



DON'T RUN FROM RUNNING COSTS

How to run a lean business without
giving up the nice-to-haves

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to part one of this series! In this guide, you'll learn the critical elements of running a successful business, along with useful resources that will help you build your business—without breaking the bank.

Many of us have the motivation and willpower to move boldly toward our creative dreams; however, the costs of running a business can be a source of anxiety and uncertainty. Luckily, every small business owner is capable of using tools and making decisions that allow their business to function efficiently. Whether it's tackling legal fees, software licenses, tax preparation, office space, or marketing costs, it's vital to keep up with the systems and resources that allow your business to leap forward.

While there are tons of business platforms, technologies, and courses available, the abundance of these resources can make it challenging to decide which tools are the best and most affordable for your business. This guide will give you tips and suggestions to help you determine which solutions can help you run your business effectively. Let's explore a few cost-effective and high-quality methods for combating running costs.

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FINDING LEGAL TOOLS FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Legal and financial questions can keep small business owners up at night. There will come a time when you're interested in trademarking or receiving patents for your ideas, names, or products. You'll also need to be clear on employee laws and insurance practices that you must follow. To truly be profitable and protected from liabilities, having access to a lawyer or legal tools is essential.

According to the American Bar Association, lawyers can cost up to \$727 per hour, which can be a significant financial strain for small business owners. Luckily, there are alternative options that are a bit more budget friendly, but are still incredibly useful.

[Rocket Lawyer](#) is a very helpful website that offers affordable options for businesses of any size. You can get help with incorporating your business the right way, writing contracts and having them reviewed by professionals, and asking questions that are answered by actual lawyers. This service also has a great document management system that offers electronic signatures.

You can also receive quick legal advice from [nolo.com](#) and the Small Business Association. If you are still hesitant about seeking legal advice, save up the cash to hire a lawyer for a few hours so they can review your contracts. The more your business grows, the more legal advice you may need. Start small and work up to more extensive legal engagement when necessary.



EXPERT TIP:

Consider affordable resources like these to help with the basics.

- Small Business Association
- Rocket Lawyer
- [nolo.com](#)

USING ACCOUNTING AND BOOKKEEPING RESOURCES

Additional business expenses also include accounting, bookkeeping, payroll, and taxes. However, these expenses mean that you're earning money in your business, so give yourself a pat on the back. While many small business owners choose to simply calculate numbers in their head, this is not a smart method for keeping your business afloat.

From budgeting and reporting to financial analysis, calculations, and taxes, there's no doubt that accurate bookkeeping is critical to your business. An accountant can ultimately save you time and expense because they can quickly tell you whether you're making money and evaluate the health of your bottom line.

However, an effective alternative to hiring a full-time accountant or bookkeeper to monitor your financials is to evaluate some of the things you can do yourself. Consider enlisting a part-time consultant to assist you. Alternatively, FreshBooks is a helpful tool that is popular among serious small business owners. This cloud accounting software is user-friendly for both beginners and seasoned business owners. [Freshbooks](#) allows you to send professional invoices, and it also tracks income, expenses, and time all in one space. If you're concerned about reporting your income and expenses during tax season, don't worry. Freshbooks makes it easy to obtain reports that you can then give to an accountant throughout the year. Just about everything you need to run and track your business' finances can be

found in this one program—and it only costs a fraction of what a salaried accountant charges.

[Wave Accounting](#) is also a great option for free small business accounting applications. Wave helps you organize income, expenses, and receivables like a pro. With this software, you can also produce financial reports, such as balance sheets and tax documents.

[QuickBooks](#) is another widely-used online accounting service that allows you to pay suppliers and contractors while keeping tabs on your bottom line from anywhere in the world.

Regardless of whether you decide to use an accountant or an accounting software, proper bookkeeping is imperative to your success, as it can make or break your business.



EXPERT TIP:

Evaluate some of the accounting tasks you can accomplish with affordable software tools, such as:

- Freshbooks
- Wave Accounting
- QuickBooks

OPTIMIZING BUSINESS OPERATIONS

If you are a solopreneur or you have a small team, group texts and emails can get out of control very quickly, and important tasks can be forgotten. Every small business needs a way to stay organized, while keeping track of team members and customers.

It doesn't matter if you're in the office or on the beach, [Trello](#) is a fun and easy-to-use tool that allows you to stay in sync with your team. Multiple teams can collaborate on projects, upload attachments, send messages, and assign jobs across users. Trello offers free (yes, free) and paid options depending on your needs and growth. [Asana](#) is another highly popular communication and task-tracking tool with similar features.

If your business handles sales for multiple customers, you will need a customer relationship manager, often referred to as a "CRM." This is a program often used to keep track of all of your sales prospects, including their contact information, notes on what they have purchased in the past, and even your conversations with them. A CRM also allows you to create a sales pipeline you can use to estimate your income.

