LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

The Marketing Guide for Local Business Owners

September 2026

Creating "Behind the Scenes" Social Media Content That Drives Interaction

The Future of Small Business Leadership: Trends to Watch Over the Next 5 Years

Scaling Smart: Growing Your Business Without Losing Control

Preparing Your Small Business for a Successful Holiday Season

Why Email Still Outperforms Social Media

Infographic:

Building a Better Website: *The Essential Elements that Drive Conversions*

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LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

Welcome to the September Issue!

ASeptember has a way of shifting our focus. Summer is winding down, the fourth quarter is approaching, and for many small businesses, some of the busiest months of the year are right around the corner. It's the perfect time to look ahead, fine-tune your strategy, and make sure your business is ready for what's next.

Inside this month's issue:

- The Future of Small Business Leadership – Explore the trends that could shape how business owners lead over the next five years.
- Preparing for a Successful Holiday Season – Start planning now to make the most of the important months ahead.
- *Why Email Still Outperforms Social Media* – Discover why email continues to be one of the most valuable tools in your marketing strategy.
- Scaling Smart – Learn how to grow your business without sacrificing the quality, culture, or control that got you here.
- Behind-the-Scenes Social Content – See how showing the people and process behind your business can create more meaningful interaction.
- Infographic: Building a Better Website – A quick look at the essential elements that help turn website visitors into customers.

We hope this issue gives you a few new ideas to put into action as you head into the final stretch of the year. As always, thank you for reading, supporting local business, and sharing our magazine with others in your network.

Here's to a productive fall and a strong finish to the year!

Don Franklin
Founding Partner

Inside This Month's Issue

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A Little About Us

When it comes growing your local business, the task is the same – be visible online, stand out from the competition, generate new leads, and convert visitors & leads into customers.
The success of digital marketing relies on your strategy and the way that you implement that strategy. For Local Business Marketing, we use all of the tools at our disposal to make sure that our clients enjoy the online success they deserve.

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Marketing Calendar

Plan your marketing messages around these upcoming holidays and proclamations.

September

Suicide Prevention Month
Childhood Cancer Awareness Month
Hispanic Heritage Month
(*September 15 – October 15*)

Sept. 7 – Labor Day (U.S.)
Sept. 11 – Patriot Day (U.S.)
Sept. 15 – Start of Hispanic Heritage Month
Sept. 22 – First Day of Fall

1st – World Letter Writing Day
4th – National Wildlife Day
5th – World Beard Day
6th – Read a Book Day
7th – Beer Lovers Day
13th – Grandparents Day
8th – World Physical Therapy Day
10th – World Suicide Prevention Day
12th – Video Games Day
12th – Chocolate Milkshake Day
13th – International Chocolate Day
13th – Peanut Day
14th – Eat a Hoagie Day
15th – World Engineers Day
16th – Guacamole Day
17th – Apple Dumpling Day
18th – National Cheeseburger Day
18th – U.S. Air Force Day
19th – Talk Like a Pirate Day
21st – International Day of Peace
21st – World Alzheimer's Day
21st – World Gratitude Day
21st – Miniature Golf Day
22nd – Ice Cream Cone Day
22nd – Family Day
22nd – Hobbit Day
25th – National Lobster Day
27th – Daughters Day
28th – Sons Day
29th – World Heart Day
29th – National Coffee Day
30th – International Podcast Day

October

Breast Cancer Awareness Month
Domestic Violence Awareness Month
National Cybersecurity Awareness Month
National Fire Prevention Month
National Women's Small Business Month

Oct. 5 – World Teachers' Day
Oct. 12 – Columbus Day / Indigenous Peoples' Day (U.S.)
Oct. 31 – Halloween

1st – International Coffee Day
2nd – National Custodial Workers Recognition Day
4th – World Animal Day
5th – Do Something Nice Day
6th – National Coaches Day
6th – World Cerebral Palsy Day
8th – National Pierogi Day
10th – World Mental Health Day
10th – National Cake Decorating Day
11th – National Coming Out Day
12th – National Farmers Day
12th – National Savings Day
14th – National Dessert Day
15th – Global Handwashing Day
16th – National Boss's Day
17th – National Pasta Day
19th – National New Friends Day
20th – International Chefs Day
21st – National Apple Day
22nd – National Nut Day
23rd – National Boston Cream Pie Day
24th – United Nations Day
25th – National Art Day
26th – National Pumpkin Day
27th – Navy Day
28th – National Chocolate Day
28th – National First Responders Day
30th – National Candy Corn Day

Creating "Behind the Scenes" Social Media Content That Drives Interaction

Some of the best social media content happens when nobody is trying to create social media content.

It is the baker preparing the first batch before sunrise. The contractor standing in the middle of a renovation before the dramatic transformation.

The restaurant staff getting ready for the dinner rush. The retailer unpacking boxes filled with new merchandise. The business owner laughing with employees over something that would never make it into a polished advertisement.

These moments may seem ordinary to the people who experience them every day. To customers, they offer something entirely different: access.

Behind the scenes content has become an increasingly valuable part of social media marketing because it gives customers an opportunity to see the people, processes, personalities, and work that normally remain hidden.

In an online environment overflowing with carefully staged advertisements and increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligence generated content, a glimpse of real life can be remarkably refreshing.

That desire for authenticity is showing up in consumer research. Sprout Social's 2025 Index found that authenticity and relatability are among the traits consumers value most from brands on social media. The same research found that roughly half of consumers say original content is what makes their favorite brands stand out on social platforms.

The message for small businesses is fairly clear. Customers do not always need another perfectly designed advertisement.

Sometimes they simply want to see what is happening on the other side of the door. Consider a local restaurant. The finished plate is beautiful and certainly deserves a photograph. But customers may be equally interested in watching the chef prepare it. They might enjoy seeing fresh ingredients arrive that morning, learning why a particular dish was created, or watching the dining room transform before a special event.

The finished product tells people what you sell. Behind the scenes content tells them who you are. That distinction has become especially important as consumers grow more skeptical of overly polished digital content. Social media users have spent years looking at perfect photographs, carefully staged lifestyles, sponsored influencer posts, and heavily edited videos. Artificial intelligence has now added an entirely new layer of synthetic content to those feeds.

Real life suddenly has a competitive advantage. For small businesses, that is good news. Authenticity does not require an enormous production budget. In fact, attempting to make behind the scenes content too polished can defeat its purpose.

