Office 365

10 tech tips
to help you run your small business more efficiently

Microsoft

When you're running a small business, every dollar counts and every hour is precious. You can't afford to waste time or money on anything that slows your progress or limits your opportunities.

Today, a new generation of technology is making it possible for small and mid-sized businesses (SMBs) to achieve greater efficiency and higher productivity than ever before—and at surprisingly affordable rates.

Here are 10 tech tips that can help you operate your small business efficiently.
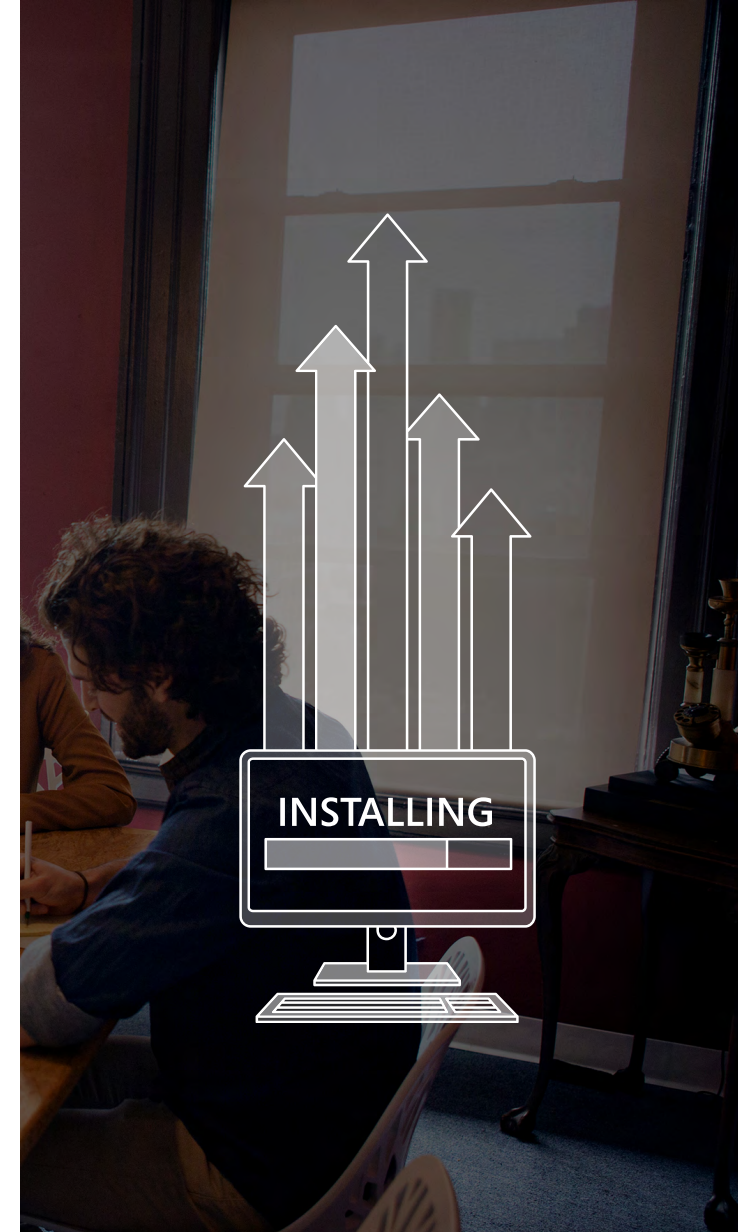
1. KEEP YOUR TECHNOLOGY UP TO DATE

Using the latest technology is one of the best things you can do for your small business. Tech-savvy SMBs increase revenues 15 percent faster than those that are slow to adopt new technology, according to a study by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG).[1] Tech-savvy SMBs also create new jobs twice as fast.

The BCG study found that high-performing SMBs stay ahead of mainstream IT adoption, making strategic investments in new technology advancements to improve efficiency, connect with new customers and markets, and compete effectively with much larger businesses. Such SMBs use the full range of available tools—from productivity software to Internet connectivity to cloud-based services.

