

51 Tips for Saving Money with Technology

By The Readers of Small Business Trends

September 2009

PRACTICAL TESTED TIPS

We asked the readers of Small Business Trends to contribute their best real-world tips and advice for how small businesses like yours can save money by using technology, or how to save money on technology purchases. The following tips and pointers represent the combined wisdom of small business owners, their staff and stakeholders.

– Anita Campbell, Editor, *Small Business Trends*

◆ BUY POWERFUL COMPUTERS TO LAST LONGER

“Initially purchase more hard drive, memory and a larger monitor than comes standard. It will increase the useful life of your computer and decrease your costs in the long run.”

Shared by:

Leslie Knight, Knight Performance Management, LLC, www.knightpm.com

Twitter: [@ITMinefield](https://twitter.com/ITMinefield)

◆ USE GOOGLE ALERTS TO FIND DEALS

“Before I make a decision on a piece of technology, I scour the review type websites like [CNET](http://www.cnet.com) and [PC Magazine](http://www.pcmag.com). I pick two items that have great reviews, and set Google Alerts for them-with the word “deals” next to them. For the next few days I monitor the prices that come up, and buy when the time is right. This works!”

Shared by:

Joel Libava, The Franchise King, www.TheFranchiseKing.com

Twitter: [@FranchiseKing](https://twitter.com/FranchiseKing)

◆ GO EASY ON WEBSITE BELLS AND WHISTLES

“Talk to your customer *before* you build your website. You may be surprised that she will not use more than 50% of what you are going to build. That’s 50% savings in technology budget and time.”

Shared by:

Chaitanya Sagar, People to Work With, p2w2.com

Twitter: [@Chaitanya](https://twitter.com/Chaitanya)

♦ **USE HOSTED SERVICES AND OPEN-SOURCE SOFTWARE**

“Many are free, like Thunderbird, and are better than most paid alternatives. Others, like Jive's hosted PBX, are significantly less expensive than the traditional products. Switching from Microsoft Office to OpenOffice alone will save you about \$100 per user per year.”

Shared by:

Brent Thompson, Jive Communications, www.getjive.com

Twitter: [@GetJive](https://twitter.com/GetJive)

♦ **SWITCH TO FREE ONLINE BOOKKEEPING SOFTWARE**

“I had a tough time when my computer crashed right before April and so I scrambled to find another solution where I would not have to depend on doing books on one computer. I chose www.outright.com and like it very much as I can enter my expenses from any computer. It's FREE.”

♦ **USE DISCUSSION FORUMS TO LOCATE DISCOUNTS**

“When shopping for technology products, this site can be addictive: www.Slickdeals.net. The forums are full of deals submitted by users and sometimes there are great bargains. Check this site first for coupons or deals before shopping for technology products. I saved \$5 in Best Buy last week with a coupon from here.”

♦ **GO TO SWAP/EXCHANGE WEBSITES FOR BUSINESS BOOKS**

“Read business books by renting them or swapping them: bookcrossing.com, bookins.com, bookmooch.com, novelaction.com, and PaperBackSwap.com.”

Above 3 Tips Shared by:

Shashi Bellamkonda, Network Solutions, blog.networksolutions.com

Twitter: [@Shashib](https://twitter.com/Shashib)

♦ **USE HOOTSUITE TO MANAGE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**

“As someone with two Twitter accounts as well as access to a Twitter feed for an association I'm in, I found it complicated and time consuming to try to post on all three accounts. I then found Hootsuite.com through that association I'm in. Now I can manage tweets on all three accounts, see my posts, mentions, direct messages, and statistics. There is greater functionality for me with this application. And yes, it's free.”

Shared by:

Diane Helbig, Seize This Day Coaching, www.seizethisdaycoaching.com

Twitter: [@dhelbig](https://twitter.com/dhelbig)

◆ **SAVE ON MAINTENANCE COSTS WITH WEB-BASED SOFTWARE**

“A great way for small businesses to save money on technology is to utilize Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions. They often remove the need for small businesses to buy pricey boxed software and the frequent upgrades that go along with it. Many Web-based applications also have a great support team that is available to the small business at no extra charge, and at all hours of the day/night (because, as we know many small business owners/operators keep non-traditional hours!).”

