

# 2018 SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING TRENDS REPORT

AN INFUSIONSOFT RESEARCH PROJECT

# INTRODUCTION

Small business owners have a lot on their plates. Most are forced to cover every aspect of their business, from hiring and firing, to sales, and everything in between. This leaves little time to dig into the nitty gritty of digital marketing. As they work just to fit marketing into their busy schedules, they're left struggling to understand what's been working and what hasn't.

Some aspects of digital marketing are under-utilized, and other aspects aren't used effectively. While they know, for example, that social media plays a big part in the future of small business, most are unable to connect their efforts on social to success.

This is the third year we've conducted our annual Small Business Marketing Trends Report, and with three years of data, we are starting to see even more clearly the trajectory small business owners are headed in digital marketing. And while it's clear small business owners (SBOs) are embracing digital marketing to some extent, it's also clear that it remains largely a mystery—a mystery they need to solve quickly—before technology leaves them stranded and out-competed.

This year, we spoke with marketing leaders and top brands including:

- **Zapier:** A workflow automation tool that integrates with hundreds of apps to automate tasks and boost productivity.
- **Mari Smith:** Often referred to as “the Queen of Facebook,” Mari Smith is one of the world's foremost experts on Facebook marketing. She is a Forbes' perennial Top Social Media Power Influencer, author of *The New Relationship Marketing* and coauthor of *Facebook Marketing: An Hour A Day*.
- **Sujan Patel:** With more than 13 years of internet marketing experience, he has led the digital marketing strategy for companies like Salesforce, Mint, Intuit and many other Fortune 500-caliber companies.
- **Brian Anderson** News Editor, Demand Gen Report & Marketing ID
- **And more**

They helped us interpret the data and forecast the 2018 landscape, offering valuable insights on where small businesses need to line up for 2018.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Methodology

In October 2017, Infusionsoft surveyed a panel of 1,000 self-identified small business owners from across the United States via an online questionnaire they accessed with a mobile device. Respondents were not necessarily customers of Infusionsoft, and the survey did not identify Infusionsoft as a sponsor.

We asked these small business owners a slate of ten questions, including a screening question to identify small business ownership. Throughout this report, we report on their answers with charts. While not all respondents answered all questions, we received at least 1,000 responses for each question.

## Executive Summary

- **The digital world continues to leave some small businesses in the dust.** One in seven (15 percent) don't plan to use digital marketing in 2018.
- **Small business owners don't have the time or resources for marketing.** Most small businesses reported that their greatest challenge is getting a break from the fray long enough for marketing.
- **Digital marketing success remains elusive to most small business owners.** Forty-six percent are unsure their marketing strategies work, 17 percent know they aren't working.
- **2018 is the year of social media marketing.** Seventy-one percent of small businesses plan to use social media content in their quest to acquire customers.
- **Facebook is overwhelmingly the social media platform of choice for small businesses.** Seventy-five percent of small business owners will include Facebook in their social media strategy.
- **Gaining and keeping customers remain the top marketing goals.** Nearly one out of every three (31 percent) small business owners said driving sales was their top goal for 2018, and fully one in four (25 percent) said they'll prioritize retaining or re-engaging the customers they already have.
- **Small business owners plan to budget more for the strategies they wish to implement.** The top aspects of digital marketing SBOs plan to budget more for in 2018 are social media management (38 percent), SEO and digital ads (30 percent), and website analytics (24 percent).
- **Yet, more than a quarter of Small business owners will try to get by in 2018 without increasing their spend on digital marketing.** Twenty-eight percent reported that they won't be spending more this year on digital marketing, as compared to only 15 percent who reported that they won't be using digital marketing at all.

## SURVEY RESULTS

### Goals

Growing the business remains the number one goal small business owners most want to achieve. As in prior years, nearly one third (31 percent) identified driving sales as the top marketing goal for 2018, followed by a quarter (25 percent) of small businesses calling out retaining and re-engaging customers.

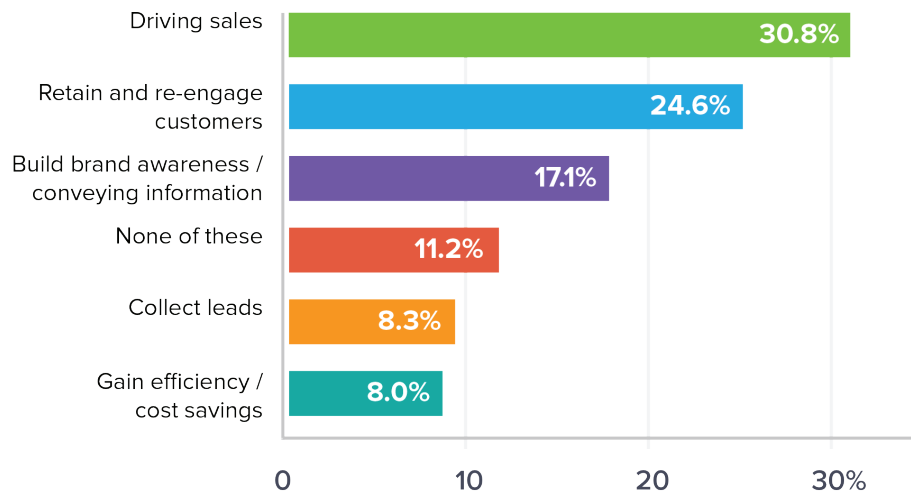


Figure 1. What's your top marketing goal for 2018?

Notably, only 8 percent intend to gain efficiency or cost savings as their top marketing goal. Considering some of the challenges they face—including (as we'll see below) the fact that the top struggle for small business owners is finding time and resources to do marketing—this goal ranked relatively low.

We've asked small business owners this question for three consecutive years, and the goal of driving sales has remained at the top every year—even when we added other options or phrased the question differently.

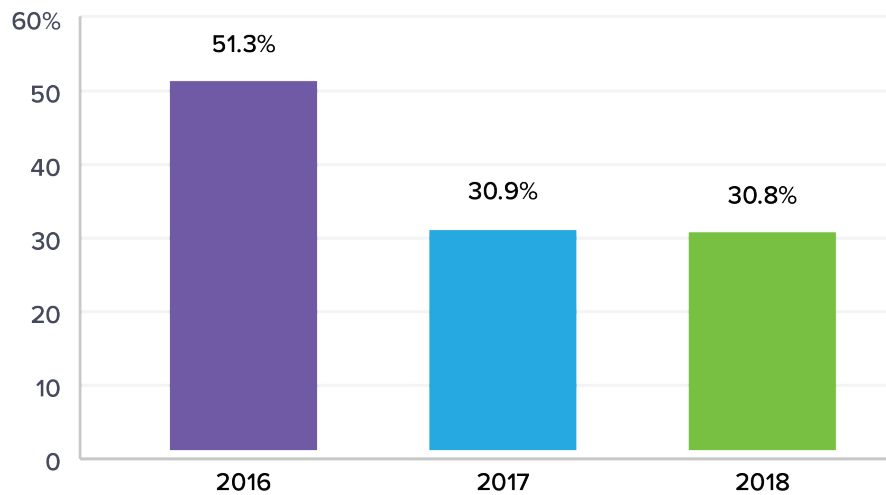


Figure 2. Driving Sales remains the top marketing goal

## Challenges

Small business owners report that the biggest challenge they face is finding time and resources to allocate to digital marketing. More than a fifth of small business owners (21 percent) identified this as their top challenge. This may not come as much of a surprise to small business owners reading this report, especially given that in our [2017 Small Business Marketing Trends Report](#) we found that nearly half (49 percent) of small business owners report handling the marketing for their business.

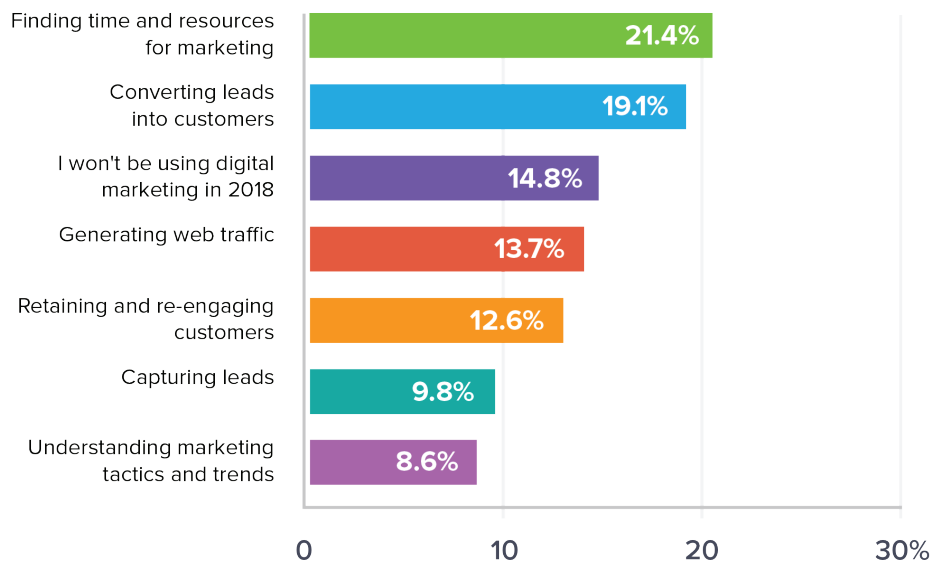


Figure 3. Of the following options, which is the biggest challenge you'll face in 2018?

While finding time and resources is a major challenge to most small business owners, nearly as many also report that their top struggle is funnel-related. Digital marketing is time consuming in its own right, but 19 percent report their biggest challenge is converting their leads into paying customers.

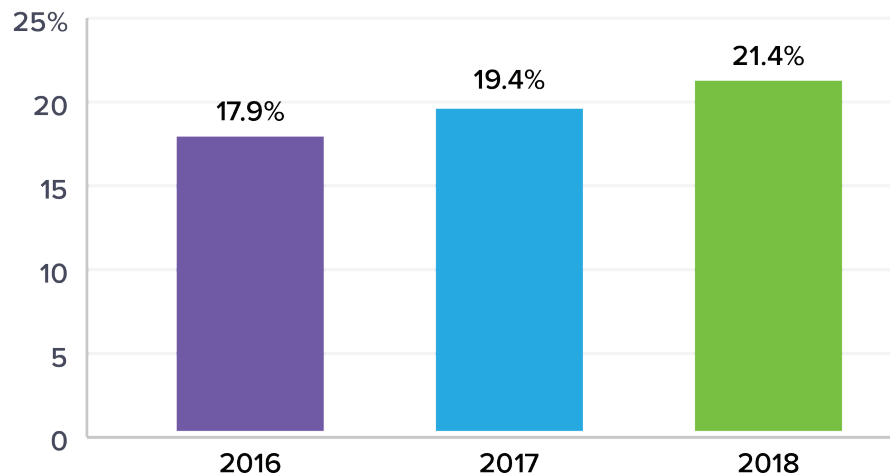


Figure 4. The challenge of finding time and resources for marketing continues to rise

Nonetheless, more business owners than ever are reporting their biggest challenge in marketing is finding time and resources. We've seen this answer continue to rise over the three years we've conducted our survey.

Perhaps this trend relates to the fact that nearly half of small business owners still don't know if their marketing is effective. This could relate to the fact that small businesses don't know how to measure the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. While small businesses spend a lot of energy marketing their business, we found that almost half of small business owners (46 percent) are unsure that their efforts actually pay off.

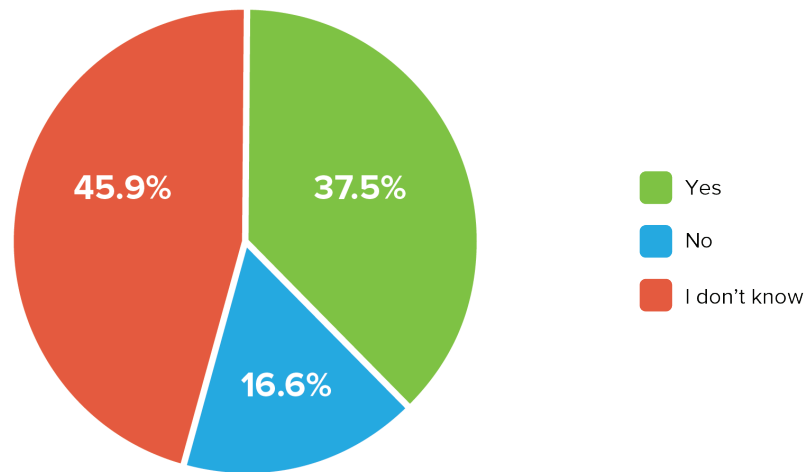


Figure 5. Are your marketing efforts effective?