In addition, using up-to-date technology can enhance customer satisfaction and make people more likely to do business with you. In research conducted by Survey Monkey for Microsoft, for example, more than 70 percent of consumers who were concerned about sharing personal information online said they would leave an SMB website rather than provide contact information if they thought the site was outdated.

[1] *Lessons on Technology and Growth from Small-Business Leaders*, The Boston Consulting Group, October 2013

2. EMBRACE THE CLOUD

A growing number of small and mid-sized businesses are moving to the cloud—and it's easy to see why. Until recently, the only way for them to have the most advanced technology was to invest in the same expensive hardware as large companies, which put it beyond the reach of many SMBs. Cloud technology changed that. Today, smaller businesses adopt cloud-based versions of enterprise-level solutions and pay only for the services actually used.

Most cloud-based services keep themselves up to date so you can stay competitive with the latest and greatest features. Updates and improvements to your productivity tools and other technology solutions are delivered automatically, so your employees get immediate access. The cloud also makes it easy for businesses to scale up or down as circumstances change. If you hire a new employee, just add that person as a user and pay an incremental cost.

It's also easy to sync information across all devices, so you and your employees can edit a document on a smartphone, for example, and access the updated version on a tablet or laptop. The cloud also provides nearly unlimited storage, state-of-the-art security for your data, and enhanced compliance for businesses that deal regularly with sensitive information and must comply with specific government regulations or international standards.

With cloud-based services, you're always up to date.

3. MOBILIZE YOUR BUSINESS

If your customers, partners, and employees are mobile—and they are—then your business and productivity solutions should be, too. According to a Sophos survey, 93 percent of SMBs have at least some remote workers who rely on mobile technology, and on average about 20 percent of all SMB employees work remotely.[2] And in a March 2014 Dimensional Research survey of 300 SMB information technology (IT) professionals, 97 percent said that anytime, anywhere access to data and applications makes employees more effective.[3]

Along with supporting mobile workers, businesses are tapping into the mobile market with apps that offer their customers content, convenience, location-based features, and other advantages. The cloud is the ideal platform for mobile development. You can develop and deploy mobile apps faster, and then scale them instantly to meet demand without the need for new equipment.

The cloud is the ideal platform for mobile development.

[2] *The Future of Network Security*, Sophos, 2012
[3] *Business Applications and Tablets: A Survey of IT Professionals at Small and Mid-Sized Organizations*, Dimensional Research, March 2014

4. EMPOWER TEAMWORK

Efficient collaboration is critical to every company's success, SMBs and multinational corporations alike. How critical? More than two-thirds of chief information officers (CIOs) from top-performing companies see internal collaboration and communication as the keys to innovation, according to a report by IBM.[4] Conversely, industry analyst firm IDC estimates that inefficient collaboration accounts for an average loss of 21.3 percent in an organization's total productivity each year.[5] Yet efficient collaboration is often hard to achieve.

Workers typically spend 61 percent of their work week reading and replying to email, searching for information, scheduling meetings, and communicating with team members, according to the McKinsey Global Institute.[6] Employees who travel for their jobs or work remotely may find it hard to collaborate with colleagues. Meanwhile, collaborating with partners, suppliers, and others outside your small business poses many of the same difficulties as collaborating internally.

Mobile and cloud solutions provide a secure place for coworkers to store and share information, and they make that data easily accessible on most popular devices. This eliminates many of the collaboration challenges that have a negative effect on efficiency and productivity. In addition, cloud-based communications and productivity tools make it easy to set up video conferences where team members in different locations can meet face-to-face and view the same documents or other resources, without spending the time or money to travel to meetings in person.

[4] *2011 Global CIO Study*, IBM, 2011
[5] *Bridging the Information Worker Productivity Gap: New Challenges and Opportunities for IT*, IDC, September 2012
[6] *The Social Economy: Unlocking value and productivity through social technologies*, McKinsey Global Institute, 2012

5. UNLEASH PRODUCTIVITY

Although cloud technology offers many opportunities for greater efficiency, more than 80 percent of SMBs in the United States see productivity as the primary benefit, according to industry research by Techaisle global SMB technology specialists.[7] Working in the cloud allows your organization to adapt to change quickly, access programs at a moment's notice from almost any device, and improve business processes.