A smartphone is often enough.

The objective is not poor quality. Lighting should still be reasonable, audio should be understandable, and viewers should be able to follow what is happening. But there is an important difference between professional and overproduced. Behind the scenes content should feel as though the viewer has been invited into the business rather than shown another commercial.

One of the easiest places to begin is with the process behind your product or service.

A custom apparel company can show embroidery being stitched onto a jacket. A florist can document an arrangement coming together. A remodeling company can reveal what a kitchen looks like halfway through construction.

What feels routine to you may be fascinating to someone who has never seen it. This is where business owners often underestimate themselves. After performing the same work for years, processes begin to feel ordinary. The owner thinks, "Why would anyone want to see this?"

Because your customers do not do it every day.

There is a reason television programs about factories, restaurants, home renovations, and manufacturing have attracted audiences for decades. People enjoy seeing how things are made. Social media simply allows every business to create its own miniature version of that experience.

The transformation format is particularly effective. Show the empty event space before setup and then reveal the finished room. Show the damaged floor before restoration and the final result afterward. Show the shipment arriving in boxes before displaying the merchandise beautifully arranged in the store.

Transformation creates curiosity because viewers want to see the conclusion. Short form video is particularly well suited to this style of storytelling. HubSpot's recent State of Marketing research continues to rank short form video among the content formats delivering the highest return on investment for marketers. Instagram Reels, TikTok, Facebook Reels, and YouTube Shorts have conditioned audiences to consume quick visual stories.

That does not mean every video should be fifteen seconds long. The story should determine the length.

If the process is visually interesting, allow viewers enough time to understand it. If the entire story can be told in twelve seconds, do not stretch it to a minute. Social media rewards attention, not unnecessary length.

People should also be a major part of the strategy.

Customers do business with companies, but they build relationships with people. Introduce the employee who has been with the company for fifteen years. Follow a salesperson preparing for an important presentation. Ask the chef what dish they would order from the menu. Let the warehouse manager show what happens after an online order arrives. These moments create familiarity.

Over time, followers begin recognizing employees. They remember personalities. They feel as though they know the business before they ever walk through the door. That familiarity can translate into trust.

Research from Edelman's Trust Barometer has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of trusted, relatable voices in shaping perceptions of organizations. For small businesses, employees and owners can become some of the most credible voices available because they are directly connected to the work customers are seeing.
Behind the scenes content can also demonstrate expertise without having to announce it.

Imagine a contractor explaining why a particular material is being used during a renovation. The video does not need to say, "We are experts." The expertise is visible.

A mechanic showing how a worn component differs from a new one demonstrates knowledge.

A hairstylist explaining how a color formula is selected demonstrates knowledge.
A financial professional preparing for a seminar demonstrates preparation and professionalism.
Show rather than tell.
That principle has powered effective storytelling for generations, and it works remarkably well on social media.

Behind the scenes content can also create interaction when businesses intentionally invite audiences into the process. Instead of merely showing two paint colors, ask followers which one they would choose.

Let customers vote between two seasonal products.
Ask them to guess what is arriving in a shipment.
Show part of a renovation and ask what they think the finished space will become.
The audience moves from watching the story to participating in it.

That interaction matters because social media platforms use engagement signals to help determine which content deserves additional distribution. Comments, shares, saves, watch time, and other behaviors can indicate that users find a piece of content interesting.

A simple question can therefore do more than generate conversation. It can potentially increase visibility.
There is one rule worth remembering: ask questions people actually want to answer.

"What do you think?" is easy to ignore.

"Would you choose the black cabinets or the natural wood?" is specific.

"Guess how many cupcakes we're preparing for this weekend" turns the post into a game.

"Which employee do you think decorated this tree?" creates personality.

The easier and more enjoyable the interaction, the more likely people are to participate.
Mistakes and imperfect moments can occasionally make excellent content as well.

That does not mean broadcasting serious customer problems or embarrassing employees. It means recognizing that harmless imperfections can make a business feel human.

Did the office holiday decorations take three attempts to hang correctly? Did the shop dog interrupt the video? Did twenty boxes arrive on the same afternoon?

Those moments often make entertaining content because they are relatable.
Humor works best when it grows naturally from the personality of the business rather than feeling manufactured for social media.
Milestones provide another opportunity.

The hundredth order of the

week. A major project nearing completion. The first customer at a new location. An employee anniversary. A new piece of equipment arriving. Invite customers into those moments.

When people have followed the journey, the milestone begins to feel like something they participated in rather than something they merely observed.

Businesses should also think beyond the individual post. Behind the scenes content can become a recurring series.

"Monday Morning at the Shop."
"What's in the Box?"
"Meet the Team."
"From Start to Finish."
"Before We Open."

Recurring concepts make content creation easier because businesses no longer need to invent an entirely new idea every week. They also give followers something familiar to recognize.

Businesses often assume boosting should be reserved for advertisements and promotions. That is not necessarily the case. If a behind the scenes Reel is receiving unusually strong comments, shares, or watch time, consider putting a modest paid budget behind it.

Even $20 to $100 can extend the reach of a successful piece of content, particularly when a local business targets people within its actual service area. The key is not paying to rescue weak content.

Watch the organic response first. If followers are already engaging, paid promotion can introduce that proven content to a larger audience.

Think of it as opening the backstage door a little wider. Of course, not everything behind the scenes belongs online.

Customer information should remain private. Employees should be comfortable appearing on camera. Confidential documents should stay out of the frame. Sensitive projects may require permission before being shown. Businesses should establish simple guidelines so employees understand what can and cannot be shared. Authenticity does not mean abandoning professionalism. It means allowing people to see the genuine personality and effort behind the professional result.

And that may be the real reason this content works. Consumers already know businesses want to sell them something. They see advertisements all day long. What they do not always see is the work that happens before the sale. Behind the scenes content makes those invisible details visible.

For small businesses competing against national companies with much larger advertising budgets, that visibility can be tremendously valuable. A corporation may have a larger marketing department, but it cannot replicate your employees, your story, your customers, or what happens inside your business every day.

You already have the content. The challenge is recognizing that it is worth sharing.