Shared by:

Jessica Routier, IAC-EZ, www.iacez.com

Twitter: [@IACEZ](https://twitter.com/IACEZ)

◆ **USE SOFTWARE THAT INTEGRATES WITH OTHER APPLICATIONS**

“If you want to grow or be agile, think about solutions that allow you to integrate data across applications, so you do not have to purchase new systems as you grow/change.”

Shared by:

Adrian Rivers, RIVCOM, www.rivcom.com

Twitter: [@adrianrivers](https://twitter.com/adrianrivers)

◆ **USE INEXPENSIVE ONLINE SURVEY SOFTWARE FOR MARKETING**

“Just because there's a budget crunch on doesn't mean that you should skip collecting feedback from your customers. I've been using online survey tools to collect customer information and keep me (and my clients) up on what's most important to our customers. When I only need the most basic information, I use [Survey Monkey](http://SurveyMonkey.com), but my favorite tool is [QuestionPro](http://QuestionPro.com) because they offer more functionality, better analysis and fabulous reports for just about the same amount of money.”

Shared by:

Ivana Taylor, DIY Marketers, www.diy marketers.com

Twitter: [@DIYMarketers](https://twitter.com/DIYMarketers)

◆ **SHARE TECHNOLOGY DEVICES BETWEEN FRIENDS**

“Swap technology with friends and business colleagues. If your friend has the latest video camera and you have the latest digital camera, swap technology for a few days. That way, everyone gets the technology and usage they need - without the price tag attached.”

Shared by:

Staci Wood, Small Business Trends Radio, smbtrendwire.com

Twitter: [@SannWood](https://twitter.com/SannWood)

♦ **USE - REALLY USE - THAT EMAIL NEWSLETTER**

“You know that email newsletter you send out? Start really using it! Include a section to help customers find you on various social media sites and start using it to feature content. Reprint articles in full, tease and build buzz for what’s coming in the weeks ahead, put links to the week’s top blog posts, etc. Rewrite them to help you promote content, new offerings, etc, so that you’re left better able to meet goals for minimal cost.”

Shared by:

Lisa Barone, Outspoken Media, outspokenmedia.com

Twitter: [@outspokenmedia](https://twitter.com/outspokenmedia)

♦ **SYNC MOBILE DEVICES TO YOUR COMPUTER**

“Integration of all your information, provided you have reliable backup, saves a huge amount of time, and time is money. Use Web-enabled smart phones (Apple iPhone) synched to your computer.”

♦ **KEEP YOUR OLD COMPUTERS AN EXTRA GENERATION**

“You do not NEED ‘State of the Art info-tech’. Use one-generation old computers and software. They are much less expensive; the bugs have been worked out; most of the important stuff runs just fine on it; they are still good for 3 years+/-, by which time a lot more will have changed anyway. ‘Keeping up with the Newest’ when it comes to technology is a big waste of money and time. Let the Nerds be the early adopters. You have a business to run and customers to serve -- don’t spend your valuable time debugging new info-tech. Make your policy to buy and use ‘State of the Need’.”

Above 2 Tips Shared by:

John Mariotti, The Enterprise Group, www.shape-shifters.com

Twitter: [@Johnentgrp](https://twitter.com/Johnentgrp)

♦ **USE FREE OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY SOFTWARE**

“Instead of costly productivity tool applications from Microsoft, use equivalent free tools. Google offers free versions of email, word processing, presentation, and spreadsheet applications. Sun offers a suite of free productivity tools called the OpenOffice Suite, including a word processor, spreadsheet, and presentation application. Mozilla offers a free email client, Thunderbird, which does most of the things Microsoft Outlook does.”

Shared by:

Keith Klundt, Orange Soda, www.OrangeSoda.com

Twitter: [@OrangeSoda](https://twitter.com/OrangeSoda)

♦ **SEARCH COUPON SITES FOR DISCOUNT CODES**

“Before I make any purchase online, I always search some online coupon sites for discount codes first. [Retail Me Not](#), [Coupon Shack](#) and [My Coupons](#) are my favorites. Some of the coupons can even be printed out and used in-store also.”