As with many other organizational tools, there are quite a few CRM programs to choose from. A couple of low-cost CRM systems are:

- **Nutshell:** This tool offers several low-cost packages, as well as a FREE trial (there's that word 'free' again). This software is known for being user friendly and easily customizable.
- **Insightly:** Google offers this CRM, and it integrates with other Google products, such as Gmail and Google Calendar.



EXPERT TIP:

Consider a project management tool with free and paid tiers, like Trello. Multiple teams can collaborate on projects, upload attachments, send messages, and assign jobs across users.

HIRING AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Don't allow the words "human resources" to send you running away from what's necessary for your business. Sure, it can seem complicated and challenging to hire employees and implement policies and procedures, but there are options to make these essential practices a little less overwhelming.

As a business owner, scaling a team and making sure they are able to perform the level of excellence you expect can be very daunting. Eventually, the time will come when you need to recruit, hire, and train a solid staff for various roles—your friends and family can't necessarily lend a helping hand forever. Find tools and resources that will equip you to make sound hiring decisions based on role-specific criteria.

Check out low-cost software alternatives to help you or your team members keep up with government regulations, record keeping, benefits, payroll, and other tasks. If you have one or more employees, consider investing in one of these tools right away:



EXPERT TIP:

If you have one or more employees, consider investing in one of these tools right away.

- **Zoho People:** This highly customizable program is great at helping companies recruit and hire talent. Zoho People provides the tools necessary to run a professional business. They offer packages for as low as \$5 a month when you have only a few employees. Prices go up to \$100 per month depending on the size of your staff.
- **People Matter:** This software is aimed at service-based companies and works well for hiring and training your team members. People Matter is somewhat more expensive than Zoho People, but it offers a powerful and complete set of workforce resources and business intelligence solutions, like employee onboarding tools with esignature capabilities.

MARKETING AFFORDABLY

Introduction

Now let's move on to some of the fun stuff. Marketing is about authenticity and finding people who are interested in what you offer.

Many small business owners pride themselves on knowing their customers by first name or cheering alongside their clients' kids' sports teams. These are things to be admired, and they make business owners stand out from their competition—even larger businesses.

Always remember that you are your best-selling tool. Sprinkle in a bit of technology and know-how and you'll be well on your way to building a prosperous business. Consider the following ideas and resources to get started.

MARKETING AFFORDABLY

Website

Your business most likely needs a website presence for various reasons. Having an online presence allows you to connect with an endless number of potential customers anytime, anywhere in the world. You can hire a web designer to create a professional and customized website for you. Alternatively, you can design your own website on a site like [Wix](#) or [Squarespace](#), which will allow you to save money on a web designer. The complexity of your business offerings and your comfort level with technology may help you determine which resources to use. Hosting is the online space where your website is located, and hosting costs can get pricey. The good news is that you can get inexpensive hosting through [Wordpress](#), [GoDaddy](#), and other web service providers. If you are unable to afford the services of a large firm that builds sites with all the bells and whistles, seek options at your local college campuses for digital design majors who want to build their portfolio. When it comes to creating a quality website, your options are endless.



EXPERT TIP:

Consider seeking options at local college campuses for digital design team majors who want to build their portfolio.

MARKETING AFFORDABLY

Content and Graphics

Have you admired the most eye-catching graphics on social media or well-written content that other business owners share? Business owners create and share content so they can more easily connect with people on a larger scale than would otherwise be possible with in-person meetings. As a business owner, this also allows you to provide free information, regardless of what your business model may be.

In the past, the only way business owners created great images was by learning how to master Photoshop. Things have changed drastically since then and for the better. If you make jewelry, there's beauty in sharing your behind-the-scenes process and how much effort it takes to produce your products. If you're a food truck owner, share the inside of your truck and the level of detail that goes into driving, parking, and serving food. If you are a landscaper, what are some tips you can share to help your clients keep a well-soiled yard until their next appointment with you? Keep in mind that many of your customers buy into you before they purchase your products. Take your visual content to the next level by using the following:



EXPERT TIP:

Take your visual content to the next level by using the following tools:

- [Canva](#) or [PicMonkey](#) to create content and graphics for marketing, both of which have free and low-cost packages (like \$5 per month low), with plenty of high-quality templates to use.
- Royalty-free photos or your own photography to avoid legal issues.

MARKETING AFFORDABLY

Email Marketing

Building an email list is vital for growing your business and building a tribe of loyal customers. Sure, passing out business cards has always been the traditional way to do business, followed by a firm handshake, but think about the communication method your customers use the most. Even with the introduction of social media and thousands of dollars being spent in marketing, the number one business generator is still email. Gathering a list of customers or potential buyers is extremely powerful and positions you to stay in contact with them year after year. Once you have a large number of clients that support you, using your personal email will no longer serve your business needs. Luckily, there are several low-cost but high-quality tools you can use to build your email list and to send value-based emails and newsletters.