Behind the scenes social media content gives small businesses an opportunity to turn everyday operations into engaging stories. Showing real employees, processes, transformations, milestones, and authentic moments can help businesses build familiarity and trust while encouraging meaningful audience interaction. Short form video, specific questions, recurring content series, and selective paid boosting can extend that impact even further.

In a digital world filled with polished advertisements and artificial content, one of the most effective social media strategies may also be one of the simplest: open the door and let customers see what really happens inside.

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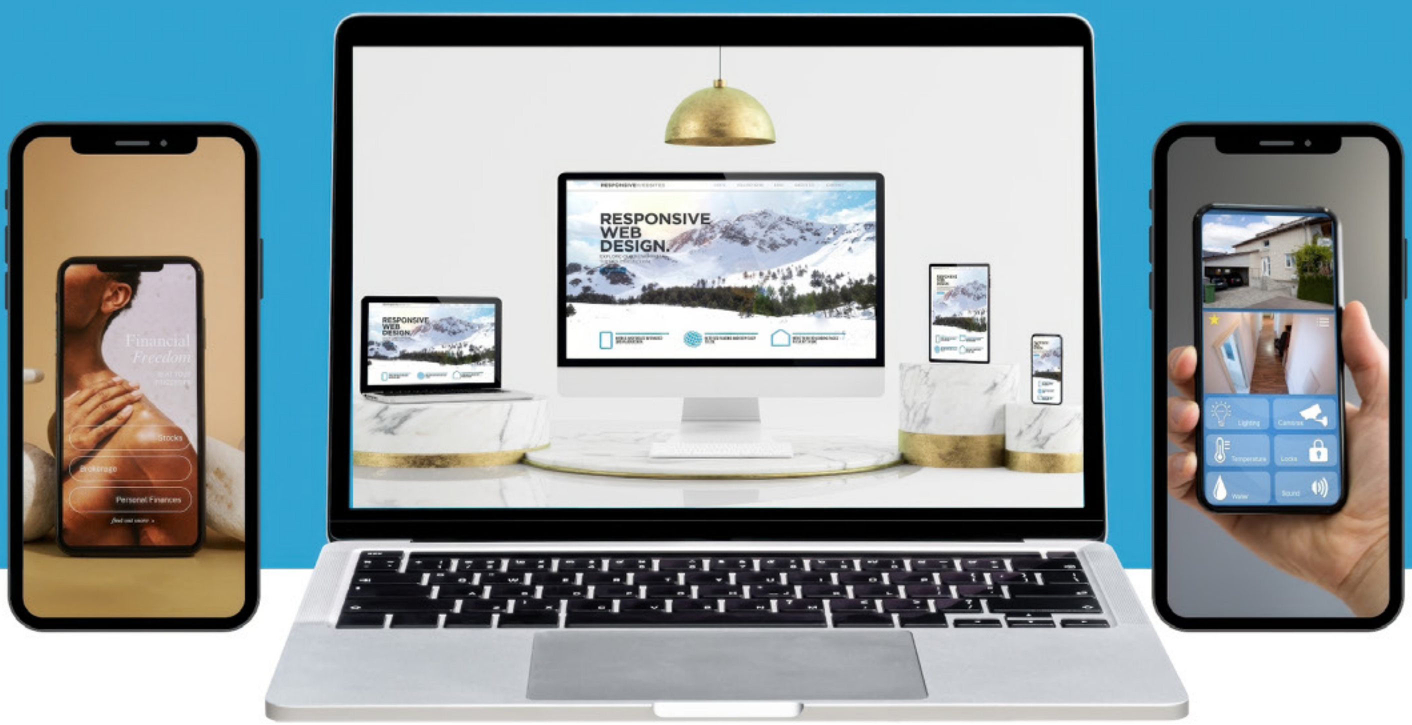

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The Future of Small Business Leadership: Trends to Watch Over the Next 5 Years

Leadership has never been a fixed concept. The qualities that defined a successful business owner twenty years ago are not necessarily the same qualities that will define one five years from now.

Technology is changing how work gets done. Younger generations are reshaping workplace expectations. Artificial intelligence is moving from experimentation into everyday business operations.

Through all of it, owners are being asked to lead companies that can adapt faster without losing the human relationships that made them successful in the first place.

For small business leaders, the next five years will be less about predicting exactly what happens and more about becoming comfortable with change.

The owner who insists on doing everything the way it has always been done may struggle, even if that approach worked beautifully for decades. The leader who remains curious, builds a capable team, and knows when to change course will be in a much stronger position. Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly accelerate that transition.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2025 Empowering Small Business report, 58 percent of small businesses said they were already using generative AI, compared with 40 percent in 2024 and just 23 percent in 2023. Even more telling, 84 percent said they planned to increase their use of technology platforms.

AI is quickly moving beyond the experimental phase and becoming another tool in the small business owner's toolbox.

What happens next will be a leadership question as much as a technology question. Owners will need to determine where AI improves the business and where it gets in the way. It may help draft correspondence, analyze data, organize information, automate repetitive tasks, or assist with marketing. But an AI tool cannot shake a customer's hand, recognize when an employee is struggling, negotiate a delicate relationship, or understand every nuance behind an important business decision.

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index offers an interesting glimpse into where this could be headed. The research found that 41 percent of leaders expect their teams to be training AI agents within five years, while 36 percent expect employees to be managing them. Microsoft has even coined a term for the emerging role: the "agent boss," someone who learns to delegate work to and manage AI systems much as people currently manage other resources.

For a small company, that could dramatically change productivity. A ten person organization may eventually possess capabilities that once required a much larger staff. Administrative work can be reduced, information can be analyzed more quickly, and employees can devote more time to customers, creativity, problem solving, and higher value responsibilities.

There is an important caution hidden inside that opportunity. Technology does not automatically make a business better. It magnifies the decisions surrounding it.

Automating a bad process simply creates a faster bad process. Generating more content does not help if the content is generic. Adding an AI customer service system is not progress if customers become frustrated trying to reach a person. Future leaders will need enough technological understanding to know not only what they can automate, but what they should automate.

Perhaps surprisingly, the rise of AI may make human leadership skills more important rather than less important.

Deloitte's 2025 survey of more than 23,000 Gen Z and millennial respondents across 44 countries found that younger workers place considerable importance on skills such as communication, leadership, empathy, and networking as they think about career advancement. Technical knowledge matters, but so does the ability to work effectively with other people.