Shared by:

Amanda Stillwagon, My Finds Online, www.myfindsonline.com

Twitter: [@myfindsonline](https://twitter.com/myfindsonline)

♦ **SET UP AN EASY WEBSITE USING DREAMHOST’S AUTOMATED SYSTEMS**

“Easy way to set up a website.... Sign up for [Dreamhost](#). They offer a one click install for WordPress. You get a free domain name and lots of themes to choose from already installed for only \$8.95 a month.”

Shared by:

Tim Grahl, Out:think Web Development and Design, outthinkgroup.com

Twitter: [@timgrahl](https://twitter.com/timgrahl)

♦ **USE EXPERTCLICK FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS**

“ExpertClick makes it easy and affordable to get news releases out into the market with its NewsReleaseWire.com service. This feature alone makes the service worth the cost: 52 news releases a year are included, without per-release charges, which is a substantial savings over traditional press release distribution services. [ExpertClick](#) could pay for itself in 2 or 3 news releases.”

Shared by:

TJ McCue, Q4 Sales, www.q4sales.com

Twitter: [@tjmccue](https://twitter.com/tjmccue)

♦ **TRACK THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR MARKETING WITH ANALYTICS**

“Have metrics tracking in place. If my web hosting service doesn’t provide a stats system, or provides an inadequate one, I’d sign up for [Google Analytics](#). It offers more data than some small businesses need, but you can’t beat the price. You need metrics in place at the beginning so you can track all your upcoming marketing efforts. Cost = Free.”

Shared by:

Matt McGee, Small Business Search Marketing, www.smallbusinesssem.com

Twitter: [@mattmcgee](https://twitter.com/mattmcgee)

◆ **BARTER WITH OTHER SMALL BUSINESSES**

“Consider bartering. If you do Web design, get a deal on services like phone setup and maintenance by offering to refresh their website design. If you work with other small businesses you just need to think creatively and find a win-win situation.”

Shared by:

Robert Brady, Lotus Jump, <http://lotusjump.com>

Twitter: [@Robert_Brady](https://twitter.com/Robert_Brady)

◆ **ELIMINATE PAPER AND FILING WITH SCREENSHOTS**

“I'm finding I can eliminate a lot of paper and filing expenses -- not to mention filing and recovery of documents -- by taking quick screen shots of web orders and travel documents and such. I save them on my CPU unless they're travel documents, in which case I save them as JPGs and put them onto my iPhone.”

◆ **USE THE AMAZON CLOUD**

“We're saving several thousand dollars a month now by having moved our servers from a server farm somewhere else to the [Amazon cloud](#). You get much better uptime and response time, but for much less money. We're also using the Amazon cloud for storing files and backup.”

◆ **INSIST ON PRICE REVIEWS FROM EXISTING VENDORS**

“When the recession was at its worst we pushed our vendors that provided phones and the office internet bandwidth to redo their pricing. We found that vendors we'd been with a long time were giving new customers much better deals than existing customers, and we insisted on a review.”

◆ **HOLD MEETINGS ONLINE INSTEAD OF TRAVELING**

“We're using the web conference for webinars and to host meetings, often one-on-one meetings, to be more efficient with travel costs. We've had success with Webex and GotoMeeting both. We get used to the simple meeting online, as quick, and easy, and a lot more effective than getting on the plane.”

Above 4 Tips Shared by:

Tim Berry, Palo Alto Software, timberly.bplans.com

Twitter: [@timberly](https://twitter.com/timberly)

◆ **REQUEST VIP PRICING FROM VENDORS**

“Vendors whom I pay a lot of money to, like Verizon Wireless, I push for VIP treatment to receive any freebies or discounts that I can get from them.”

◆ **USE A COST EFFECTIVE BACKUP SERVICE**

“Carbonite is only \$50 a year and not only saves my data but I also have remote access to all my backed up files.”

