What’s Ahead in 2016 for Small Businesses?

Wouldn’t it be great to have a crystal ball to predict the 2016 outlook for entrepreneurs and small business owners? Of course, none of us really knows what lies ahead in the coming year—but to give you the next best thing to that crystal ball, I will pass on to you what Rieva Lesonsky tells me about 2016. She is one of my favorite small businesses resources. Rieva is CEO of GrowBiz Media, a content and consulting company specializing in covering small businesses and entrepreneurship. She was formerly Editorial Director of Entrepreneur Magazine and has written several books about small business and entrepreneurship. She asked several small business experts and thought leaders to share their insights.

But first, her prediction: “Small business owners must be proactive and embrace new technologies, ideas and business models. Entrepreneurs who are innovative, bold and gutsy will win the day. After all, as General George Patton once said, “Opportunities do not come to those who wait. They are captured by those who attack.””

**Innovation**

Jack Bienko, Director for Entrepreneurship Education, Small Business Administration (SBA)

Entrepreneurs continue to lead us toward a “smaller world” where innovation is directly related to client benefits and societal gains. This continues to inspire me as we address serious issues and seek to leverage solutions from all sectors.

**Marketing**

Gini Dietrich, CEO of Arment Dietrich and Author of *Spin Sucks*

It’s no surprise that everyone is inundated with content and exhausted with the options…most of them not good. Because of that, I predict 2016 will be the year the content marketing cream rises to the top and the weak will disappear. Small businesses will have to get more creative in their content—more video, more visuals, more behind-the-scenes access. Content is not something you do just because everyone else is doing it, but because it is driving sales for you. You will figure out who the influencers are in your industry…and build relationships with them to help you build an external ambassador program. And you’ll work hard to track content against real results, or you’ll just stop doing it.
Mobile

David Smith, Vice President of Worldwide SMB, Microsoft

Mobile capabilities will become more powerful than ever and new apps, including Skype for Business, OneNote and Continuum, which turns your phone into a big-screen projector and a big-time productivity tool, will allow SMBs to run an increasing amount of their business processes on a single mobile device.

Money

Eyal Shinar, CEO, Fundbox

2016 will be the year where big banks and fintech startups start creating partnerships and offer more solutions to SMBs. We will see the two working with each other rather than against each other.

Cindy Yang, Small Business Expert, NerdWallet

Entrepreneurs will go online more for small business loans. Online loans account for 2 percent of all small business loans today. That number is expected to rise to 16 percent by 2020.

Retail and ecommerce

Mike Kwatinetz, Founding General Partner, Azure Capital

Today’s ecommerce company is more about curation—being a source for items the shopper has not [yet decided to buy] and curating products so the target demographic is delighted when shopping. The degree [to which a company] is able to personalize the shopping experience impacts how well the customer is delighted with what they are offered.

Security

Klaus-Michael Vogelberg, Group Chief Technology Officer, Sage

It's not just huge enterprises that are targets [of cybercrime]—any online business is a potential victim. But small businesses often lack the resources to defend themselves against attack. It could destroy their reputation and cripple them financially.

New security software for a small business needs to be simple and easy to use—even better if it can make use of crowdsourced analytics to spot suspicious patterns and outbreaks. Small business owners need to be educated in the best ways to use existing technology to combat an ever-increasing threat.
**Technology**

**Jeff Crouse, Vice President, Pitney Bowes Global SMB Solutions**

In 2016, small and medium businesses (SMBs) will face an uphill challenge to manage their shipping and mailing due to higher shipping volumes, rising costs and increasing complexity—ranging from multiple carriers and rate structures, to real-time tracking and new compliance requirements. Simplifying the sending process will become even more critical in 2016 as postal and courier rates rise and more SMBs go global through ecommerce. The good news for SMBs is new technology and cloud-based solutions are becoming available to integrate physical and digital experiences and simplify processes on one platform.

**Michael Spadaro, CEO of Profound Cloud and Brother Small Business Advisory Panelist**

The evolution of mobile operating systems, hardware performance and wireless connectivity continue to set us up for a time when these devices, which many consider secondary to desktop workstations today, become the primary devices in small business IT.

Helping this transition is the emergence of more cloud-enabled devices. Today, even printers and scanners can seamlessly integrate with cloud services and platforms, making tablets and smartphones increasingly viable replacements for traditional workstations. I expect to see more of these devices coming to market in 2016 to support the growing number of businesses thinking cloud and mobile-first.

**Women**

**Cindy Yang, Small business expert, NerdWallet**

Assuming the current growth rate of women-owned businesses continues, more women will become small-business owners—43 percent of small businesses will be owned by women in 2016 and 50 percent by 2020. That’s up from 36 percent in 2012. Growing industries for women entrepreneurs include agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; accommodation and food services; and manufacturing.

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