This, too, has remained top answer for the past three years, indicating that small businesses continue to struggle with connecting their digital marketing strategy to strong analytics that can reveal return on investment.

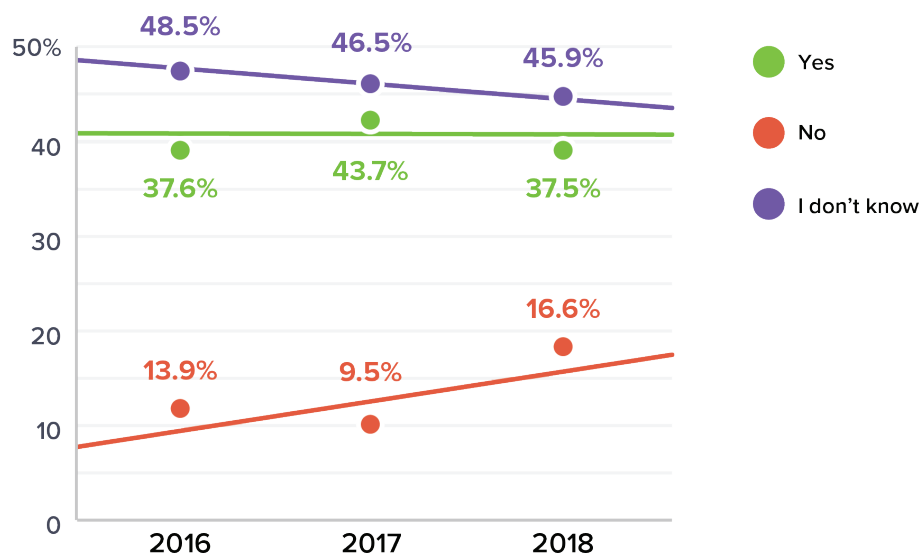


Figure 6. Confidence in marketing efforts, past three years

We're finding that confidence in marketing efforts has remained flat overall, whereas businesses reporting that they're unsure has ticked downwards. Perhaps somewhat alarming is that the rate businesses know their efforts are not working has ticked upwards.

## Digital marketing tactics and tools

Small business owners understand the power of social media in their marketing. Overwhelmingly, social media is the number one digital marketing tactic they use now and will use in the coming year. On top of that, social media is the number one strategy they plan to budget more for in 2018.

When asked which strategies small businesses currently use, social media management emerged as top answer with almost half (49 percent) using social.

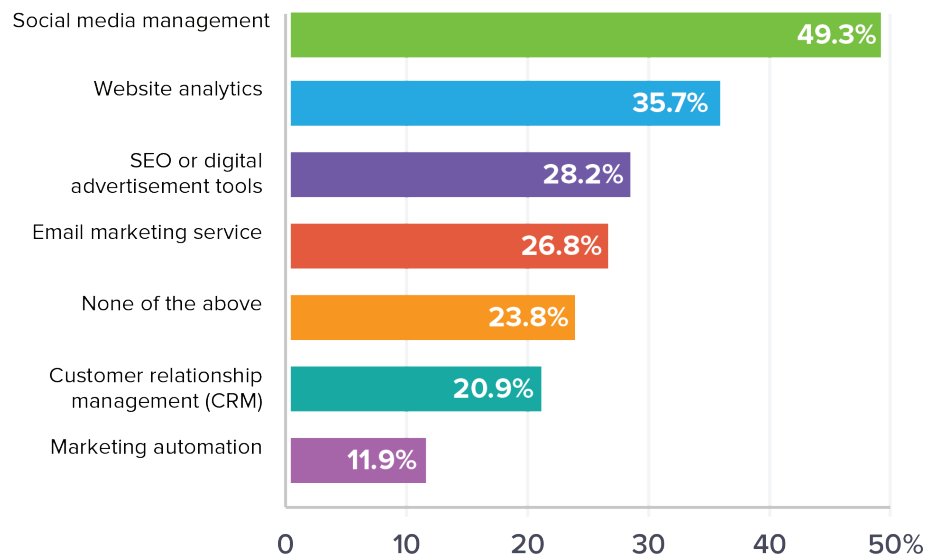


Figure 7. Which types of tools do you use in your marketing?

Fewer than 25 percent of respondents are using important tools that can help them follow up on leads (a major component of converting leads into customers), like CRM and marketing automation.

When asked which tactics they plan to employ in 2018, nearly three quarters (74 percent) of businesses stated they plan to use social media. This is by far the top tactic small business owners will be using this year.

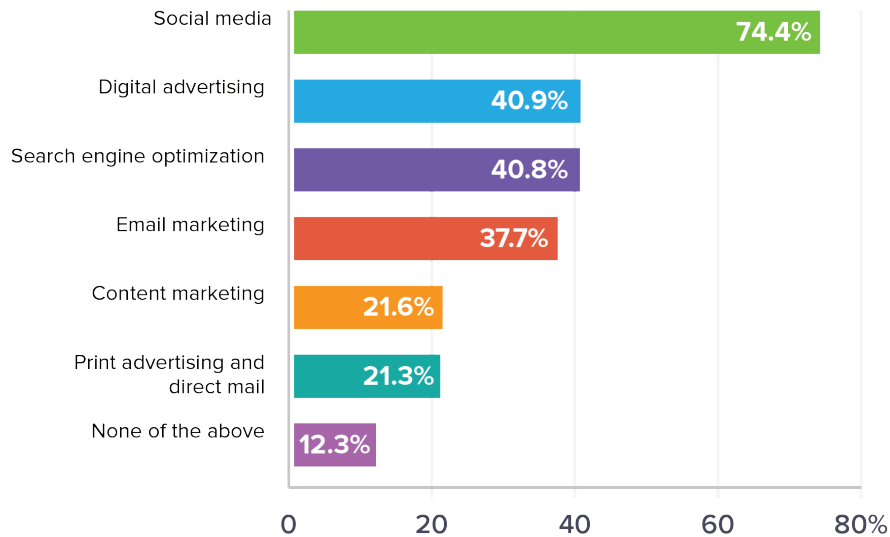


Figure 8. What kind of marketing tactics do you plan to use in 2018?

