industry news.** Industry publications, websites, and blogs can help you stay up-to-date with market trends.
- **Engage on social media.** Keep a finger on the pulse of your industry by monitoring social channels for insights into audience behavior.

Get funding for growth

Bigger small businesses face significant obstacles when it comes to securing funding for growth – **41% say the cost and availability of financing has gotten worse over the last 12 months**.[1] As a result, more of these businesses have had to cut personnel and other operating costs, postpone planned investments, or dip into their internal cash reserves.

But that's not always a bad thing. "Before seeking external funding, small businesses should first explore ways to increase their free cash flow (FCF), which is the money available after covering operating expenses and any capital expenditures," says Todd.

"Improving free cash flow through reducing costs and optimizing revenue streams may eliminate the need for external financing altogether."

– Krystal Todd

That said, sometimes maintaining your growth trajectory (or setting a new course for growth) requires additional funding. But traditional loans (which can be difficult to get) aren't the only way. "Other options include small business loans, lines of credit, crowdfunding, and venture capital for more flexible, growth-oriented solutions," says Todd. "Getting creative by self-funding through pre-sales can not only help you gauge interest in a product or service but provide direct funding for new business initiatives."

Try these:

- **Crowdfunding.** Use a crowdfunding platform to connect with potential backers for your business. Crowdfunding allows a large number of individuals to contribute small amounts. For them, the stakes are low. For you, the payoff can be high.
- **Angel investors.** These individuals offer financial support to small and growing businesses, typically in exchange for some stake in the company. They're often experienced entrepreneurs themselves.

- **Product pre-sales.** This method allows you to collect advance payments for a product or service before you produce it. Use that revenue to fund production and invest in further marketing.
- **Venture capitalists.** Like angel investors, venture capitalists invest in businesses in exchange for an equity stake, but these tend to be investment firms.
- **Government programs.** These programs come in the form of grants, loans, and tax credits. If you're eligible, government loans tend to have lower interest rates and more flexible repayment terms than traditional banks.
- **Small business grants.** Grants can come from educational institutions, nonprofits, corporations, and other organizations. These organizations want to support businesses that share their goals.

Funding avenues for business growth

- Crowdfunding
- Angel investors
- Product pre-sales
- Venture capitalists
- Government programs
- Small business grants

No matter which route you choose, Todd says it's crucial to stress-test for potential interest rate fluctuations and calculate the impact of a worst-case scenario. "Start by calculating the maximum interest rate the lender can charge and determine how much it will cost you," she says. "Then, assess the impact this cost will have on your cash flow. Keep in mind to include any prepayment penalties if you intend to pay off the debt early. Additionally, consider the flexibility of the loan terms, particularly if your income varies, and evaluate the collateral requirements to ensure you're comfortable with the assets you're putting at risk."

Scale your team

As bigger small businesses know, the success of a growing business hinges on having an effective team. **Six in 10 of these business owners say they have plans to increase their workforce within the next three months**. But hiring an effective team isn't without challenges. Almost half (47%) say hiring has been difficult or getting harder.[1] These businesses face competition from larger businesses – that might offer better wages and benefits – and skill shortages that make it difficult to find qualified candidates.

Difficult, but not impossible. When it comes to building high-performing teams, the process starts within.

Six in 10 of bigger small business owners say they have plans to increase their work-force within the next three months

1. Identify the jobs to be filled

Before you jump feet first into the applicant pool, start by identifying the jobs that need to be filled within your business. This enables you to make more strategic hiring decisions. "As a small

business owner, you're often used to handling every aspect of your business," says Picciurro. "However, I recommend evaluating all the activities you're currently doing yourself, assigning an economic value to each, and focusing on moving the repetitive, lower-value tasks to a new team member as quickly as possible. Prioritizing this can free up your time for more valuable activities," like focusing on growth.

The art of strategic delegation lets you focus on the big picture and steer your business toward long-term goals. But it also empowers your employees to develop their skills and take on new challenges, boosting morale, engagement, and productivity.

Try this:

- **Identify business goals.** Determine your business's long-term goals and objectives. This can help pinpoint the areas that need additional help or focus going forward.

- **Assess the current workload.** Identify areas of the business that are under-staffed or causing your current team to be overworked.
- **Identify challenges.** Review current and future challenges and opportunities to determine the type of talents you'll need. A diverse team can help your business remain agile in these instances.
- **Get feedback.** Ask your current employees what positions they think the business needs to expand and grow.