That finding points toward one of the biggest leadership changes ahead. Managing employees will increasingly require more than assigning work and measuring performance. Employees are looking for leaders who coach, communicate, and help them develop.

Deloitte found that 86 percent of Gen Z respondents and 84 percent of millennials consider mentorship and guidance important to their development. Yet the same research found that managers spend nearly 40 percent of their time dealing with immediate problems and administrative responsibilities, while only 13 percent is spent developing people.

Therein lies one of the great challenges for small business leadership. Owners are busy. Managers are busy. There is always a customer problem, deadline, staffing issue, invoice, or operational emergency competing for attention. Mentoring someone rarely feels as urgent as solving today's problem, but over time it may be considerably more important.

The small business leaders who learn to develop people rather than simply manage tasks will create organizations that are less dependent on them personally. Employees become better decision makers. Future managers emerge. Problems can be solved without everything traveling up the chain of command. The owner gains something every entrepreneur eventually needs: leverage.

Workplace expectations are changing at the same time.

Deloitte's research found that 89 percent of Gen Z respondents and 92 percent of millennials consider a sense of purpose important to their job satisfaction and well being. Yet purpose does not necessarily mean employees expect every company to change the world. It can mean understanding why their work matters, seeing opportunities to grow, feeling respected, and believing their contribution has value.

Traditional ideas about career ambition are changing as well. Only 6 percent of Gen Z respondents in Deloitte's survey identified reaching a senior leadership position as their primary career goal. That does not mean younger workers lack ambition. It suggests many are defining success differently, placing greater emphasis on learning, financial security, meaningful work, flexibility, and quality of life rather than simply climbing the corporate ladder.

Small businesses that recognize this shift may gain an important recruiting advantage. A smaller employer may not always be able to match the salary or benefits package of a national corporation, but it can often provide something more personal: direct access to leadership, broader responsibilities, hands on learning, faster advancement, and a visible connection between an employee's work and the success of the company.

This will require leaders to rethink retention. Keeping good employees will not simply be a matter of increasing compensation every year. Pay will remain critically important, but employees will also evaluate whether they are learning, whether their ideas are heard, whether leadership communicates effectively, and whether there is a future for them inside the organization.

Transparency will become part of that equation. Employees have more information about employers than previous generations ever possessed. Salary data, employee reviews, social media, professional networks, and online communities have made workplace culture increasingly visible. Customers have similar visibility into how companies behave.

The wall separating internal culture from external reputation has become very thin.

How a business treats employees can affect recruiting. How leadership responds to criticism can influence customers. How an owner behaves publicly can shape the brand. Future leaders will need to recognize that company culture is no longer merely an internal human resources issue. It is part of reputation management.

Adaptability will become equally important. If the last several years have taught business owners anything, it is that carefully constructed plans can change quickly.

Economic conditions shift. Supply chains are disrupted. New competitors emerge. Consumer behavior evolves. Technology creates entirely new ways of delivering products and services.

Strong leaders will still plan, but they will hold those plans with enough flexibility to change them when the evidence says they should. Data will make those decisions easier. Small businesses now have access to information that was once available primarily to large corporations.

Accounting platforms provide real time financial information. Customer relationship management systems track sales activity. Digital advertising platforms measure leads and conversions. Website analytics reveal customer behavior. AI can increasingly help owners make sense of all of it. The challenge will not be obtaining information. It will be deciding which information deserves attention.

A business owner can easily become buried beneath dashboards, reports, notifications, and performance metrics. Future leaders will need to identify the handful of numbers that genuinely indicate whether the company is healthy: profitability, cash flow, customer retention, sales pipelines, productivity, employee turnover, customer acquisition costs, and whatever measurements are most relevant to their particular business.

Good leadership will increasingly combine data with judgment. Numbers can tell us what happened. Experienced leaders still need to determine why it happened and what should happen next.

Delegation will become another dividing line between businesses that remain small and businesses capable of scaling. Many entrepreneurs build companies by personally handling almost everything. That involvement can be an enormous advantage early on because it keeps the owner close to customers and operations.

Eventually, however, the owner can become the company's biggest bottleneck. If every meaningful decision requires one person's approval, the business can only move as quickly as that person can think, respond, and work. Future focused leaders will create systems that distribute responsibility without sacrificing accountability. They will give good employees room to make decisions and, occasionally, room to make mistakes.

This does not mean owners lose control. In many ways, the opposite is true. Systems, clear expectations, reporting, and capable managers create a more sustainable form of control than personal involvement in every detail.

It also makes the company more valuable. A business that can function effectively when the owner is away is generally stronger than one that depends on that individual every hour of every day. Whether the eventual goal is expansion, succession, sale, or simply a better quality of life, building leadership throughout the organization creates options.
The future of leadership, then, may involve a subtle but important shift away from control and toward influence. The old model of leadership often placed the boss at the center of everything. Information flowed upward. Decisions flowed downward. Authority came primarily from position.

The emerging model is more distributed. Leaders establish direction, create standards, provide resources, develop people, and build environments where employees are capable of making good decisions. That does not make leadership softer.

Accountability still matters. Performance still matters. Difficult decisions will still need to be made.
But tomorrow's strongest leaders may spend less time proving that they are the smartest person in the room and more time making everyone in the room better.

Small businesses have a significant advantage here. They can change faster than many large corporations. Owners often interact directly with employees. New ideas can be tested without navigating multiple layers of bureaucracy. Culture can be shaped through everyday interactions rather than corporate initiatives.

That proximity makes leadership personal. And as technology becomes more sophisticated, personal

leadership may become even more valuable. Customers will still want to feel understood. Employees will still want to feel respected. Teams will still need clarity when circumstances become uncertain. No software platform eliminates those responsibilities.

The leaders who thrive over the next five years will therefore need to become comfortable operating in two worlds. They will embrace AI while protecting human connection. They will use data while maintaining judgment. They will demand results while investing in people. They will create systems while remaining flexible enough to change them. Most importantly, they will remain curious.

The future will not necessarily belong to the business owner who knows the most today. It will belong to the one who remains willing to learn tomorrow.

The next five years will reshape small business leadership through artificial intelligence, changing workforce expectations, greater demand for mentorship, increased access to data, and a growing need for adaptable organizations.

Research already shows rapid AI adoption among small businesses while younger employees place increasing value on development, purpose, and strong human leadership.