Digital advertising and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) are tied for second place at 41 percent, indicating that small business owners understand that both paid and organic tactics are necessities in a successful digital marketing strategy.

Notably, email marketing slipped from 44 percent as a key tactic in 2017 to 38 percent in 2018. While small business owners seem to be less confident in this area, experts continue to predict that email is one of the more powerful tactics businesses should consider (see Trends section below), especially when implementing a lead follow up strategy.

When asked on which tactics they plan to spend more, small businesses, again indicated social media. In addition, 30 percent plan to spend more on SEO and digital ads in the coming year. This high ranking performance-based tactic reveals a hunger for understanding how digital marketing can perform toward the overall goals of small businesses.

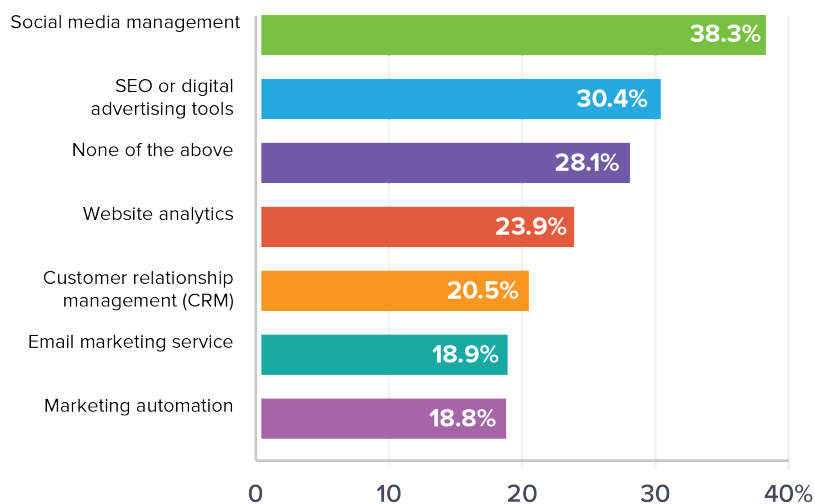


Figure 9. Which marketing tactics do you plan to budget more for in 2018?



Many small businesses expect to be able to find low-cost or free software solutions to help them get ahead in 2018. A large percent of small businesses won't be increasing their budgets for digital marketing this year (28 percent).

While there are a number of tools available, this approach can lead to challenges with managing customer and lead data across a number of platforms. [CRM software](#) is the most valuable tool that can help make sense of a complicated tech stack. More than one in five small businesses (21 percent) plan to up their investment in CRM for 2018.

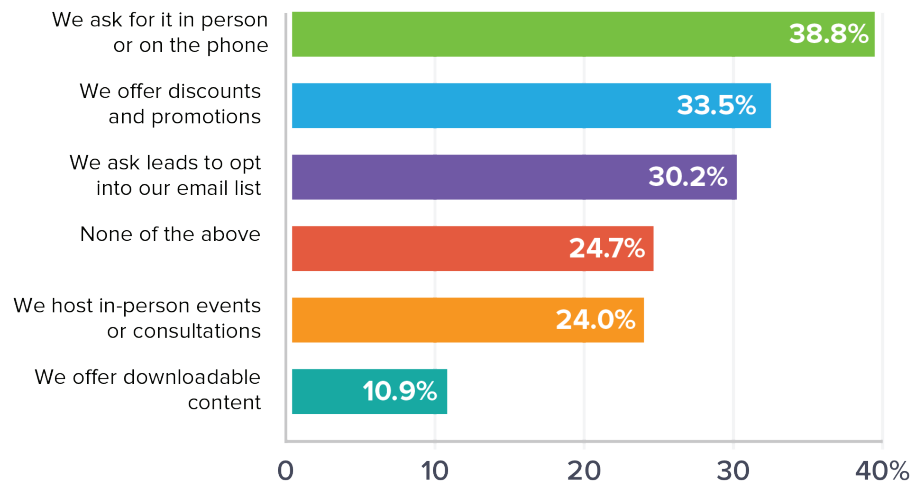


Figure 10. What does your company do to collect contact information from leads?

As in prior years, small businesses rely primarily on in-person or phone interactions to collect contact information from their leads. While personalized interaction is clearly important here, fewer than a third of businesses use digital marketing tactics like email opt-ins or downloadable content to collect contact information from their leads. These tactics—in conjunction with CRM and marketing automation—can provide the personalized automated follow up that a small business owner needs to convert more leads to customers while simultaneously saving time.

## Social media marketing strategies

Small businesses have shown a strong bent toward social media marketing. Looking closer at how they're using social media, it was clear that social media is the centerpiece of small business digital marketing. Over the last three years, this has not only been the top answer, but has risen as the top customer acquisition tactic for more and more small businesses.

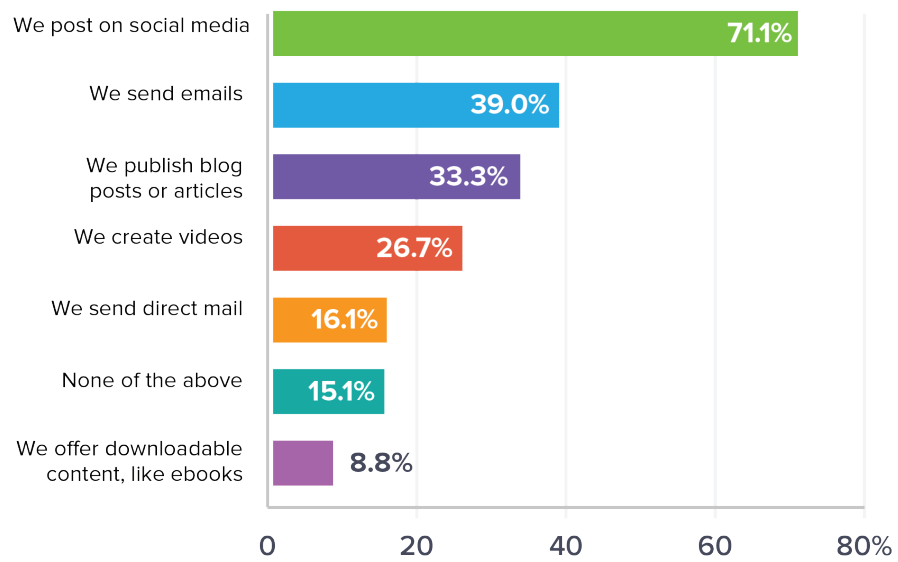


Figure 11. What kind of content does your company create to help get customers?