◆ **USE ONLINE SHIPPING SERVICES**

“Although I rarely need to go to the post office, if I MUST mail something I use USPS.com. I print postage online using two-day priority mail – it’s like \$3 or so.”

◆ **COMBINE TECHNOLOGY TOOLS ONTO A SINGLE USB**

“Cram your needed tech tools (Skype, Firefox, Adobe Reader, and more) onto a USB key that you can keep with you. You can quickly and easily load them when travelling or mobile.”

Above 4 Tips Shared by:

Ramon Ray, Small Biz Technology, smallbiztechnology.com

Twitter: [@ramonray](https://twitter.com/ramonray)

◆ **PLAN AHEAD FOR GLOBAL EXPANSION WITH THE RIGHT WEB HOST**

“Since our business is about helping entrepreneurs and small businesses go global, we look for a web host who has technological capabilities to grow global with us and at the same time, establish good programs for our clients too who are just as eager to use technology to springboard into the global marketplace. Our global Web host measures their success by our success worldwide. It’s a win-win relationship.”

Shared by:

Laurel Delaney, Globe Trade, www.globetrade.com

Twitter: [@laureldelaney](https://twitter.com/laureldelaney)

◆ CREATE YOUR OWN ONLINE VIDEOS

“Everyone from the New York Times to USA Today is “flipping” over the Flip (TheFlip.com). The Flip HD Mino is a video camcorder that fits in your pocket, yet takes high definition (HD) footage -- and retails for under \$200. Video is increasingly important for getting your business found in search engines, and the Flip is an inexpensive way to get started creating video. And if you are looking for free lessons for how to shoot business video using the Flip camcorder, try OnlineVideoToolkit.com.”

◆ CREATE INEXPENSIVE BANNER ADS USING AN ONLINE SERVICE

“With PointBanner.com you can get professionally designed banner ads for as low as \$11 per banner ad. At that rate, an online branding ad campaign needn't cost you an arm and a leg.”

◆ PULL THE PLUG FAST ON FLOUNDERING TECH CONSULTANTS

“You often save money by outsourcing technology projects, because outside providers can hit the ground running and work more efficiently than less-experienced people. But watch for warning signs of projects gone wrong, such as not seeing tangible results in a reasonable time frame, or worse, having to re-do tasks not done right the first time. These can be signs that the provider's skills are not a good match for the project... they may be in over their heads. Insist on answers and progress, and if you don't get them, bring the provider's activities to a halt sooner rather than later. Don't keep throwing money down a black hole – anything you've paid to date is ‘[sunk costs](#)’ you won't recover. You'll save money by cutting your losses and starting over with a contractor who's a better fit.”

◆ SWITCH FROM DIRECT MAIL TO EMAIL MARKETING – AND SAVE 80%

“Email marketing saves at least 80% -- or more -- over the cost of direct mail (snail mail). And it works very well for marketing to existing customers whose email addresses you have. One website offers a [side by side comparison](#) of the cost of an email mailing versus a paper mailing. The results? According to their figures, it would cost \$48,620 and 17 days to execute a direct mail campaign to 50,000 addresses, versus \$650 and 6 hours to execute an email marketing campaign.”

Above 4 Tips Shared by:

Anita Campbell, Small Business Trends, <http://smallbiztrends.com>

Twitter: [@smallbiztrends](https://twitter.com/smallbiztrends)

◆ FIND DEALS ON TWITTER

“Lots of companies are using Twitter now to broadcast deals, coupons and special offers. The trick is finding them. Don't worry; just take a look at this list of [30 deal hunters on Twitter](#) who are out there finding the deals for you! Follow them for savings!”

Shared by:

Jim Kukral, www.jimkukral.com

Twitter: [@jimkukral](https://twitter.com/jimkukral)

◆ STOP BUYING DUPLICATE SOFTWARE

“Stop buying duplicate software – while making sure you’re not pirating. Do you have the right number of software licenses? Do you know what PC it’s on? Some companies over-buy out of concern, while others are woefully under-licensed (and are vulnerable to a software audit). Use an inexpensive asset tracking software program to track your software licenses. If you avoid buying just one duplicate license, or easily verify compliance – the product has easily paid for itself!”