For businesses of 1–50 employees, promoting productivity through the cloud means giving team members high-end business tools to streamline their work practices. For example, knowledge workers today spend roughly 20 percent of their time—one entire day every week—searching for information internally.[8] With the right tools, your employees could spend most of that wasted time on more productive work. And because cloud solutions work across devices and on most mobile platforms, getting work done isn't limited to the confines of the office.

As company size grows, centralizing apps in the cloud can reduce strains on IT management, too. In fact, the main driver for businesses of 50–250 employees is IT productivity: freeing tech-oriented staff from the chore of maintaining software on devices, and enabling them to do more for the business.

Knowledge workers today spend roughly 20 percent of their time searching for information internally.

[7] *2014 Small Business PC Cost Study*, Techaisle, 2014
[8] Interact, 2013

6. ENABLE FLEXIBLE WORKSTYLES

Bring your own device (BYOD) is an increasingly common practice among small and mid-sized businesses. BYOD can relieve companies from the responsibility of managing and maintaining aging computers, but it can also create potential security and compatibility problems and lead to costly inconsistencies. Cloud-based productivity tools and storage can eliminate those problems.

Cloud-based and mobile versions of popular business software suites are now available across mobile platforms—including Windows, iOS, and Android—and on devices ranging from smartphones to tablets to laptops. With flexible cloud-based software, your employees can work effectively from anywhere at any time. They can move easily from one platform to another, across multiple devices, and use the skills they already have to create content, analyze data, and help you build your business. You can motivate and empower your employees by allowing them to use the devices they prefer while keeping their experience consistent and your data secure.

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7. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CLOUD STORAGE

Because cloud storage synchronizes data across different devices, you always see the latest version of a document or the newest information no matter where you are when you access it. Along with those capabilities, SMBs also require security, privacy, and access control. The best solutions combine a high level of security with the convenience of cloud storage, synchronization, and team services with familiar productivity and collaboration tools.

Having your important company information centrally stored in the cloud, and not on the hard drives of your employees' many devices, can greatly reduce the risk that your data may be lost, corrupted, or destroyed.

8. GET SMART ABOUT BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE

Business intelligence (BI) technology can put data to work for your small business. You can use it to discover and analyze both internal and external information, develop valuable insights, and make more informed decisions to move your business forward.

With a BI tool, you can pull data from inventory, point-of-sales systems, websites, spreadsheets, and public databases. By combining and filtering this data, you can get a clear picture of how your business is doing. Fortunately, you don't have to be a trained data analyst or spend a fortune to use business intelligence tools to make quick and insightful decisions. Some of the best BI tools provide a cost-effective solution to help SMBs make the most of data.

9. IMPROVE YOUR SECURITY

Cloud-based technology solutions are designed to protect your business data, relieve you and your employees of the worry that comes with trying to safeguard the data on your own, and ensure that you retain control of your information. Cloud-based solutions also help SMBs in highly regulated industries stay in compliance with specific standards.

Strong data security can reduce the time that you and your employees spend managing and responding to security issues, freeing you for more positive and proactive work.

10. LOWER YOUR COSTS

Another good way to boost efficiency is to lower IT expenses. By adopting cloud technology, you can reduce or eliminate the costs of purchasing, managing, and maintaining servers and other expensive hardware. The average number of servers to server administrators in a typical data center is 50 servers to 1 administrator. The average ratio in cloud-based data centers is 500:1.[9]

Many small businesses are choosing to migrate to cloud-based productivity solutions as they replace aging PCs with newer tablets and other mobile devices. Plus, by switching to the cloud-based services subscription model, you can forgo software licenses and many upfront costs, and purchase only the services you need.

In a recent survey conducted by Spiceworks, one of the top benefits IT pros reported about moving to the cloud was cost savings. On average, respondents reported saving approximately 20 percent.[10]

On average, IT pros report 20 percent cost savings after moving to the cloud.

[9] *Microsoft SharePoint 2010: Deploying Cloud-Based Solutions*, Phillip Wicklund (Microsoft Press, 2011)
[10] *Survey of 150 US and EMEA IT pros at companies with 250 or fewer employees*, Spiceworks, August 2015

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