[MailChimp](#) was one of the first mass email systems created and is still one of the most popular among business owners. MailChimp is cost efficient and very easy to use. You can use a drag and drop interface to create recurring emails, and you can also segment your customers and potential customers into groups so you can easily send targeted content.

Other professional email content systems are [Constant Contact](#) and [AWeber](#). These systems are more complex and a bit more expensive than MailChimp; however, the more your business grows, the more customization features you may need. Your mailing list will be one of your most valuable and efficient assets.

Social Media

It doesn't matter what generation you were born in or what type of business you have, social media is necessary for most small businesses. Not only is social media a great way to connect with customers to see how they use your products, you can also see what your competitors are doing to leverage their social media presence.

[Facebook](#) is great for building a community of supportive customers and fans, while [Instagram](#) is best utilized by visually telling your business's story. Additionally, you can use [Twitter](#) to easily connect with similar brands and to engage with supporters. Twitter and Instagram provide optimal forums for hashtags (#). Learn the best ways to use them effectively and have fun with them.

DECIDING BETWEEN AN ASSISTANT OR VIRTUAL ASSISTANT

In the beginning stages, small business owners may feel the need to hire an assistant. Sounds appealing and very business savvy, right? However, many of the things that we believe we need help with are things we can do ourselves if we manage our time accordingly.

Hiring a full- or part-time assistant can be a huge step for a growing business. Depending on how many hours a week your assistant works, you may need to provide them with benefits. If you find yourself drowning in work and business expenses, consider trying a virtual assistant (VA). A VA is web-based, so you communicate with them via the internet and phone. Most VAs use their own equipment and software. One of the most appealing things about a VA is that the hours they work are scalable. This allows you to increase or decrease their hours each week or month based on your specific needs. Consider major projects that you plan on rolling out during the year, as well as the times of the year that you interact with clients frequently.

The salary of a skilled, full-time assistant can range from \$15-\$20 per hour, compared to a VA who will typically work for significantly less with a lot more flexibility. You can find VAs on sites like [Upwork](#) or [People Per Hour](#).



EXPERT TIP:

Consider a virtual assistant. One of the most appealing things about a VA is that the hours they work are scalable, allowing you to increase or decrease their hours based on your specific needs.

FORGING FORWARD

Remember that there will always be substitutes for many tools, processes, and concepts that are used in business. Continue to do your research and become acquainted with the most effective tools that fit your small business needs.

Now that you have read about many of the essential must-haves for small business owners, stay tuned for part two of our series to learn more about how you can cut personal expenses or start a side hustle to fund business growth.

Here is a quick and easy checklist for remembering the tools and resources that are must-haves and nice-to-haves for your business.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Determine level of support needed based on recommendations previously covered in this guide for whether the following “Running Costs” for your business are “Must-Haves” or “Nice-to-Haves.”
2. Select one for each “Running Cost” category.

Remember: Don’t run from these running costs ... they are an important part of ensuring you stay in business!

Stay Tuned: In part two of this series, you’ll receive actionable guidance for how to creatively fund your business.

RUNNING COSTS	LEGAL	ACCOUNTING	ORGANIZATION	HUMAN RESOURCES	WEBSITE	CONTENT	MARKETING
MUST-HAVES	<input type="checkbox"/> ROCKET LAWYER <input type="checkbox"/> NOLO	<input type="checkbox"/> FRESHBOOKS <input type="checkbox"/> WAVE <input type="checkbox"/> QUICKBOOKS	<input type="checkbox"/> TRELLO <input type="checkbox"/> ASANA <input type="checkbox"/> NUTSHELL <input type="checkbox"/> INSIGHTLY	<input type="checkbox"/> ZHO PEOPLE <input type="checkbox"/> PEOPLE MATTER	<input type="checkbox"/> GODADDY <input type="checkbox"/> WORDPRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> CANVA <input type="checkbox"/> PICMONKEY <input type="checkbox"/> STOCK IMAGES	<input type="checkbox"/> MAILCHIMP <input type="checkbox"/> CONSTANT CONTACT <input type="checkbox"/> AWEBER
NICE-TO-HAVES	<input type="checkbox"/> LAWYER	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCOUNTANT <input type="checkbox"/> BOOKKEEPER	<input type="checkbox"/> VIRTUAL ASSISTANT <input type="checkbox"/> UPWORK <input type="checkbox"/> PEOPLE PER HOUR	<input type="checkbox"/> HR PROFESSIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> WEB DESIGNER	<input type="checkbox"/> COPYWRITER <input type="checkbox"/> GRAPHIC DESIGNER <input type="checkbox"/> VIDEO/PHOTO EDITOR <input type="checkbox"/> PHOTOGRAPHER	<input type="checkbox"/> MARKETING MANAGER