◆ STOP PAYING FOR EMPLOYEE BREAKS

“Stop paying for employee breaks – without making employees angry. Do your employees clock in and out each time they take a break? Of course not! It’s time-consuming, plus it would take hours to add up their time. But with a biometric (fingerprint) time clock, employees can clock in and out as many times as needed, and the time clock automatically tallies their hours. Employees get the breaks they want and you get the hours you pay for.”

◆ ELIMINATE ERRORS WITH BARCODES

“Eliminate errors with barcodes – a proven technology that never makes mistakes. Rekeying is slow and prone to mistakes that cost you time and money. Put barcodes on customer invoices, products, even your computers or office furniture. The barcode is the ‘information beacon.’ Scanning takes just seconds and you’ll never have the wrong information again.”

Above 3 Tips Shared by:

Grant Wickes, Wasp Barcode Technology, www.waspbarcode.com

Twitter: [@gwickes](https://twitter.com/gwickes)

◆ PAY ATTENTION TO ERGONOMICS TO AVOID EXPENSIVE DOCTOR VISITS

“Technology is supposed to help small business owners, not hurt us. But sometimes the very machines we can’t run our businesses without can cause irreparable harm to our bodies. When I was hurting I asked Brian Bentow, author of *The Computer Athlete’s Handbook* for advice. Here’s what I learned:

‘If you’re a laptop devotee, use an external mouse and keyboard whenever possible. This helps reduce stress in your shoulders, wrists, arms, elbows, and neck.

Are you in the market for a new keyboard? Make sure it allows you to keep your wrists, elbows and shoulders in neutral positions. Try one with low key pressure. Your best bet could be a split keyboard.

Your mouse should fit comfortably in your hand and shouldn’t require you to twist your arm.”

Shared by:

Rieva Lesonsky, GrowBiz Media, www.growbizmedia.com

Twitter: [@Rieva](https://twitter.com/Rieva)

◆ TAKE A COMMUNITY COLLEGE COURSE TO LEARN HOW TO EDIT VIDEO

“I decided that video editing is becoming a must-have skill for people in social media. So I took a video editing course at a local community college, which enabled me to buy the expensive Final Cut Pro editing software at a student rate. Now that I have the software, I am learning how to use it through the excellent video courses at www.lynda.com which only cost \$25/month – totally worth it, I’ve learned a ton at my own pace and they offer lots of great video courses for digital media – and even Excel.”

Shared by:

Shara Karasic, www.sharakarasic.com

Twitter: [@sharakarasic](https://twitter.com/sharakarasic)

◆ CAREFULLY PICK ONLINE APPS FOR PRODUCTIVITY

“I like to take advantage of online services -- using technology in the "cloud" -- for my business. That way, I'm not confined to a single computer that would have a single software license. For invoicing, I like Freshbooks.com. For calendaring, I use Google Calendar. My to-do list is based on [Remember the Milk](#). I communicate with most of my clients directly in Gmail (I use Google Apps for my own domains, and I redirect email accounts to one single inbox with colored filters to designate priorities). I also use Basecamp and Campfire. And of course, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn help me keep "tabs" on my colleagues and follow what they are up to.”

Shared by:

Tamar Weinberg, Techipedia, www.techipedia.com

Twitter: [@tamar](https://twitter.com/tamar)

◆ USE YOLA FOR FREE SEO

“A small business SEO (search engine optimization) solution is [Yola](#) – it’s free to set up a simple blog or website. Add Google Maps and optimize it for search engines. For a nominal cost you can get your own domain name (it will redirect to your Yola blog). If you have things to write about, want to save on time or choose something less technical it’s a good choice. You can help your SEO and ultimately your business.”

Shared by:

Janet Meiners Thaeler, Orange Soda, www.orangesoda.com

Twitter: [@newspapergrl](https://twitter.com/newspapergrl)

♦ **FOLLOW UP WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS**

“The greatest resource a small business owner has is their existing database. When you follow up consistently and effectively with your contacts, you build better, more profitable relationships with them. By reconnecting and marketing to your existing database, you save yourself from spending more time and money generating new leads. Plus, with the right technology, follow-up can be fast, effective, and completely automated.”

