

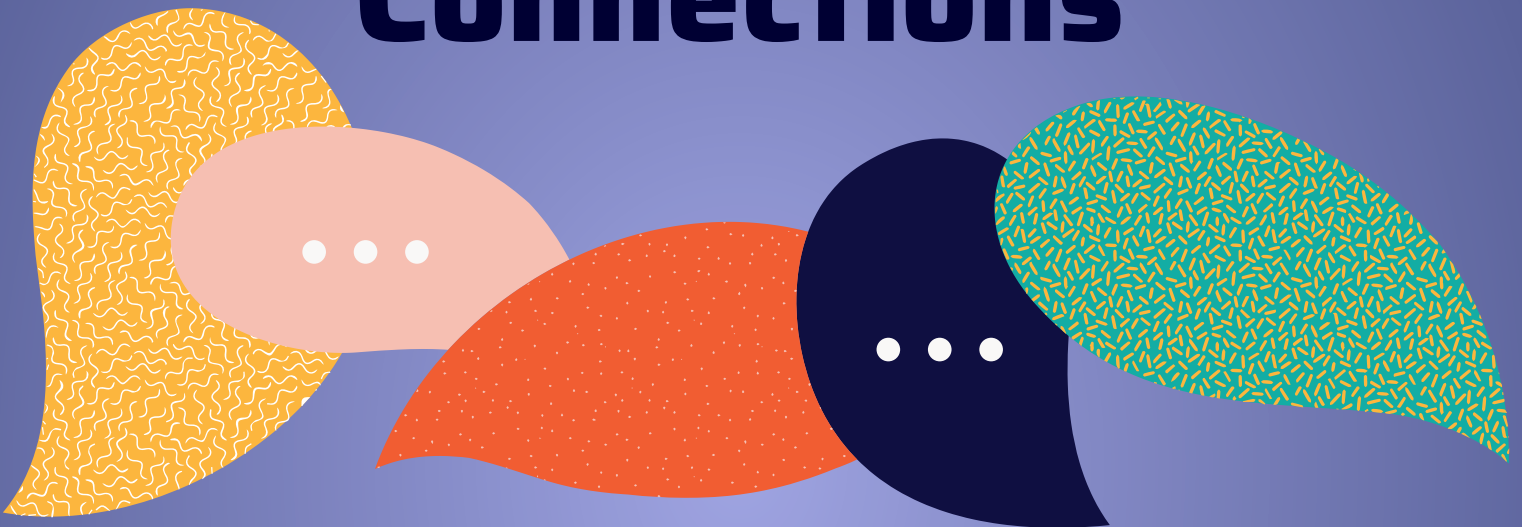
# SelfInformed

Published by the National Association for the Self-Employed

August 2025

NETWORKING FOR SOLO ENTREPRENEURS

## How to Build Meaningful Connections





# How to Build Meaningful Connections

In 2023, American entrepreneurs started 5.5 million new businesses. That's a small part of the big picture because entrepreneurs now comprise 18.86 percent of the U.S. workforce. It's an exciting time, but as an entrepreneur, you may not realize that becoming a small business owner can be a solitary endeavor.

There's often no one to bounce ideas off or help you with challenges that arise. It doesn't have to be that way. You can build meaningful connections that will help in growing a business.

## Why Entrepreneurs Should Build Connections

Knowing the benefits of connecting with other small business owners allows you to forge relationships that promote your business. Building connections also offers the opportunity to receive valuable investment, advice, and partnerships.

### Connect with Potential Investors

Finding investors is one of the most challenging tasks for a self-employed business owner. Making a personal connection before requesting an investment allows you to build relationships. They know you and your business, which makes the potential investor more open to discussing financing.

Instead of walking in “cold” to propose a deal, you’ll probably have a warm welcome. The investor will be more willing to listen.