Of course, multichannel digital marketing can have a powerful impact on any marketing strategy, and small businesses by and large are missing out on the potential of video. Just over a quarter of respondents (27 percent) use video to get customers. Video (as Mari Smith and others talk about in our Trends section below) is paramount a social media marketing strategy heading into 2018.

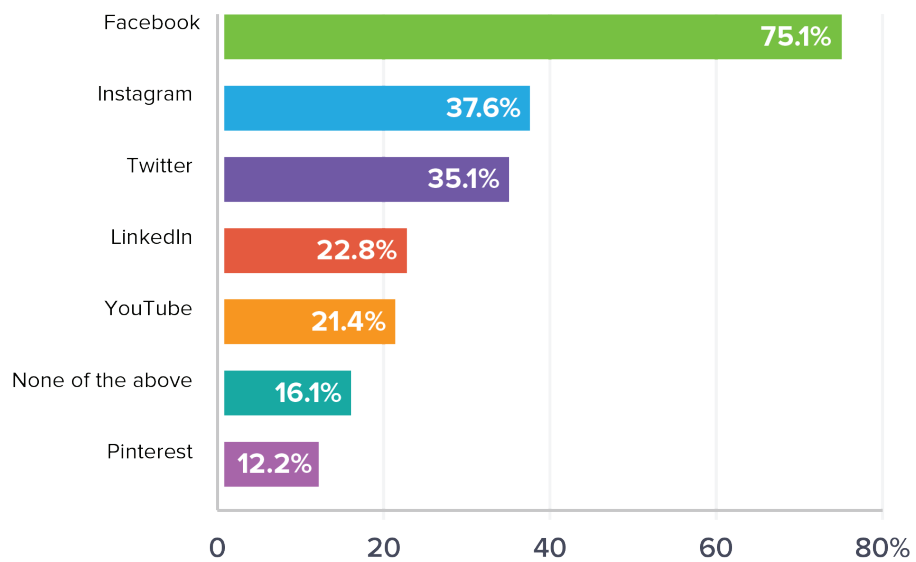


Figure 12. Which social media platforms does your business regularly use?

Three-quarters of small businesses (75 percent) have one thing in common: they all regularly use Facebook for their business. While Facebook has been criticised for stifling organic tactics on the platform, Facebook rewards businesses who use the platform the right way, and who are willing pay.

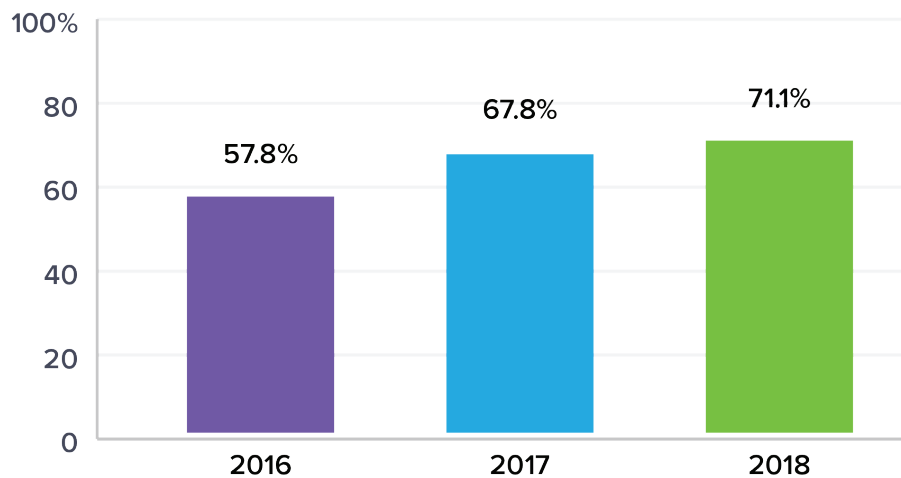


Figure 13. Gaining customers via social posting is on the rise

Apart from Facebook, other social platforms are underutilized. Less than half of respondents use any other social media platform regularly for their business. In fact, despite the reality that [YouTube happens to be the second largest search engine](#) behind Google, only about one in five small businesses (21 percent) are active on that platform.

## TRENDS

Small businesses may struggle with finding time, but that only means they need to get clear on what to prioritize. The world of marketing technology is changing rapidly, and while many systems add efficiency, this can add system chaos that ends up creating an unanticipated collateral impact on time and effort.

We talked to top brands and marketing experts to see what small business owners should do in 2018 to maximize their marketing success.

### Growth will come from connecting social media to other marketing tools — Zapier

Social media continues to be a dominant source of new leads and sales, as was the case last year. Tools like Facebook Lead Ads and LinkedIn Lead Gen Forms (which launched in the spring of 2017) continue to grow rapidly as they enable high-volume lead acquisition from two of the most popular social media networks—less friction means more submissions.

From there, we see massive growth for SMBs to create customized, targeted social media marketing campaigns by connecting Facebook Lead Ads and LinkedIn Lead Gen Forms to their other marketing tools. With Zapier, for example, companies can create workflows that automatically populate CRMs like [Infusionsoft](#) and mailing lists from these ads and landing pages. Zapier provides integrations between 900-plus apps, and we see SMB-driven marketing processes swelling on a huge scale in the past year. Case in point: Facebook Lead Ads and LinkedIn

Lead Gen Forms are at the top of fastest growing apps on Zapier for 2017.

Ease of access to automation is key in the above dynamic, as we've noticed a strong boost to capacity and efficiency when processes flow through connected apps, cutting out wasted manual effort for staff and maximizing response time.

To provide a sense of scale, [EMarketer](#) estimated that mobile advertising budgets will hit \$158.55 billion by 2018 and that at this time mobile ad budgets will be more than 50 percent of all worldwide digital advertising. The new social media ad platforms are optimized for mobile, where consumers and buyers are most likely to interact with social media.