♦ **SET UP PAYMENT PLANS**

“If you’re not providing customers with more than one payment option, you’re losing sales. When budgets get tight, a payment plan can provide customers with the leniency they need to afford the purchase. Most shopping carts provide small business owners with an easy system for dividing payments and calculating interest.”

♦ **TRY TEXT MESSAGE MARKETING**

“Every form of communication has been used to market and sell products and services. But one of the most underused marketing techniques is text messaging. It’s fast, it’s cheap (if you have the right phone plan), you can reach out to many individuals at once, and you can automate the whole process. Plus, because it’s a newer technology, few people are using it.”

♦ **HOST VIRTUAL EVENTS**

“Because of recent budget cuts, getting prospects to attend an event has become a real challenge. It’s costly for the attendee and it’s costly for the small business owner. Hosting an event online is fast, easy, requires less preparation, and costs very little. But what most small business owners don’t realize is that online events can be more than webinars and teleseminars. Business owners might also want to consider U-streaming, chat, and live Tweeting.”

♦ **OFFER DIGITAL PRODUCTS AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION**

“If you offer educational or content-based products, save yourself the cost of production by creating digital products. Not only can you deliver on these products faster, but you save yourself the cost of shipping as well. Furthermore, you can save yourself time and printing costs by emailing newsletters and free reports that might normally be mailed out. Simply create PDFs that can be instantly downloaded.”

Above 5 Tips Shared by:
Clate Mask, Infusionsoft, www.infusionsoft.com
Twitter: [@clatemask](https://twitter.com/clatemask)

◆ LEVERAGE THE WEB FOR PUBLICITY TOOLS FOR \$1 OR LESS

“Here are 3 publicity tools you can get on the Web for free or almost free: [Help a Reporter](#) gives you free leads from reporters who are looking for sources for stories. [Contact any Celebrity](#) offers a one week trial for \$1 – you get contact information for celebrities, to get potential endorsements. [Contacts on Tap](#) gives you a free 15-day trial of a media contacts database.”

Shared by:
Margie Zable Fisher, Zable Fisher Public Relations, www.zfpr.com
Twitter: [@MZFisher](https://twitter.com/MZFisher)

◆ USE PRICE COMPARISON SITES AND WORK CREATIVE DEALS

“I used comparison sites like Pricerunner.com and Smarter.com. I compared the prices of a product in both the USA with Sweden (where I am located) -- even did calculations on the transport, currency conversion, etc. I suggested a below-market price and that I would test the product and, if I liked it, would help spread the good word by mentioning it to my friends and colleagues. I liked it so much I ended up writing a review of it. In the process I also gave the product manufacturer a crash course on the value of social media and blogging. Both sides got good value, and my readers benefited too by learning about a unique product that many had never heard of but became interested in once I showed them what it could do.”

Shared by:
Martin Lindeskog, Egoist International Business Coordinator, martin.lindeskog.name
Twitter: [@lyceum](https://twitter.com/lyceum)

◆ USE INTRODUCTORY OFFERS TO TEST CUSTOMER SERVICE

“I look for ‘free introductory offers.’ I not only test the product -- I make sure I connect with and make friends with a real person at the company -- someone who knows the technology better than I, and who is available to walk me through the trial sessions.

This personal relationship shows me how well the product works and how responsive the company will be if I have problems. It’s a people issue, not a technology issue.”

Shared by:
Yvonne DiVita, Windsor Media Enterprises, www.windsormediaenterprises.com
Twitter: [@y2vonne](https://twitter.com/y2vonne)

♦ **SUBSTITUTE CREATIVITY FOR CIRCUITRY**

"I'm a professional cartoonist. I couldn't resist having some fun with the idea of saving money by being creative. So my tip to get you thinking about being creative comes in the form of this cartoon."



Shared by:
Mark Anderson, Andertoons, www.andertoons.com
Twitter: [@andertoons](https://twitter.com/andertoons)

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