Collaborate to compete

7 ways to give your small business a competitive edge

Microsoft
Collaboration and communication technology solutions make it possible for small businesses to compete successfully with much larger companies and to serve the needs of customers across town and around the world. Increasingly, mobility, social networking, and the cloud are essential elements for small businesses that want to remain competitive and thrive in today’s fast-paced global business environment.

As mobile computing becomes the standard for work and life worldwide, it offers small businesses new opportunities to share information with employees, partners, and customers, who can now work anywhere, at any time, and on any device and mobile platform. Social technology solutions are helping redefine how businesses communicate and collaborate—both internally and externally.
Efficient collaboration and communication are vital components in the success of every business. According to industry analyst firm IDC, inefficient collaboration costs organizations US$19,732 per information worker annually and accounts for an average loss of 21.3 percent in organizations’ total productivity each year. In another study, researchers in Australia used science and mathematics to prove the effectiveness of collaboration over individual effort. They found that one qualified person working alone has a 59 percent chance of successfully completing a series of critical tasks. Assign the same project to a team of three subject matter experts—with one person actually completing the tasks and the other two providing support as the work progresses—and the likelihood of success jumps to 99.9 percent.

With Microsoft Office 365, you can do your best work with new Office 2016 apps like Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook, as well as other Microsoft productivity apps. Features such as coauthoring in real time, instant messaging (IM), video, and voice make it easier to create, share, and work together wherever you are, across your favorite devices.

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1 Bridging the Information Worker Productivity Gap: New Challenges and Opportunities for IT, IDC, September 2012
2 The Science of Teams and Teamwork, Lifetime Reliability Solutions, 2014
Following the suggestions below can help you improve communication and collaboration to make your small business more effective, competitive, and successful:

1. BE MORE PRODUCTIVE WORKING TOGETHER IN THE CLOUD

Businesses of all sizes are taking advantage of the convergence of cloud and mobile technology to enhance collaboration and productivity, accommodate different work styles, and reduce costs. Many businesses now let employees work from anywhere, provide cloud-based productivity tools so those workers can communicate and collaborate more effectively, and encourage them to use their own devices for work.

In a March 2014 Dimensional Research survey of 300 SMB information technology professionals, 97 percent said that anytime, anywhere access to data and applications makes employees more effective. Enabling employees to work where, how, and on the devices they prefer can lead to greater productivity and improved collaboration—especially when they are empowered to work together using Office 2016.

With the new Office 2016 apps, you and your employees can use a mix of business and personal devices to access trusted business applications while benefitting from a consistent experience across your favorite desktops, laptops, smartphones, and tablets running iOS, Android, and Windows operating systems. Office 2016 gives you the flexibility to securely access and edit documents in real time across devices, so your team is always working from the latest version with everyone’s changes saved. Your company will benefit from the collaboration boost that comes from sharing documents fluidly and holding productive meetings from multiple locations.

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1 Business Applications and Tablet Adoption: A Survey of IT Professionals at Small and Mid-Sized Organizations, Dimensional Research, March 2014
The world reached a new milestone in 2014, when mobile devices began to outnumber people for the first time. Mobile technology is now multiplying five times faster than the global population, at a rate of about 10 new devices every second. In addition, more than 260 million people who work in small businesses now telecommute or use cloud-based services. Meanwhile, the emerging global generation is mobile by nature. As mobile technology continues to redefine how and where people communicate and collaborate, small businesses have the opportunity to tap into this developing market and to capitalize on the evolving mobile workforce as their business grows.

With Office 2016, you have full-fidelity viewing and editing of Office documents across Windows, Android, and Apple devices. That means you and your team can review, edit, analyze, and present with a consistent, familiar user experience optimized for your preferred devices. You can also switch easily from one device to the next without missing a beat. With the Office apps’ integration with Microsoft OneDrive for Business, you can access documents from anywhere, pick up where you left off on whatever device you were working on last, and even coauthor with others when you are on the go.

2. GO MOBILE

There are now more gadgets on Earth than people, CNET, October 6, 2014

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Today, many businesses that were once 9:00-to-5:00 operations have become much more fluid. As small businesses use cloud and mobile technology to broaden their reach and compete successfully with larger businesses, they often need to communicate and share information with customers, partners, and suppliers in different time zones or different countries.

Cloud storage synchronizes information across different devices, so you and your colleagues are always looking at the latest version of a document or other content no matter where you’re working or what device you’re using. When you use cloud-based productivity and collaboration tools, you can stay on the same page with distant partners and offsite employees, who can see the most up-to-date content. The cloud also provides high-level security and privacy while ensuring the access control you need.
4. WORK OUT LOUD

A growing number of forward-thinking small businesses are taking collaboration to a new level by using Microsoft OneNote shared notebooks to provide a centralized place where they can share all project information, including photos, videos, drawings, typed or handwritten notes, screen clippings, and web pages. When team members work together in the same notebook, OneNote syncs their changes within seconds. With powerful search and versioning, everyone can quickly find just what they’re looking for.

In addition, many small businesses also use social technologies like Yammer, an enterprise-grade social network, to engage their employees and enhance collaboration. Organizations that use social technologies see a 37 percent improvement in project collaboration, and almost 70 percent of users agree that social technology improves collaboration across remote locations. With the right set of social technologies to support open communication and seamless collaboration—no matter where people work—companies can also respond more quickly to changing market conditions.

Along with helping their employees collaborate better internally, small businesses can use technology solutions such as Yammer and OneNote shared notebooks in Office 2016 to work more effectively with external partners, suppliers, and customers. According to a 2013 Yammer survey, companies that use such technologies experience a 20 percent improvement in supplier and partner satisfaction.

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5 Inside Communication, 2012
7 Ibid.
“With just a click or two, you can initiate an IM chat, share documents, or set up an online meeting where team members in different locations can meet face-to-face and view the same information.”

5. MAKE MEETINGS EASIER

Meetings are an important part of business, providing valuable opportunities for people to brainstorm, collaborate, strategize, and share information. But not all meetings are created equal. According to information compiled by Atlassian, most employees attend 62 meetings a month, including the 31 hours they spend in unproductive meetings. Those unnecessary meetings carry a high price, costing US businesses $37 billion annually.⁸

New communication and collaboration tools like Skype for Business make it easy to conduct modern meetings that are more efficient and productive by providing familiar, easy-to-use features plus enterprise-grade security, compliance, and control. It can be tough for small businesses to get everyone together in the same room. Using Skype for Business HD video calling, coauthoring, app sharing, and presentations, your team can actively participate in meetings from anywhere. You can host or join a meeting from any of your favorite devices—whether they run on iOS, Android, or Windows—and easily present, share, and collaborate on documents or a virtual whiteboard during the meeting.

Need to ping someone for a quick question? Use Skype for Business IM, and then add voice, video, and screen sharing as the conversation evolves. With just a click or two, you can initiate an IM chat, share documents, or set up an online meeting where team members in different locations can meet face-to-face and view the same information, without spending the time or money to travel to meet in person.

⁸ You Waste a Lot of Time at Work, Atlassian
An increasing number of small businesses are using business intelligence (BI) solutions to spot trends, identify risks, and find new opportunities. One-click forecasting in Office 2016 helps SMBs quickly turn historical data series into an analysis of future trends. New treemap and waterfall charts in Office 2016 make it easier to visualize complex data, and they can be published directly to Microsoft Power BI from Excel.

You can use these new tools to connect, view, and shape data from multiple sources, including tables from websites, unstructured sources like Hadoop, and services like Salesforce. Use the improved Power Pivot features to map different data sets with drag-and-drop ease, and calculate hundreds of millions of rows of data with the new analysis functionality.

By using business intelligence tools, SMBs can transform company data into deep insights and make faster, more informed decisions that help maintain a competitive edge. According to a study by IBM and MIT Sloan Management Review, organizations that achieve a competitive advantage with data analytics and business intelligence are 2.2 times more likely to substantially outperform their industry peers.⁹

Like their enterprise counterparts, SMB employees need to work together on the same documents, such as sales reporting spreadsheets and marketing plans. An important collaboration feature of productivity tools like Office 2016 and Office Online is real-time coauthoring, which makes it possible for you and your team to edit and contribute to documents at the same time. These cloud-based tools save as you go. So when you work together on a Word document, you see everyone’s edits to text and formatting as they occur in real time. You can also use the version history to refer back to snapshots of the document during the editing process.

Because Office 365 supports mobility and flexible work styles, it doesn’t matter whether you and your team members are working on the web, a desktop, a laptop, or a mobile device. Every change will be synced in the document, automatically saved to the cloud, and made visible to the team.
To learn more about how cloud, mobile, and social technology solutions can make your business more collaborative and competitive, see office.com/business