Bot platforms for social media are also an increasing presence, allowing SMBs to offer personalized engagement at scale without needing to ramp up, and the prevalence of integrations with these allows for monitoring at every step.

We're also noticing increased concern for data-driven optimization, leading to the use of tools like Facebook Offline Conversions or Google Analytics to track examples of the marketing that works and use it to continually refine audiences.

When it comes to communication and content, we're seeing similar trends, like Hootsuite's release of an API, allowing SMBs to pipe out in regular streams of content with automated ease and frequency.

In all of these, we notice a larger trend: the empowerment of the SMB. Tools that help with every part of the marketing funnel, from getting new prospects to engaging them and closing the deal, are accessible, easy to use, affordable, and often require minimal technical skill.

These direct-to-consumer tools allow small businesses to execute and iterate on their marketing quickly, effectively, and within budget. Content is being generated, queued, and disseminated automatically. Leads are copied through to all the key apps businesses use to track and communicate with prospects. Conversions can be intelligently and instantly fed back into the same systems that acquired new users, creating an ever increasing positive feedback loop.

Above all else, we encourage every SMB to start thinking about how they can leverage technology for more intimate relationships with customers, with honest, personalized engagement and fast responses. Connect your tools, cut manual and wasted effort, set up automated response and engagement, and use all that free time to dig into what your customers

## The future is Facebook — Mari Smith

Mari Smith—one of the world's leading social media thought leaders, widely recognized for her Facebook marketing expertise, and author of *The New Relationship Marketing* and coauthor of *Facebook Marketing: An Hour A Day*—provides three important takeaways that small businesses using Facebook need to keep in mind in 2018.

“What you need to know now as a marketer, as a business owner, to really take advantage of what Facebook is rolling out in the coming 12 to 18 months,” she said, is “how the world is communicating: it is mobile, mobile, mobile.” Nearly 90 percent of Facebook users access the platform predominantly on their mobile device. She noted that the average consumer spends five hours a day on their mobile devices, and one solid hour of that time is spent solely on Facebook—that’s 20 percent of their total time on mobile. And a further half hour of that time, 10 percent of all their time on mobile, is spent on messaging apps, like Facebook’s Messenger. This means anyone using Facebook absolutely must keep mobile in mind.

Any ads you create on Facebook need to be mobile conscious. Think about how mobile users interact with the content. Think “Thumb-stopping creative;” in other words, what will catch a user’s eye enough to halt her scrolling. This means short, catchy, and creative content works. Smith noted that Buzzsumo recommends that you limit your text content to 84 characters on average (61 characters is the median) for the most success. “Now I have to tell you,” she went on to say, “I tend to be a little more wordy than 84 characters...but I’ve done that for 10 years on my Facebook page, and my audience is used to that. I want to encourage you to test, test, test, and find out what works for you.”

Video is even more powerful than ever, and small businesses can’t ignore this. Smith referred to a recent eye-tracking study that found people gaze five times longer at video than static content on Facebook and Instagram. Smith pointed to five factors to the rise of video identified by Facebook:

- The rise of smartphones makes it easier to consume video
- Audiences have shorter attention spans and want micro-videos (videos 10-30 seconds in length)
- Binge watching—Facebook launched Watch, their streaming television app. Streaming TV is a massive market, and it’s skyrocketing
- Video in your social stream is contextualized and highly relevant to your interests
- Novelty—Facebook’s latest product, Watch is new, drawing the attention it needs to move aggressively into the streaming television market

Thirdly, Smith noted that we are in the age of [conversational commerce](#). At the center of this is messaging apps. You need only look at what’s happening with China’s WeChat platform to see where the future of Facebook’s Messenger is headed. “It has been said, my friends, that China’s Wechat is the top messaging app in the world, and they are light years ahead of the Western World in terms of messaging apps and how everything is in the same app. And the only two messaging apps in the world that are poised to compete are Facebook’s Messenger and Whatsapp, owned by Facebook.” If you want to know where Facebook is taking Messenger and Whatsapp, [keep an eye on WeChat](#).

Knowing the direction Facebook is taking Messenger, small business owners need to understand how it can work for their business in 2018. With 1.2 billion monthly users, and 2 billion messages between businesses and people per month (human and automated), it lends credibility to the statistic: 53 percent of people say they’re more likely to do business with a company they can message.

Messenger bots are critical to making messenger work for business. “This is something I’m working on myself in my own business. I use ManyChat...it’s very easy to use and integrate with what you’re doing in other marketing efforts. ChatFuel is another one...what that means is that you can easily set up a simple automated message for frequently asked questions or to direct people to certain places on your website.” Messenger provides a place where you can discover bots to start using right away. On top of the current functionality, Facebook is rolling out more advertising tools so you can place ads inside of messenger.

What you can do in 2018? Up your video content, and optimize all video for mobile. This includes, of course, [Facebook Live](#). Keep mobile at the heart of your social media marketing, which means keeping content short and catchy. Amplify your reach—and your results—using Ad Manager. Finally, Get ready for m-commerce: mobile and messenger apps.

## Small businesses need to adopt analytics in 2018 — Sujan Patel

The first thing that jumps out to me from this report is that 46 percent of small business owners don’t know if their marketing efforts are effective, but only 24 percent of them plan to spend more on analytics in 2018. Presumably, if you’re not sure something is working, you would either stop doing it, or invest in something to try to figure it if it is working. As a seasoned marketer, I usually know how a marketing strategy or tactic is working for me, and I still plan to increase my investment in analytics in 2018.

My guess is that business owners don’t know the tools at their disposal to track their marketing efforts, so they throw up their hands and keep doing what they think is working. The problem with this is that small business owners are still competing with the Wal-Marts and Amazons of the world, who are tracking absolutely everything, and the democratization of big data now makes it easier than ever for non-technical and relatively inexperienced small business owners to access the same kind of competitive advantage-producing data. Small business owners [can track everything](#) from foot traffic to phone calls to online review growth; the ROI of tracking this stuff is so high that there’s no excuse for not making this a priority in 2018.

This speaks to the primary trend I see for small business owners that want to gain an immediate competitive advantage in 2018; the businesses that use the tools at their disposal to track their leads and customers will make the biggest strides over their competitors.