2. Attract the right candidates

Attracting and hiring the right employees is crucial to the success of any business, no matter the size. The right hires can improve team morale, increase efficiency, aid in decision-making, and help drive the success of your business. Hiring the wrong person, on the other hand, can lead to disruption, a dent in morale, and reduced productivity. That's why it's so essential for growing businesses to invest time and resources in recruiting. While you can't guarantee a perfect fit every time, a strategic hiring plan can help.

"First, you need to define your business goals and values," says Christopher Picciurro, CPA. "In our experience, just as we let our best clients choose the next client, let your best team member help pick the next team member. Make sure to thoroughly discuss the vision and mission of your business and where you see it going. While it's difficult to predict exactly where you'll be in five or ten years, understanding the trajectory and culture is crucial. This alignment will attract people who share a similar vision."

During the interview process, ask questions that dig into the candidate's understanding of your business and what they bring to the table.

Ask this:

- What are your top 3 skills that qualify you for this position?
- What's the first project or challenge you'd want to tackle?
- How can you help grow the business?
- What's one thing you would do to improve or change the business?

Employees who share your business values and mission work more cohesively as a team. "It's important to focus on finding people with complementary skill sets who are also willing to share past experiences, provide feedback, and accept constructive criticism," he says. Diverse employees with unique skill sets bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to your team, leading to the growth and development of your business.

"The people on your team should be smarter than you. Surround yourself with talented and intelligent people."

– Christopher Picciurro

Look here:

- **Job boards and career sites.** People on these sites are actively looking for employment.
- **Your network.** Your network may be the best source for qualified candidates. Ask current employees for referrals.
- **LinkedIn.** LinkedIn and other social media sites expand your network, casting a wide net to hook interested applicants.

3. Retain top talent

Hiring the right people for your team is only half the battle – you spend valuable time and resources recruiting and hiring great employees, and now you need to think about how you're going to retain them. **Four in 10 bigger small businesses say they've had challenges retaining great employees.** To combat this, nearly the same amount (38%) say they plan to increase employee benefits in the near future. According to the survey, the most effective benefits for retaining good employees are healthcare, paid time off, and 401k plans. Another 64% of bigger small businesses say they're planning to give pay increases to their team.[1]

While better pay and benefits are certainly motivating factors for employees, it's not always feasible for growing businesses to make substantial changes. Fortunately, there are some cost-effective solutions to increase employee retention.

Try this:

- **Use official wage data as a benchmark for employee pay.** Browse wage data for over 800 occupations by nation, region, and state, on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website. Armed with official data, you'll know you're offering your employees competitive compensation for their work.
- **Offer low-cost, high-value employee benefits**, like the option to work remotely, on-the-job training and professional development, and flexible work schedules.
- **Start with proper hiring and onboarding.** First impressions are everything – employees should be clear about their roles and responsibilities from the get-go. A clear employee handbook keeps all employees aligned on business goals, values, and expectations.

Employee retention strategies

Use official wage data as a benchmark for employee pay.

Offer low-cost, high-value employee benefits.

Start with proper hiring and onboarding.

Invest in the right tools

New small businesses typically only need a few fundamental tools to get started – a virtual hammer and nails. But, as the business grows, so must the toolkit. With more complex strategies comes more complex tools – and bigger small businesses carry a heavy tool belt.

Nearly 3 in 10 (29%) say they're using digital tools, such as apps and software, to manage 8 or more different areas of their business operations.[3] These tools are helping them improve efficiency, save time, and reduce errors. Small businesses that use 8 or more digital tools to manage different areas of their business are almost twice as likely to report revenue growth and three times more likely to have expanded their workforce, according to the Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Index.

For bigger small businesses, the benefit of using digital tools is clear. It comes as no surprise that **80% of these businesses are early or timely adopters of new digital technologies** – like AI. According to a recent QuickBooks survey, nearly 9 in 10 (89%) respondents agree that AI is key for business success in today's economic climate.[4]

> "Leveraging AI, automation, and technology is crucial for small business owners who want to stay competitive and grow consistently."
>
> **– Krystal Todd**

"Implementing technologies like automated accounting, customer relationship management (CRM) programs, and inventory management reduces human error, frees up valuable time, and enables you to empower your staff with more productive, value-added work," says Todd. "AI and automation also provide the insights needed to make smarter, data-driven decisions, which can be the difference between a thriving company and one that is running out of cash and time."

In today's digital landscape, selecting the *right* digital tools for your business is crucial to optimizing efficiency, increasing productivity, streamlining operations, and gaining a competitive edge.

As you reach for new tools, keep these in mind:

- **Your budget.** A large suite of different apps and software can be expensive, and they add up quickly. When considering a new tool for your tech stack, keep price and ROI in mind.
- **The learning curve.** New tools take time and effort to learn, but they should make complicated tasks easier, not harder.
- **Integrations.** When possible, look for tools that work seamlessly with the tools you already use.
- **Scalability.** Invest in tools that can grow and scale with your business over time.

