

## SMART SMALL BUSINESS BEST DIGITAL TOOLS

# Say it to my Facebook page

Small businesses can get big results from social media, digital tools

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Tweet, Vine, Pin, Post. Update a blog. Like a Facebook status. Network via LinkedIn. There's myriad options for small business owners to connect with customers, peers and others via digital media.

Yet, these entrepreneurs also have to balance budgets, keep track of accounts receivable, manage payroll and sell their products and services.

With limited time and financial resources, it can be incredibly difficult to figure out the most efficient and effective ways to embrace the rapidly expanding digital world.

If a small business owner shuns social media, he or she could miss out on big marketing opportunities. But if too much time is spent seeding such sites, other important duties could fall by the wayside.

These are the challenges of many small businesses nationwide, including the four firms that are part of USA TODAY's Smart Small Business series. This six-week series addresses the ups and downs of entrepreneurship and provides advice on topics such as creating sustainable growth, using social media for marketing and finding financing that works.

The four Smart Small Business participants all have dived into the digital world already. Here's some of their outreach in that area:

► The Twitter feed for We Rub Your's Korean BBQ sauces includes photos from tasting events and information on Korean cuisine. Co-founders Janet Chung and Ann Chung Mellman also use Twitter to directly engage with other foodie users.

► Bhakti Chai's Pinterest page is filled with images that reflect the Indian culture that inspired founder Brook Eddy to create the tea company. There are pictures of spices, yoga poses and Bollywood stars.

► The website for Jin+Ja, a beverage created by Reuben Canada, includes easy-to-access links to Jin+Ja's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube profiles. Those sites are updated frequently and include information such as where to buy Jin+Ja and what other beverages mix well with it.



TODD FLITT, USA TODAY

We Rub Your's Ann Chung Mellman, left, and Janet Chung use Twitter to directly engage with other foodies.

EILEEN BLASS, USA TODAY  
**Reuben Canada of Canada Enterprises, which makes Jin+Ja. The company website has links to Jin+Ja's Facebook, Twitter and YouTube profiles.**



### Using Web technology

How some owners responded when asked if their small businesses have an online presence:

	Yes	No	In development
Traditional website	82%	11%	6%
Mobile website	18%	49%	8%
Application	5%	60%	6%

Source: 2013 Small Business Technology online survey of 845 small-business owners, conducted Aug. 14-23.

► The Facebook page for Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese, run by the Giacomini family, provides details on the farm's more than 50-year history, as well as links to interesting news about cheese — such as a recent article about “funky, innovative cheeses.”

### DIGITAL DOINGS

If done consistently and strategically, entrepreneurs can use digital media to bolster brand awareness, improve customer relations and boost sales, say marketing and small business experts. This year, average digital media usage among U.S. consumers is esti-

ated at nearly 15 hours per week, according to researcher PQ Media. By 2017, it's expected to hit 19.30 hours per week.

“This is where your customers are,” says Sabina Ptacin Hitchen, co-founder of Tin Shingle, an online community and resource provider for small business owners.

But even as digital media use grows, there are firms staying on the sidelines. One in 10 small businesses don't have a website, according to the National Small Business Association's 2013 Technology Survey. Nearly 30% don't use social media.

“You don't need to have a flashy or super-slick website.” It just has to be “clean and updated.”

Katie Vlietstra, National Association for the Self-Employed

A major issue for small business is deciding which platforms to embrace — as well as what potential time and money-sucking options to weed out.

One must-have: a presentable website. “You don't need to have flashy or super-slick website,” says Katie Vlietstra, director of government affairs at the National Association for the Self-Employed. It just has to be “clean and updated.”

When it comes to choosing for the wide array of social-media choices, firms should first focus on channels that mean the most to the businesses, advises Jeff Sweat, director of PR and Social Media for a agency Deutsch LA.

A business-to-business company may want to begin with a presence on LinkedIn, for instance, while consumer-oriented company may want to post a profile on Facebook.

“Pick your battles,” he says. Companies should check out the digital resources that others in the industry are using — competitors included — to see if those platforms would fit in with their own business plans, says Sweat.

The most vital social-media site: Ptacin Hitchen points to Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Once a business opts in to social media, it must maintain an active presence, she says. It's not enough to create a profile and update it once in a while. Aim for daily updates — or don't just focus on company news.

“Don't just talk about yourself at the time,” she says “Share information; ask questions.”

For the already over-taxed entrepreneur who can't fathom the idea of adding another job to the daily to-do list, Ptacin Hitchen offers this advice: “Instead of seeing it as a burden, think of it as a gift.”

Small businesses can use social media to share interesting industry news, promote new products and solicit consumer feedback. If done right, those social-media followers will likely become evangelists for the brand, she says.

“Sure it takes time, but it is time well spent,” she says. “In the beginning, you may not love it. It may be