I’m not surprised social media is the most-used channel for most SBOs. It’s the easiest to get started, and most people would feel very much ‘behind the times’ if they weren’t regularly posting on social media. That said, I would argue that unless you have a well-defined social media strategy, it probably isn’t driving as much business value as you think.

What does interest me, though, is what people aren’t doing, more than what they are. For instance, only 38 percent of them plan to use email marketing in 2018. Thirty-eight percent!? In my estimation, there is just no reason not to be actively building an email list and [building email automation sequences](#) to capture as much value from it as you

can. I won't repeat all the stats about how much more valuable an email subscriber is versus a website visitor or social media follower, but even for local businesses and brick and mortar companies, there are so many ways to get someone's email, and it can—and should be—one of the pillars of a small business owner's marketing strategy.

## Technology won't help your marketing. Good processes will — Brian Anderson

“One of key focuses coming up in 2018 for all small businesses—but those in the B2B marketplace in particular—is the whole idea of analyzing and measuring success,” said Brian Anderson, news editor at Demand Gen Report. “It's clear from the results of this survey that it's an area where small businesses continue to struggle. In today's marketing and sales landscape where there is a piece of technology for everything, B2B organizations—especially smaller ones—are still having a hard time measuring the overall success of their marketing efforts.”

“The whole idea of finding time and resources for marketing and being able to convert leads into customers, being able to have the types of conversations that lead to sales, it's ultimately not a technology solution as much as it's a process solution,” Anderson said. “if you don't have a process to understanding your marketing efforts and your sales efforts, your technology isn't going to benefit you.”

He goes on to say, “We're seeing a shift in the conversation as business leaders are looking to colleagues to help them figure out not so much the types of tools they're using to orchestrate their campaigns but they're actually getting into the nitty gritty, the how-to of the sales process. They're asking each other, ‘how did you get these conversations within your marketing team to identify what ideal customers look like?’ Small business owners are learning that understanding the prospective buyer is what will ultimately come down to meeting that top goal of driving sales.”

Retaining and re-engaging customers, the second aspect of the top 2018 goals, is the big area where Anderson says a lot of growth has to happen. When it comes down to it, every single marketing goal touched on this research ties back to driving sales. If you're not retaining and engaging customers, if you're not building brand awareness, if you're not collecting appropriate leads, you're not going to driving sales and you're not going to be meeting you're number one marketing goal.

“There is a shift in the mindset happening within both B2C and B2B organizations where the focus is moving away from the product and onto the buyer,” Anderson pointed out. “We're starting to see now that small business owners are realizing that it's better to focus on the buyer versus the product features. Content is starting to lean more towards the buyer's needs—answering their questions—and that's where you're seeing a lot of small business owners have the conversations with their current customers to make sure the communication continues after the deal closes. They're recognizing the importance of making sure everybody is happy from the customer standpoint, whether it's through customer service or whether it's with continued support with technology. Continued relationship building leads to stronger sales.”

## Success on social will only happen with a plan — Steve Strauss

“What I’m finding interesting in these results is that small business owners’ top marketing goal is to drive sales while re-engaging past customers is a close second, yet the top marketing tactic is social. And that, to me, shows a little bit of a disconnect,” said Steve Strauss, USA TODAY senior columnist and best-selling author of [The Small Business Bible](#). “Because while I love social—we all love social—it’s not always the best method for driving sales.”

The drumbeat of social is so loud now that business owners can fall into the trap of doing it just to do it, Strauss warned. He went on to note that it’s imperative to put a specific plan together for social media campaigns, pointing out that nearly half of business owners still don’t really know if their efforts are paying. With social being such a high focus, business owners need to keep their business sense in mind and run social campaigns like they would any other marketing campaign. Nobody continues to pay for ads that aren’t performing.

“You can post your sale on Facebook or Instagram but unless you track the results with a cookie or with a code, you’re not going to know if your social efforts pay off,” said Strauss. “Since the vast majority of small business owners are indicating that they plan to invest their money in social media in 2018, I strongly recommend they invest in tools that enable them to drive that social traffic to a [landing page](#) or to a specific piece of content on their website where they can monitor traffic and conversions to see what’s working and what isn’t.”

Strauss goes on say he still believes in the power of email marketing for small business owners, even though it ranked fourth in priority for the survey respondents. “E-newsletters are a far more effective use of your time and dollars than a vague social media campaign,” he said. “Because you’re marketing to people who have literally told you, ‘Please market to me!’ you’re already one step ahead. Give people the option to opt-in to hearing from you and then deliver useful, educational, or entertaining content; that’s relationship building and it’s what customers want from small business.”

Going into 2018, Strauss is predicting retargeting is going to be gaining steam for small business marketers. It’s a highly effective tactic that bigger brands have been using for years now but small business may not be aware that it’s accessible to them as well.

## If sales is your goal, marketing must drive revenue—Justin Gray

Marketing has more tools, channels and attention than any other time in the discipline’s history. The rise of technology has not only changed the way buyers consume information, but it has enabled marketers to consume an incredible understanding of how those buyers are responding to their messaging and how that influence is affecting the path to purchase. And with that disclaimer, make no mistake about it, marketing is in real trouble.



At LeadMD we serve up very similar questions for our annual benchmark, and although we work with a different cross section of the market, the data reveals the exact same trend. There is a complete lack of alignment between stated goals versus tactical action. The largest area that stands out to me in reviewing this report is the brutal ‘two by four between the eyes’ response of marketing’s primary desire, above all else, to drive and influence revenue. Even if you ignore every other data point in the survey, this alone is enough to know that marketing resides in the metropolis, Struggle City. A decade ago, five years ago that would have not been the marketer’s response. Today it is as instinctual as breathing.

Marketing must drive revenue.

As if the ability to provide insight into what is yielding revenue will somehow provide all of the rest of the connected tissue to actually make it happen. Vendors created this story and marketers fell for it hook, line, and sinker. The marketers have been sold.