Diversify your sales channels

For small businesses looking to scale, diversifying sales streams is essential. Relying on a single sales channel can lead to lost profits amid a changing economy and market trends. Investing in additional sales channels, like e-commerce, can help mitigate that risk, increasing opportunities for growth and expansion.

"Diversified revenue streams not only ensure profitability but also help build enterprise value," says Picciurro. Enter omnichannel selling. An omnichannel strategy involves using multiple channels, that are integrated, to communicate, market, and sell to your customers.

80% of bigger small businesses are early or timely adopters of new digital technologies

> "There's a big difference between growing and scaling. Businesses that can *scale* tend to have a higher value."

– Christopher Picciurro

Benefits of omnichannel selling:

- **Increased sales.** More sales channels allow you to reach more customers and increase your revenue.
- **Brand awareness.** Having a presence across multiple channels increases brand recognition for your business.
- **Targeted marketing.** Multi-channel selling allows you to tailor your approach to different audiences.

Invest in e-commerce

According to QuickBooks data, growing small businesses are more likely to invest in e-commerce – **nearly half (49%) rank direct online sales as their top sales channel, compared to just 33% of smaller businesses**. Overall, 72% of bigger small businesses say they make sales online, either directly or through a third party – less than half of smaller businesses (47%) say the same.[1]

This e-commerce strategy is paying off, 32% of growing businesses say online sales have increased within the last three months, and another 43% expect online sales to continue to increase over the next three.[1] By integrating online sales channels, you not only sell to existing customers but also to a wider range of new consumers. This added revenue stream creates room for reinvestment and supports business growth.

Nearly half (49%) of growing small businesses rank direct online sales as their top sales channel, compared to just 33% of smaller businesses

Try this:

- **Choose the right platform.** There are lots of e-commerce platforms to choose from. Consider ROI, payment processing, shipping, and flexibility to scale as your business grows. Use data to guide your decisions, such as a survey of your customer preferences.
- **Optimize your website.** Your website is a reflection of your business – a bad experience can prevent a sale. Again, data is the key to success here: look at your stats and adjust accordingly.
- **Leverage social media.** Use social platforms to promote your products and engage with customers.
- **Offer free shipping.** Set free shipping thresholds to encourage customers to add more items to their carts.
- **Focus on customer experience.** Consider adding chat support for online customers and use online customer feedback to improve the experience and your offerings.

How to implement an e-commerce strategy

- ✓ Choose the right platform.
- ✓ Optimize your website.
- ✓ Leverage social media.
- ✓ Offer free shipping.
- ✓ Focus on customer experience.

"To stand out in a crowded market, small businesses should prioritize building a strong brand identity to attract consumers seeking value to build trust, loyalty, and community," says Todd. "Additionally, consider investing in SEO, analyzing customer data, tracking key performance indicators (KPIs), and always making data-driven decisions. These strategies make it easier to execute on growth strategies and compete in the market based on brand, not pricing wars with your competitors."

Expand your offerings

"Aim to create an enterprise that can function even if you exit the business," says Picciurro. After all, according to QuickBooks data, this is the goal for nearly 7 in 10 bigger small businesses – they say they plan to either sell the business or pass it on to a family member when the time comes.[1] "Part of this involves developing diversified revenue streams," he says. Expanding your product or service offerings is a good place to start.

"In professional services, for instance, you can only sell your time once," he continues. "But if you arrange it properly, you can sell your knowledge repeatedly and scale it. Stick to your core competency, but explore complementary services or products to diversify your revenue streams."

However, expanding your offerings requires careful consideration and planning. It's crucial to balance adding new products or services with current capabilities to avoid spreading your resources too thin.

Do this first:

- **Market research.** Conduct market research to better understand current trends and demands for the product or service you plan to add to your existing offerings.
- **Product/service development.** Develop your new product or service in a way that caters to your desired audience and complements your current offerings. Start with a small test or production run to assess demand before investing heavily.
- **Develop a roll-out plan.** Strategically plan product launches, promotional offers, and marketing. This plan should include a process for obtaining and addressing customer feedback.

By conducting proper research, creating a well-thought-out development plan, and properly marketing your new offerings, you can increase your revenue and drive long-term growth.

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3. **Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Index Annual Report**: Findings draw from a detailed analysis of official statistics, employment trends from the Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Index, and surveys of more than 5,000 small businesses throughout 2023.

4. **Business Solutions Survey**: An online survey of 630 owners and executives from businesses with 10-99 employees throughout the US, commissioned in August 2024.

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