

## CHANGE IS COMING: DON'T LET IT LEAVE YOUR SMALL BUSINESS BEHIND

Predicting the future is one of humankind's oldest endeavors. Nearly everything from tealeaves to caterpillars has served as a bellwether of fate. Twenty-first Century small business owners can draw on a host of technology and information resources to chart the course of their enterprises. But given the increasing pace and unpredictability of change, one can't help but wonder if those caterpillars might really know something.

Anticipating trends can be extremely valuable in keeping you current on everything from sales strategies and customer desires to technology tools and the general economy. As your business grows, change will be inevitable and small business owners should constantly look ahead and seek out ways to shake things up. The more you test the winds of change, the better your chances of success down the road.

But how can you tell the difference between a fleeting fad and a true trend? Louis Patler, a market research guru for companies such as American Express and Dell, has spent decades tracking emerging trends and studying their impact on business. He says the key to successfully piloting a business in the years ahead will be embracing new ways of thinking.

For example, Patler says that truisms like "stick to what your business does best" are

outmoded. If you want your business to grow, consider that past business traditions and processes might only hold you back. Trying new approaches is vital.

Not all customers are created equal. Some are more valuable and loyal than others, and those are the ones you should lavish the most attention on with special savings and service offers. And don't expect loyalty from employees. As American society becomes ever more mobile and labor shortages worsen, workers won't stay on a job for more than three years.

Information is the key to success in the 21st Century, and the ability to effectively capture and analyze data on customer needs and behaviors is essential for small business owners to stay on top of and, even more important, anticipate trends related to their products or services. After all, what's important to your current and potential customers will likely be important to you as well.

Don't rely on incomplete information to plan your small business. Get help from the experts at SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business." SCORE is a nonprofit organization of more than 10,500 volunteer business counselors who provide free, confidential business counseling and training workshops to small business owners.



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