Successful owners will not respond by abandoning traditional leadership principles. They will combine the best of them with new tools and new expectations.

The technology will change. The workplace will change. But the fundamental job of a leader will remain remarkably familiar: provide direction, develop people, make sound decisions, and build an organization capable of succeeding even when the future does not unfold exactly as planned.

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Scaling Smart: Growing Your Business Without Losing Control

Growth is supposed to be the goal. More customers, more revenue, more employees, and more opportunities are usually viewed as signs that a small business is succeeding. Yet ask an owner who has experienced rapid growth, and you may hear a surprisingly different story.

Growth can create just as many problems as it solves. A company can increase sales while watching profits shrink. A growing customer base can overwhelm employees. An owner who once knew every detail of the operation can suddenly feel disconnected from what is happening inside their own company. Before long, the business that was supposed to create opportunity begins creating chaos.

This is why successful business owners eventually learn an important distinction: growing and scaling are not necessarily the same thing.

Growth often means adding resources at roughly the same pace as revenue. More customers require more employees, more equipment, more inventory, or more hours. Scaling means building a company capable of handling additional business without costs, complexity, and workload increasing at exactly the same rate.

Think of it as building a wider road before adding more traffic.

For small business owners, this distinction matters because demand alone does not create a healthy company. Sustainable growth requires infrastructure.

Before aggressively pursuing additional customers, owners need to determine whether their existing operation can handle them.

The stakes are significant. The U.S. Small Business Administration reports that roughly 80 percent of new businesses survive their first year, but only about half remain after five years. Many factors contribute to business closures, but cash flow, management challenges, changing market conditions, and operational weaknesses consistently create difficulties as companies develop.

Sometimes success itself exposes those weaknesses. Imagine a contractor accustomed to managing ten projects suddenly responsible for thirty. Or a restaurant that receives unexpected publicity and sees customer traffic double. Revenue may increase immediately, but so do scheduling challenges, customer service demands, purchasing requirements, staffing needs, and opportunities for mistakes. More business is only good business when the organization can deliver it profitably.

That makes financial visibility one of the first requirements for smart scaling. Business owners need to understand much more than total revenue. Gross margins, labor costs, customer acquisition costs, overhead, cash flow, accounts receivable, and profitability by product or service all become increasingly important as the company grows.

Revenue can be seductive. A company celebrating record sales may actually be becoming less profitable if the cost of producing those sales is rising faster than income.

Cash flow deserves particular attention. Growth frequently requires businesses to spend money before receiving it. Additional employees need to be paid. Inventory needs to be purchased. Equipment may need to be acquired. Marketing budgets increase. Meanwhile, customers may not pay invoices for several weeks.

A business can therefore be profitable on paper and still struggle to pay its bills. Financial forecasting helps owners anticipate these pressure points before they become emergencies. Rather than simply asking how much revenue could be generated, smart leaders ask how much working capital will be required to support that revenue.

People represent another critical part of the equation. Many businesses reach a point where the owner becomes the bottleneck. Every decision requires approval. Every problem lands on the owner's desk. Every important customer expects direct access.

What once felt like strong involvement eventually prevents the company from moving efficiently.

This transition can be difficult because entrepreneurs often build their businesses by being involved in everything. Scaling requires learning to let go.

That does not mean abandoning oversight. It means replacing personal control with organizational control.

Systems, processes, reporting, and accountability allow owners to maintain visibility without personally performing or approving every task. The goal is to create a business that operates according to clear standards rather than relying on the owner's constant presence.

Delegation becomes essential.

Hiring talented people is only the beginning. Employees need authority to make decisions within clearly defined boundaries. If every employee must repeatedly ask the owner what to do, the company has added payroll without truly adding capacity. Great leaders establish expectations and then trust capable people to execute.

This is also where documented processes become increasingly valuable. In a very small company, knowledge often lives inside people's heads. One employee knows how invoices are handled. Another understands the scheduling system. The owner knows how certain customers prefer to be contacted.

That arrangement works until someone leaves, becomes unavailable, or the company grows too quickly for informal knowledge sharing.

Standard operating procedures create consistency. They document how important tasks should be completed, how customers should be served, and how common problems should be addressed. They also make training new employees considerably easier.

Technology can help

businesses create additional capacity without proportionally increasing staff.

Customer relationship management systems can organize sales activity.

Accounting software can automate financial processes. Scheduling platforms can reduce administrative work. Marketing automation can maintain communication with prospects and customers. Artificial intelligence can assist with repetitive tasks, research, data analysis, and workflow efficiency.

The objective, however, should never be technology for technology's sake. Every tool should solve a real problem.

Adding software without improving processes can simply create more complexity. Smart scaling means identifying bottlenecks first and then determining whether technology, additional staff, better training, or a redesigned process provides the best solution.

Customer experience must remain part of the conversation as well. One of the greatest dangers of rapid growth is allowing the qualities that originally made the company successful to disappear. Customers who once received personal attention begin feeling like numbers. Response times increase. Quality becomes inconsistent. Employees become rushed.

Growth that damages the customer experience eventually undermines itself. Business owners should therefore monitor customer feedback closely while scaling. Reviews, surveys, repeat business, referrals, complaints, and response times can provide early warning signs that service quality is slipping.

Culture can experience similar pressure.

A five person company communicates naturally. Everyone knows what is happening because everyone is often in the same room. A twenty five person organization requires much more deliberate communication. At fifty employees, assumptions about values, expectations, and responsibilities can create serious problems.

Culture does not automatically scale. Leaders need to define what the company stands for, how employees are expected to treat customers and one another, and which behaviors will not be compromised as the organization grows.

Hiring decisions become particularly important during periods of rapid expansion. Filling positions quickly may solve an immediate staffing problem, but the wrong hires can create long term challenges. Skills matter, but so do attitude, reliability, adaptability, and alignment with company values.

Sometimes the smartest growth decision is slowing down long enough to hire correctly. Marketing should also scale strategically.

Businesses experiencing growth are often tempted to dramatically increase advertising because current campaigns are working. That can be effective, but only when operational capacity is ready for the additional demand.

Generating twice as many leads is not useful if sales teams cannot respond promptly or production teams cannot complete the work.

Marketing and operations must grow together.
The same principle applies to expansion. Opening another location, adding a new service, or entering a new market can be exciting, but expansion should solve an opportunity rather than satisfy an ego.