Yes, technology has rapidly evolved, and it’s awesome. The skillsets of marketers have not. We don’t even lie to ourselves and say that they have, we’ve just skipped over the acknowledgement that it is a necessity altogether. Maybe—and it’s a big maybe—maybe we’ve provided training in relation to the new tools we’ve saddled this group with. Maybe, but in relation to modern day marketing education and training, no, that has not happened, not in the least. This lack of skills-based empowerment makes the blind enthusiasm around revenue production nothing short of sacrificing our marketing teams as cannon fodder. Marketing as a revenue center is not going to happen, not without investing at an incredible level, a level beyond the costs of technology and most of all, the investment of time. Marketers need time to develop a profession. We must acknowledge that there is no degree, no trade school, no certification that prepares individuals to succeed as marketers. Certainly, there is no preparation prior to placing incredibly damning notions of grand revenue impact into their hands and sending them charging over that blind hill and into oblivion.

I know I said we could forget about the rest of the survey data, but just to make this point crystal clear. What do marketers cite as their biggest hurdle to attaining their stated goal? Resources. They have no idea how true that statement is—both true and damning.

## Search engine optimization: A must for digital marketing—Rachel Meyer

We had the opportunity to sit with Infusionsoft’s SEO Manager, Rachel Meyer, to find out how search engine optimization (SEO) should fit into a small business digital marketing strategy for 2018, especially knowing that nearly half of small businesses aren’t sure if their digital marketing is working. The need for insight into how digital marketing truly reaches its audience is palpable, and online search is one of the most effective ways to understand what digital audiences are looking for. This makes SEO one of the most important aspects of digital marketing that small businesses need to master. With 30 percent of small businesses planning to spend more on SEO and digital advertising, we wanted to hear from an SEO wizard as to what will work in the year ahead.

**Infusionsoft:** We found that 45.9 percent of small business owners don't know whether or not their digital marketing efforts are effective. Why is it so hard for small businesses to know this?

**Rachel Meyer:** It could be a number of things, but I believe the two most common are that small business owners either feel that they don't have the time to track their online metrics, or they don't know how or where to start. I would recommend automated dashboards or reports that you can create in Google Analytics and have these emailed to you on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

[I built a quick custom dashboard](#) that you can use right now. Just click on the link, and sign into Google Analytics when it opens. Then just choose the view where you'd like to use the dashboard. Click the Email button at the top, and set up the email frequency, and you're done—a PDF will get emailed with the dashboard stats on a regular basis.

This way, you can start seeing traffic by channel and what pages get the most traffic. It's a good place to start. Another very simple way to see if digital efforts are working is to just ask your customers how they found you, but be sure to drill down a little bit. If they say "online," ask if it was from Google or Facebook, for example. Track this information, and you'll start to see trends.

**IS:** We've been hearing that online audiences are becoming immune to many digital marketing tactics—[whether they use ad blockers](#), or vote for content by bouncing on spammy content—does SEO provide hope for small business digital marketing?

**RM:** SEO is definitely something that small businesses can use to their advantage. Create content (written, video, social, podcasts, anything) that answers a customer's question or addresses a customer's pain point. Create it from the perspective that you're the expert in your space, and that you offer something unique. Be creative, be authentic, and try focusing on one small piece of your business that you do better than anyone else, then create content around that. A big company will have shallow information across many topics, but as an expert in one or two things, a small business website can start to profit from search that targets those topics.

**IS:** SEO isn't new, but seems to be the one big thing that gets overlooked. How do small businesses need to start reimagining their digital marketing strategy to incorporate SEO?

**RM:** There are a lot of [great beginner's SEO guides](#), and a good place to start would be to read up on these tactics and start incorporating them into the content that is being created. It's also important to remember that organic search is only one channel. I wouldn't neglect other digital channels in an effort to incorporate SEO, but instead, try to blend it into a total strategy plan.

**IS:** How does SEO work for small business budgets? Is organic dead?

**RM:** Organic is still an extremely important channel, and likely will be for a long time yet, especially as we move even further toward voice search. It's important for small businesses to focus on long-tail phrases or topics that will show up in a search further down the funnel. Trying to rank for broad, competitive, top-of-funnel keywords is difficult, but they seem appealing because of the traffic volume. Focusing on a long-tail keyword strategy may seem

discouraging because it means fewer visits from search, but visitors who use those long-tail keywords in search are generally further down the buy funnel and much closer to a purchase decision. I'd rather see five visits from organic search that all convert rather than 1,000 visits with no conversions.

**IS:** Looking ahead to 2018, what should small businesses anticipate? What can they do to be sure their marketing efforts are effective for organic? Are there any tools they should adopt to help with this?

**RM:** A good content strategy goes hand in hand with SEO, and that will continue to be true. Thoughtfully created content that answers a question or addresses a pain point will be valuable across channels, and can be promoted through paid and social media in addition to capturing search clicks, so that is a good place to focus. If nothing else, look at the data on the traffic mix so you can make intelligent decisions about your marketing budget.

- Tools: [Answer The Public](#): free keyword and question tool
- [SEMRush](#): not free, but affordable tool for keyword research, competitive intelligence, SEO ideas, and site health reports
- [SERPs Keyword Rank Checker](#): use with caution; don't get obsessed with the position data, but use it as a data point against which to judge benchmarks
- [Google Analytics](#) and [Search Console](#): free data from your website

## CONCLUSION

Most small business owners aren't sure that their marketing efforts are working or are certain they aren't. This has remained top answer for the past three years. This is likely because SBOs are, by and large, underutilizing tools like [CRM](#) and [marketing automation](#). In fact, looking closely at those who responded that they will be using marketing automation in 2018, only 4 percent of them indicated that their top goal for the year is to retain or re-engage customers. Often thought of as enterprise level solutions, small business owners may not realize that CRM and marketing automation tools like [Infusionsoft](#) are available to small businesses. These are the tools that provide insight into marketing effectiveness and save time with automating follow up.

The vast majority of small businesses regularly use Facebook as well as a variety of other social media platforms in their business, but they are likely not treating this activity like the rest of their marketing and aren't able to tie their efforts to their goals of growing sales and customer retention and reengagement. The best strategy for social media in 2018 will be to integrate these activities to other areas of their marketing strategy and optimize follow up on interactions on social media.

Of course, with small business owners lacking time and resources to adequately address marketing in their business, efficiency becomes the de facto priority for businesses that want to find success in marketing. This begins with a clear, measurable plan and to implement software tools that can help them meet their goals and which include analytics and reporting capabilities to help them execute effectively.

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