



FUTURE OF BUSINESS SURVEY

SMALL BUSINESSES:
LEARNING, SUPPORTING, GROWING TOGETHER

MAY 2017



INTRODUCTION

Successful businesses are adaptive and resilient. Everyday, businesses all over the world defy the odds to start new enterprises. Rapid transformation is the new normal and it's being driven by powerful technology that fits in the palm of your hand – mobile.

Technology benefits people and businesses by connecting them with jobs, education, and other resources. Access to such information can improve lives, communities and economies. However, new technology requires new learning.

Many businesses are learning to embrace mobile technologies to connect with and find new customers, sell products or services online, locate new employees, and activate mobile marketing campaigns. This is increasingly true for small and medium sizes enterprises (SMEs) who seek tools and solutions to help them affordably and effectively manage their businesses on the go. For SMEs, mobility can bring time management benefits and help fill resource gaps.

As SMEs navigate the growing complexity of technology, they are turning to each other to learn and share ideas, reminding us that connections matter; for making our economies but also our communities stronger.

In the latest [Future of Business Survey](#), an ongoing collaboration between Facebook, the OECD and the World Bank, **42%¹ of businesses told us that they learn from each other**, second only to online searches (64%). Clearly, businesses are looking to each other to master the new mobile environment.

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¹ All results from this report are based on March 2017 data.



LEARNING FROM SMES

To help businesses succeed, we need to understand the economic environments in which they operate. Businesses can help us understand the challenges they face and the opportunities that exist to help them grow. And this is important because when businesses grow, they create new jobs and economies succeed.

As a new source of information on SMEs, the [Future of Business Survey](#) provides a unique window into the mobile economy. To date, nearly **200,000 SMEs**, drawn from the 70 million businesses with an active Facebook Page, in more than **40 countries** have taken the survey.

As of March 2017, aggregated survey responses indicate the following insights around Business Confidence, Job Growth, and International Trade and Gender Manage-

ment:

- **26%** of SMEs are positive about the current state and **41%** about the future of the economies.
- **44%** of SMEs are positive about the current state and **61%** about the future of their own businesses.
- **41%** of SMES say they want to add employees in the next 6 months.
- SMEs engaged in international trade are more confident in the future of their businesses and use online tools at a higher rate than non-traders.
- **47%** of SMEs that engage in international trade are likely to increase employment in the next 6 months vs **39%** of non-traders.
- Women-run businesses are as likely - and sometimes more likely² - to use online tools to help grow their businesses than male-run businesses.

SMES LEARNING TOGETHER

While every business has a unique story and mission, they are united in striving to create a successful business. SMEs are constantly innovating to find new solutions to manage their companies and overcome problems. Many of these solutions and problems are common to all SMEs, yet, this knowledge is not always shared.

The network effects of learning from a peer community can be powerful, joining entrepreneurs with information they can use to overcome obstacles both in maintaining and growing a business as well as in starting-up. The Future of Business Survey highlights additional trends in how SME connections can impact economic outlook, job creation, and international trade.

- **Optimism in the economy:** Connections matter. When businesses connect and learn from each other they are more confident. Nearly half (**45%**) of businesses that are confident about the economy are learning from other businesses, whereas two-thirds (**64%**) of unconfident businesses are not.
- **International trade:** A supportive community can help businesses scale geographically. Businesses that trade internationally learn from more sources and have a higher than average number of business-related educational interests. They are also three times more likely to cite educational interest in better information on international trade.
- **Increasing jobs:** Nearly half (**47%** and **45%** respectively) of businesses that have added jobs in the past six months or plan to in the next six months also learned from other businesses. In contrast, among businesses that have decreased the number of jobs in the past 6 months or plan to do so in the next 6 months, learning from other businesses is less pronounced (**41%** and **37%** respectively.)

² [Future of Business Survey, Gender Report, January 2017](#)



CREATING SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

Small businesses are a key part of all communities. Thousands of small businesses and their communities use social platforms to form tight knit groups with a vision to build a strong local economy, and help each other grow. In fact, many businesses say that helping other businesses is one of the more gratifying aspects of entrepreneurship:

- In Muskogee, Okla., Victor Lezama made the transition from military veteran to small business owner. Now, his [PC Landing Zone](#) technology repair shop has expanded to a second location, and Lezama has an open-door policy for other small businesses or entrepreneurs in the community to come in for advice on technology, digital marketing skills, or growing their own operations.
- In New Jersey, Ali Maffucci is building her [Inspiralized](#) culinary brand by learning and sharing with other entrepreneurs – sharpening skills on everything from search engine optimization to best practices for using social media as a business. Maffucci finds her interactions with other entrepreneurs to be both inspiring and educational. Connecting with a network also helps her quickly answer tactical questions that could otherwise take hours of solo research.
- In Brazil, Ana Fontes created [Rede Mulher Empreendedora](#), a network that promotes workshops and entrepreneurship classes for women all around the country, and has already trained and connected more than 300,000 women.
- In Germany, Jutta Zeisset took over her family's farm and adjacent [cafe](#) in a remote area, and grew it from two to 30 employees. To help her fellow small businesses owners, she is running workshops for female farm owners on social media and online marketing across Germany, and has set up a group with more than 400 members so they can share best practices on how to be successful with social media in rural areas.
- In India, Praneet Sahai a co-founder of [PosterGuy](#) believes digital marketing helps drive success for the business. Praneet and his co-founders find value in the community and learn about growing their business from mentors and experts in online business groups. The business owners then share those learnings with other SMEs in the community who do not have access to digital resources.
- Omar Taha, founder of [Start Up Muslim](#), a global platform connecting Muslim startups all over the world that provides mentorship and knowledge, to a 16,000 strong network.

The power of networks and mobile technology can drive successful SMEs and foster inclusiveness and thriving communities.

Public intervention and policies that empower start-ups and SME growth in the digital and mobile economy are central to fostering stronger economic and social growth.

Businesses benefit from building supportive communities, using effective mobile solutions to connect with customers, leveraging training programs, and by sharing in the experiences of other businesses - all of which can help accelerate entrepreneurship, diversity, and help businesses grow.