Before expanding, owners should ask whether the

existing business model is profitable, repeatable, and documented. If the first operation depends entirely on the owner to function, duplicating it may simply duplicate the problems.
This is where metrics become indispensable.

As businesses become larger, intuition becomes less reliable. Owners need dashboards that provide visibility into a small group of meaningful indicators. Revenue, profitability, cash flow, sales pipeline, customer retention, productivity, and other relevant measurements help leaders identify problems without becoming buried in data.

You cannot personally watch everything as a business grows.

But you can build systems that tell you where to look.
Perhaps the most important part of scaling intelligently is knowing what you do not want to lose.
Why did customers originally choose the business? What makes employees proud to work there? What standards are nonnegotiable? Which aspects of the customer experience distinguish the company from competitors?

Growth should amplify those qualities, not erase them.
There is nothing inherently impressive about having more employees, more locations, or higher revenue.

Size is not the same as success. A smaller company with healthy margins, loyal customers, strong employees, and an owner who still enjoys running it may be far more successful than a larger organization struggling beneath its own complexity.

The objective should not simply be getting bigger.
It should be getting better while becoming capable of handling more.

That is the difference between uncontrolled growth and intelligent scaling.
When the right systems, people, financial controls, technology, and leadership are put in place, growth stops feeling like something happening to the business.
It becomes something the business is prepared to manage.

And that may be the clearest sign that a small company is becoming a mature organization.

Scaling a small business successfully requires more than generating additional revenue. Sustainable growth depends on strong financial management, documented processes, effective delegation, capable employees, appropriate technology, and consistent customer experiences.

Business owners should build capacity before aggressively increasing demand and monitor profitability just as carefully as sales. The goal is not to grow as quickly as possible; it is to create a stronger organization capable of growing without sacrificing quality, culture, profitability, or control.

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Preparing Your Small Business for a Successful Holiday Season

The holiday season has a way of sneaking up on small business owners. One minute, customers are squeezing the last few weekends out of summer; the next, inboxes are filling with holiday promotions, storefronts are decorated, and consumers are making shopping lists.

For businesses, however, a successful holiday season rarely begins when the decorations go up.

It begins weeks, and sometimes months, earlier. The final months of the year represent an enormous economic opportunity. The National Retail Federation reported that holiday spending during November and December 2025 surpassed $1 trillion for the first time, illustrating just how much purchasing activity is concentrated into a relatively short period. While large national retailers capture plenty of that spending, small businesses have something their larger competitors often struggle to replicate: personal service, local connections, flexibility, and memorable customer experiences.

Taking advantage of the season requires more than launching a Black Friday sale. Holiday success is usually the result of preparation across the entire business, from marketing and inventory to staffing, technology, customer service, and cash flow. The businesses that prepare early enter the season with a plan. Those that wait often spend November and December reacting.

Marketing is one of the first areas that deserves attention. Consumers begin thinking about the holidays earlier than many businesses realize. Gift research, travel planning, event scheduling, and major purchases can begin well before Thanksgiving. If your first holiday marketing campaign launches in December, you may be joining a conversation your competitors started months earlier.

For many businesses, September and October are ideal months to begin developing holiday campaigns, even if customer facing promotions will not appear until later. This gives owners time to plan offers, schedule photography, create advertisements, prepare email campaigns, develop social media content, update websites, and coordinate special events without the pressure of last minute deadlines.

A holiday marketing calendar can make an enormous difference. Start with the dates that matter most to your particular customers, then work backward. Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, Giving Tuesday, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's Eve, and year end deadlines may all present opportunities. Restaurants and hospitality businesses may also focus heavily on holiday parties, while professional service companies may emphasize year end planning.

Small Business Saturday deserves particular attention for locally owned companies. American Express launched the initiative in 2010 to encourage consumers to shop at independent businesses, and it has since become an established part of the holiday shopping weekend. The message behind it aligns naturally with one of the strongest advantages small businesses possess: customers increasingly understand that spending locally helps support the communities where they live and work.

But competing during the holidays does not mean every promotion needs to involve a discount. Constantly reducing prices can squeeze already thin margins and condition customers to wait for sales. Small businesses can compete differently by creating value through gift bundles, limited seasonal products, complimentary gift wrapping, loyalty incentives, exclusive experiences, convenient pickup, gift cards, or thoughtful extras that make shopping easier. Gift cards deserve special consideration. They are convenient for customers who are unsure what to purchase, and they introduce businesses to recipients who may never have visited otherwise. For restaurants, salons, retailers, entertainment venues, and many service businesses, a gift card purchased in December can create another customer interaction months later.

Your digital presence should also receive a holiday checkup before traffic increases. Visit your website as if you were a first time customer. Are your holiday hours easy to find? Is your phone number correct? Does the website work properly on a smartphone? Are gift cards, reservations, appointments, shipping policies, and store information easy to locate? Can customers quickly understand what you offer?

Your Google Business Profile deserves the same attention. Holiday hours should be accurate, photos should be current, and business information should be consistent. Consumers searching for nearby stores, restaurants, entertainment, and services are often ready to act. Incorrect hours or outdated information can send a motivated customer directly to a competitor.

Social media can become especially valuable during this period, but businesses should resist turning every post into an advertisement. Holiday content provides an opportunity to show personality. Introduce employees, share gift ideas, showcase seasonal products, highlight community traditions, provide behind the scenes glimpses, and feature customers. People are already surrounded by promotional messages; content that feels useful or human has a better chance of earning attention.

Businesses should also consider putting a modest paid budget behind their strongest holiday social media content. Organic reach alone may not expose an important promotion to enough people, particularly during a season when advertising competition increases. Even a relatively small investment can expand local exposure when targeting is carefully defined by geography, demographics, or interests. Rather than boosting everything, identify content that is already generating interest and use paid promotion to amplify it.

Email marketing should be part of the plan as well. Existing customers already know your business, making them one of your most valuable audiences during the holidays. Instead of sending an endless stream of promotional messages, create a thoughtful sequence. An early holiday preview might introduce seasonal offerings; a later message might provide gift ideas; another could communicate ordering or reservation deadlines. The goal is to remain helpful and relevant without overwhelming subscribers.

Of course, great marketing can create an entirely new problem if operations are not prepared for the response.

