



Article 316

October 20, 2013

Web-Based Services Aim To Make Business More Manageable

By Finance New Mexico

The Internet has linked New Mexico businesses with a worldwide web of customers, and it's also provided a universe of cost-cutting and time-saving tools that are simplifying many aspects of running a business. Better yet, many of these tools are free or affordable.



Many businesses already use social media sites like Facebook and Twitter to advertise products, offer discounts and interact with customers. Even critical comments from customers help businesses by pointing out correctable problems with service or products; they're a cheap form of damage control and quality control.

Another web-based tool that many people now take for granted is electronic mail, provided at no cost in its most basic form by search engines like Google and Yahoo. Both of these providers have expanded their free services to include instant messaging and even video calls. And Google Voice allows users to transcribe voicemail into email or text messages, and it permits conference calling, among other things.

Google and Yahoo are giants in the "freemium" business model: They provide a basic service at no cost but charge for premium upgrades, and some of these upgrades a business might never need.

Freemium businesses include:

- LinkedIn, a social networking platform that allows professionals to interact, endorse one another's skills, share job links and post résumés in cyberspace. It's free, though more services are available for \$19.95 to \$74.95 at www.linkedin.com.
- MailChimp (<http://mailchimp.com/>), which provides an email marketing tool that allows businesses and individuals to send product messages to multiple recipients, among other business services; depending on the number of emails sent, the upgrades begin at \$15 per month.
- Wix, which can save companies hundreds of dollars they might otherwise spend hiring someone to build a website. Wix (www.Wix.com) helps users build professional sites at no cost, though more services are available with upgrades.

- Shoeboxed, a company that helps businesses go paperless and eliminate clutter by scanning receipts and other documents and storing them in a secure online account. The service is free for the first five scans; premium plans (<https://www.shoeboxed.com/>) start at just under \$10 per month.

Other web-based services and products can also help businesses manage customers, market products and manage tasks, among other things. They charge for their services, but all argue that their costs are much less than it would cost to provide those services in-house.

Customer-relationship management software, for example, can cost tens of thousands of dollars to set up and thousands each year to maintain. Online businesses such as HighriseHQ and Batchbook provide basic CRM services for a fee that's much more affordable for small businesses. HighriseHQ bills itself as an online personal assistant that can help companies keep track of business communications and customer contacts for \$24 to \$99 per month (<https://highrisehq.com/tour>). Batchbook offers similar tools for \$20 to \$100 (<http://batchbook.com/tour/>).

Time Trade, an appointment-scheduling platform lets customers set up their own appointments online (www.timetrade.com/), and OmniFocus is an apps-based task management system that works with iPhones, iPads and Mac computers to help users collect and organize ideas, thoughts and activities. The OmniGroup sells its apps on its website at <http://www.omnigroup.com/omnifocus>.

A cloud-based accounting application is available from FreshBooks (www.freshbooks.com/); it allows businesses to send, receive, print and pay invoices. The company offers a 30-day free trial; paid packages start at \$19.95 per month. And Regus (www.regus.com/products/virtual-offices/index.aspx) provides numerous business services, including telephone answering, video conferencing and meeting spaces — whether virtual or physical.

These are just a few of the products that promise to make business a whole lot simpler for entrepreneurs in New Mexico and elsewhere.

For information about other free and low-cost business resources, visit the Finance New Mexico website at financenewmexico.org.

Finance New Mexico is a public service initiative to assist individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org. Sponsored by:

