



Leveraging Technology to Fertilize Growth

The right business software can help your garden center succeed.

By Nauman Poonja

Running a garden retail business in today's unpredictable environment can be daunting, but the right software tools can make growing your business a simpler and surer path. Small business owners often have many roles; the right small business software will help you to succeed.

Build the Right Website

Creating a website to generate awareness of and traffic to your garden center or its online store is not only imperative, but also possible with a variety of user-friendly tools. WordPress has thousands of free and premium themes to help a business get started creating a professional online presence. It not only offers website creation, but also has features like blogs and e-commerce, which include 24-hour support via email and chat.

Wix is another site-building tool that has an easy-to-use platform, including a drag-and-drop editor and beautiful professional web design, that allows you to get a site live in minutes. Free accounts are available with 24-hour support via phone and email.

Squarespace is an all-in-one website building solution that allows small businesses to build and host professional and compelling sites using pre-built site templates and drag-and-drop features to modify pages.

Get Paid

When receiving payments, PayPal is the go-to for many, both personally and professionally. It allows small businesses to accept in-person credit cards as well as online

payments, and makes it easy to access funds either through their debit card or direct deposit into your bank account.

Another payment software garden retailers should consider is Square Payments Processing. With it, small businesses can accept online and in-person payments and create an ecommerce store using the free Square card reader that attaches to your phone.

Shopify allows businesses to build an entire e-commerce store and website that easily integrates payments, which can be received in-person or online.

WooCommerce is a customizable open-source plugin for WordPress that can help garden centers build the e-commerce site they want.

Keep the Books

Every business should automate accounting to get more accurate information, avoid missing payment deadlines, and remain compliant with state and federal regulations and tax laws. You can do this with the proper software, but each business is different. The right system will depend on the size of your business and the complexity of your sales.

Generally speaking, QuickBooks is considered the best accounting software for small businesses, and offers metrics that will help your business know if you are underpricing products or identify the most profitable or highest selling products. QuickBooks can also pull information from various sales channels like Amazon, WooCommerce, Square, and your POS system, creating even greater efficiencies and line of sight.

Market to Customers

Helping your business grow requires marketing to your customers with information about your business, products, and promotions. If you're doing this via email, MailChimp offers several plans that at the most basic level offer seven marketing channels, one-step automations, basic templates, marketing CRM, surveys, website generation, and custom domains.

Another email option, iContact, offers great customer service along with professional-looking email campaigns. The iContact basic monthly subscription includes a drag and drop editor, HTML editor, template library, stock image library, targeted follow-ups, email, and automation reporting for easy design.

For physical print marketing like direct mail, Vistaprint has a variety of great marketing materials, including digital marketing, search engine management, signage, brochures, and other tools. Another option for print marketing is Moo, which offers business cards, postcards, flyers, stickers and other marketing materials with a slightly edgier design. Moo's designs are affordable yet offer a high end look.

Manage Social Media

Some garden centers do well marketing their businesses locally via social media, which can be effective in drawing customers for seasonal releases, sales, and events. Given the visual nature of plants, lawn furniture, and patio décor, among other retail offerings, social media is a great place

to share pictures of your business and products. Hootsuite is considered to be the best for "watching" social media for trending topics, mentions and opportunities to engage. Loomly is another good social media management platform that helps small businesses build successful brands to create, publish and measure, all in one place. Both allow businesses to monitor and link multiple social profiles for simpler and coordinated publishing and engagement.

Get Feedback

Social media creates a way for customers to share their thoughts on their experience with your store in a public forum, and surveys or feedback requests make it possible for you to harness that feedback in a more active way. GoogleForms allows businesses to create surveys and forms as easily as creating a document, and have quickly become the standard in the industry. SurveyMonkey is also popular and has been for years, allowing businesses like your garden center to easily create surveys, quizzes, and polls for any audience. Additionally, SurveyMonkey helps businesses gather feedback via weblink, email, mobile chat, social media and more, automatically analyzing results, so businesses can export their results easily into a spreadsheet.

Answer the Phone

One of the interesting effects of the COVID pandemic has been the increase in inbound calls that many companies,



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especially small businesses, struggled to cope with. Limping along with an answering machine doesn't cut it when customers are calling but staff are tied up with helping customers in-store. Call answering services are effective for small and family-owned businesses that want to make sure the phone is answered all the time. As a communications tool, Live Chat is both a cost-effective and easily deployed way to give clients another route for communication. Use of it has doubled during the pandemic because today's customers love the immediacy of getting the information they want right away, without having to wait for a phone call to be answered, or worse, returned.

Administer

Even legal documentation has a software solution. LegalZoom allows small businesses to get the help of a lawyer, register a trademark, or maintain compliance as a corporation. Small businesses can either work directly with one of LegalZoom's independent attorneys or use its self-guided legal services. A flat fee is charged for services, so you're never surprised.

Additionally, good administration will include calendaring and keeping appointments. Calendly is considered one of the top booking software platforms available, and can connect with up to six team calendars to automatically check

availability. Integrating with Google Calendar, Office 365, Outlook, and iCloud, Calendly can schedule unlimited events, be added to a garden center's website, and even integrate with MailChimp, PayPal, and Zoom.

Ask the Experts

It can be tricky to dedicate the brainpower to understand and properly implement these solutions, especially with the high demands of marketing the business. Many small businesses may have just one person dedicated to thinking about these disparate areas, creating a potential single point of failure. Conversely, any built-out internal operation — from website and marketing to accounting — may require more than a typical garden retailer can afford. Tapping outside expertise for either a temporary or long-term engagement can introduce the right thinking and predictability, freeing time and increasing profitability. This is how Accounovation works with clients, using the right technology, processes, and people to implement the best systems, so businesses can lay solid roots for growth and get back to doing what they do best. 🌱

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