Inventory based businesses should review previous holiday sales and identify products that are likely to experience higher demand. Supply chains can become less predictable as the holidays approach, so conversations with vendors should happen early. At the same time, ordering too much seasonal inventory can leave businesses discounting merchandise in January.

Historical sales, current trends, and realistic forecasting should guide purchasing decisions rather than enthusiasm alone. Staffing deserves equally careful planning. Determine staffing requirements early and communicate schedules as soon as possible. If seasonal employees are needed, recruit and train them before the busiest weeks arrive.

Training matters because holiday shoppers are often interacting with your business under less than ideal circumstances. A patient employee who helps someone find the right gift or solve a last minute problem can create a customer for years. That customer experience may ultimately be a small business's greatest holiday advantage.

Large retailers can compete aggressively on price and selection. Small businesses can compete on attention. Remembering a customer's name, helping select a gift, providing knowledgeable recommendations, accommodating a special request, or simply making someone feel welcome creates an experience that cannot easily be replicated by an automated checkout screen.

The physical appearance of your business also deserves attention. Make sure exterior areas are welcoming and easy to navigate. Holiday decorations can add warmth and personality, but they should complement the business rather than overwhelm it.

Community involvement offers another opportunity. Toy drives, food collections, charitable partnerships, Chamber of Commerce events, tree lighting celebrations, and local holiday festivals can connect your company with the community while supporting worthwhile causes.

The strongest initiatives are not simply publicity opportunities; they reflect genuine participation in the place where your customers live.

Behind the scenes, financial preparation is just as important. Holiday revenue can create the illusion that a business has more available cash than it actually does. Additional inventory, overtime, advertising, shipping, events, and seasonal expenses can quickly consume revenue.

Creating a holiday budget in advance allows owners to determine how much they can responsibly spend and where additional investment is most likely to produce a return.

There is also one important date on the calendar that many businesses overlook: January. A successful holiday strategy should not end on December 31. Holiday shoppers may include hundreds of people interacting with your company for the first time. What happens next determines whether they become one time purchasers or long term customers.

Encourage new customers to join your email list. Invite them to follow your social media accounts. Provide an incentive for a return visit. Ask satisfied customers for reviews. Create January offers that give people a reason to come back. The greatest value of the holiday season may not be the transaction that happens in December; it may be the relationship that begins because of it.

The holidays magnify both the strengths and weaknesses of a business. Great customer service becomes more noticeable. So do slow websites, confusing policies, inadequate staffing, and poor communication.

The businesses that perform well during the holiday season rarely leave those details to chance.

When January arrives and the decorations come down, the real measure of holiday success is not simply how much was sold. It is whether the business entered the new year with stronger customer relationships, greater visibility, and momentum that can continue long after the last gift has been opened.

Preparing your small business for a successful holiday season starts well before the traditional shopping rush. Early marketing planning, an updated digital presence, thoughtful promotions, appropriate staffing, inventory management, strong customer service, community involvement, and careful budgeting can help businesses capitalize on one of the busiest periods of the year. Most importantly, business owners should view the holidays as an opportunity to create relationships rather than simply transactions.

A successful season can deliver more than December revenue; it can create loyal customers who continue supporting the business throughout the year.

Why Email Still Outperforms Social Media

Social media gets most of the attention in modern marketing. It is visual, immediate, public, and constantly evolving. A clever video can reach thousands of people overnight, while a strong Instagram post can introduce a small business to customers who had never heard of it before. When we talk about digital marketing, social media naturally dominates much of the conversation.

Yet one of the most effective marketing tools available to small businesses is considerably less flashy.

Email.

Despite predictions about its demise dating back years, email marketing remains remarkably effective. While social media is exceptional at generating awareness and starting conversations, email often has an advantage when the objective moves from getting noticed to getting customers to take action.

The reason begins with something simple: ownership. When a business builds an email list, it creates a direct connection with customers and prospects who have chosen to hear from it. Social media audiences operate differently. A company may have 10,000 followers, but an algorithm ultimately determines how many of those people see any individual post.

That distinction has become increasingly important as organic social media reach has become more competitive. Businesses can spend years building an audience and still reach only a fraction of those followers without strong engagement or paid promotion. With email, a company has considerably more control over when and how it communicates with subscribers.

An email list is therefore more than a marketing database. It is a business asset.

That does not mean every subscriber opens every email. Far from it. According to Mailchimp's email marketing benchmarks, average email open rates vary considerably by industry, audience, and campaign type. Even so, email gives businesses the ability to communicate directly with people who have already demonstrated some level of interest rather than hoping an algorithm places content in front of them.

The scale of email also remains enormous. Estimates from Statista project that the number of global email users will continue climbing toward five billion users by the end of the decade. Email is not disappearing because newer communication channels have emerged. It has become part of the infrastructure of modern life.

Think about how people use their inboxes compared with their social feeds.

Social media is largely a discovery and entertainment environment. People scroll to see friends, watch videos, follow news, find inspiration, or simply pass time. They may encounter a business along the way, but purchasing is not always their primary intention. The inbox is different.

Consumers use email to receive order confirmations, appointment reminders, invoices, newsletters, promotions, event information, and messages from businesses they already know. Commercial communication is an expected part of the environment.

That difference in mindset can make email particularly effective when a business wants someone to take the next step.

Email also offers something social media struggles to match: personalization. A single social media post generally delivers the same message to everyone who sees it. Email marketing allows businesses to segment audiences according to interests, purchasing behavior, location, previous engagement, or stage in the customer journey.

A restaurant can communicate differently with frequent customers than occasional visitors. A retailer can send recommendations based on previous purchases. A service company can follow up with prospects who requested information but never scheduled an appointment. The message becomes more relevant because it reflects the recipient.

Consumers increasingly expect that relevance. Research from Salesforce has repeatedly found that customers expect businesses to understand their individual needs and preferences. The days of sending identical messages to every person in a database and expecting exceptional results are fading. This is where automation becomes particularly powerful.

Without email automation, the prospect may receive a phone call or perhaps a single follow up message. If they are not ready to buy immediately, the relationship can quietly disappear.

With a thoughtful automated email sequence, that same prospect can receive useful information over several weeks. The business remains visible without requiring an employee to manually send every message.
The technology does the repetitive work while the business continues building the relationship.

Email also excels at customer retention.

Small businesses often devote significant resources to finding new customers while overlooking the people who have already purchased from them. That can be expensive.

Acquiring a new customer generally requires more effort and marketing investment than encouraging an existing satisfied customer to return. Email provides a natural way to maintain that relationship. Newsletters, helpful tips, company updates, seasonal reminders, special events, new services, and occasional offers keep businesses familiar between purchases. When the customer needs the product or service again, the company has not disappeared from memory.

This is particularly valuable for businesses with longer purchasing cycles.

A homeowner may only need a new roof once every few decades, but that does not mean the roofing company should disappear after the project. Helpful homeowner content can keep the company familiar and potentially generate referrals for years.

Email marketing also provides remarkably clear measurement.

Businesses can track delivery

rates, clicks, conversions, purchases, unsubscribes, and other behaviors. With proper website analytics and conversion tracking, companies can often follow the path from an email click to a completed action.
That makes email highly accountable.

Instead of asking whether people "seemed to like" a campaign, marketers can examine whether recipients visited the website, requested information, registered for an event, or completed a purchase.

Perhaps most importantly for small businesses, email can deliver substantial value without requiring an enormous advertising budget. Social media advertising can be extremely effective, but reaching larger audiences often requires continuous spending. When the advertising stops, the additional reach usually stops with it.

Email works differently. Building a quality list takes time and effort, but once the relationship exists, businesses can communicate with those subscribers repeatedly at a relatively low incremental cost.

That is one reason email has historically produced such strong returns. Various industry studies have estimated email marketing returns at roughly $30 to $40 or more for every dollar spent, although actual results vary dramatically depending on industry, list quality, campaign strategy, and how return is calculated.

The specific figure matters less than the broader lesson: email can be remarkably efficient when businesses communicate with an audience that has voluntarily expressed interest.
Of course, email has its own challenges.

Inboxes are crowded. Spam filters have become more sophisticated. Consumers unsubscribe quickly when businesses send irrelevant or excessive messages. Privacy regulations and platform requirements have also made responsible list management increasingly important.
The answer is not sending more email.

It is sending better email. Strong email marketing respects the subscriber's attention. It provides useful information, relevant offers, interesting stories, or timely reminders. It gives people a reason to remain subscribed. The subject line earns the open, but the content earns the relationship.

Businesses should also resist the temptation to purchase email lists. A smaller database of people who genuinely want to hear from you is far more valuable than tens of thousands of addresses belonging to strangers. Permission creates relevance, and relevance drives results.
So where does social media fit into all of this?
Everywhere.

The argument for email is not an argument against social media. The two channels perform different jobs exceptionally well.

Social media helps businesses get discovered. It introduces brands to new audiences, showcases personality, encourages conversation, and provides opportunities for content to spread beyond an existing customer base.

Email takes that initial attention and creates a more direct relationship.

A person discovers a local retailer through Instagram, visits the website, and joins the email list. A Facebook follower registers for a webinar and begins receiving educational emails. Someone watches a company's TikTok video, downloads a guide, and enters an automated email sequence.

Social media rents the attention.

Email helps you build the relationship.

That combination can be considerably more powerful than either channel operating independently.

For small businesses, this means every digital marketing strategy should include opportunities to convert temporary attention into an owned audience. Website signup forms, event registrations, loyalty programs, downloadable resources, contests, and in store invitations can all help grow an email database organically.

The objective is not simply to accumulate addresses. It is to create a group of customers and prospects who have given the business permission to continue the conversation.

That permission is extraordinarily valuable. Algorithms will continue changing. New social platforms will emerge. Others will decline. Consumer habits will evolve, and the newest marketing technology will inevitably capture our attention.

Through all of that change, email continues doing something remarkably simple.
It delivers a message directly to someone who asked to receive it.

And sometimes, the simplest marketing tools remain the most powerful.

Email continues to outperform social media in many areas because it provides businesses with greater control, stronger personalization, measurable performance, and direct access to an audience they have built themselves.

Social media remains invaluable for discovery, engagement, and brand awareness, but algorithms ultimately determine how much organic content followers see. The strongest small business marketing strategies use both channels together: social media attracts attention, while email turns that attention into an ongoing customer relationship. In a marketing world increasingly controlled by platforms and algorithms, building an audience you can communicate with directly may be one of the smartest investments a business can make.

EMAIL VS. SOCIAL MEDIA:

Social media may get more attention, but email remains one of the strongest tools for turning an audience into customers.

EMAIL GIVES YOU DIRECT ACCESS
An algorithm determines whether followers see your posts on social media. Your permission based email list gives you a much more direct way to communicate with customers & prospects.

EMAIL CAN BE PERSONALIZED
Segment subscribers by interests, purchases, location, customer status, or behavior. You can deliver information that is individually relevant.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS GREAT FOR DISCOVERY
Social platforms excel at reaching new audiences, creating conversations, showcasing personality, and building brand awareness.

EMAIL IS BUILT FOR FOLLOW THROUGH
Once someone discovers your business, email can nurture that relationship through newsletters, offers, reminders, educational content, and automated campaigns.

THE SMART STRATEGY: USE BOTH

SOCIAL MEDIA
Get Discovered
↓
Build Awareness
↓
Generate Interest
↓
Encourage Email Signup

EMAIL
Build the Relationship
↓
Stay Top of Mind
↓
Drive Action
↓
Encourage Repeat Business

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Building a Better Website:
The Essential Elements that Drive Conversions

1. Clear Headline

Visitors should understand who you are, what you offer, and why it matters within seconds.

2. Simple Navigation

Make it easy for visitors to find your services, products, contact information, and other important pages.

3. Strong Calls to Action

Tell visitors exactly what to do next, whether its call, request a quote, schedule, shop, or contact you.

4. Mobile-Friendly Design

Your website should look and function just as well on a phone as it does on a desktop.

5. Trust Builders

Reviews, testimonials, certifications, project photos, awards, and other credibility signals help visitors feel confident choosing you.

6. Fast Load Times

Visitors expect pages to load quickly. A faster website creates a better user experience and reduces the chance of potential customers leaving.

7. Conversion-Focused Content

Speak to your customers' needs and clearly communicate how your business can help.

8. Easy Ways to Contact You

Make phone numbers, contact forms, email addresses, and other contact options easy to find so interested visitors can quickly connect with your business.

Your website shouldn't just look good. It should turn visitors into customers.

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