### Learn from Other Professionals

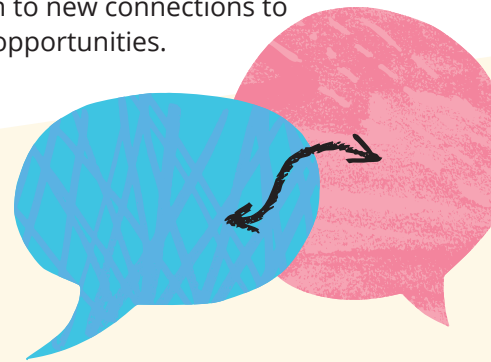
Sharing best practices with those entrepreneurs and professionals who are not direct competitors can provide valuable insights.

Typically, most small businesses have the same challenges. Learning how others in your position have dealt with similar problems can accelerate your success.

### Forging Partnerships and Collaborations

If you’re B2B, it’s important to establish a connection with someone who may end up being a future ally. You should think of your own behavior. Most people are more likely to purchase a product or service from someone they know or that a friend recommends.

It’s important to be open to new connections to broaden your business opportunities.



## Tips for Starting a Business Through Connecting

There are many ways a micro business owner can connect to find help when growing a business. Be it a collaboration or looking for an investor, these tips will help you meet like-minded business owners.

### Online Communities Foster Small Business Growth

Virtual round table discussions exist online where entrepreneurs gather. You can go online and participate in:

- forums
- social media groups
- online communities

You’ll be able to find advice, share experiences and even find motivation from these groups.

A quick search found dozens of groups for micro business owners on Facebook.

Forums are another area where small business owners congregate. They share best practices for running a small business. Some of these forums include:

- [Reddit](#)
- [Quora](#)
- [The Fastlane Forum](#)

There are other forums available. Take the time to find one that meets your needs and goals. But think of a forum as a chat with a group of small business owners.

Connect digitally on a personal level. Today’s technology allows you to have a one-on-one meeting with anyone who has a computer and webcam. You’ll meet periodically to share experiences, offer advice and keep each other motivated.

If one-on-one is a little too intense, then form a group with like-minded business owners and meet regularly. This gives all of you the opportunity to provide valuable insights into growing a business.

## Small Business Owners Connecting Offline

Connecting online isn't the only option for the self-employed. There are numerous activities you can do in your region.

It's imperative to put yourself in the right place. Networking opportunities are often determined by the people you encounter. Seek gatherings that attract the best and the brightest.

Consider enrolling in executive education seminars or appropriate webinars to connect with other entrepreneurs.

Explore and join industry-specific guilds. Even if they're not your industry, a guild or other

organization that aligns with your micro business will be helpful. For example, if you sell a service but are having issues with marketing it online, an organization for digital marketing will benefit you.

Local meetups are an effective way to meet contemporaries. You'll meet other business owners face-to-face; shaking hands can lead to a powerful connection.

Various organizations offer meetups and they can provide the opportunity for a small business owner or family business to network with other entrepreneurs.

## Finding a Small Business Mentor

A business mentor has experience facing the same challenges you have building a business. They often offer advice. But a mentor isn't a business consultant.

The mentor is committed to you and is in it for the long haul. But unlike a business consultant who is specific with their recommendations, a mentor may be more general with their advice. Both are effective.

A mentor not only offers business advice but also provides encouragement and sometimes emotional support.

Growing a business is often a solitary, even lonely journey. A mentor who is in your corner can help lighten the load through their understanding. They'll also keep you motivated and accountable.

## Business Mentors Steer You Away from Mistakes

Your mentor is probably a small business owner who has made some mistakes. They'll help you avoid pitfalls.

For example, most micro business owners resist delegating work. They overwhelm themselves and have difficulty completing tasks. This sometimes leads to breaking business promises. A mentor will point this out and encourage you to pace yourself.

## Building a Business with a Mentor

Your first mentor may not be your last mentor. As you're growing a business, your needs change. A mentor who was great at starting a business may not be able to help you scale.

Even if you aren't actively working with your mentor anymore, keep them in the loop. You want to develop a lasting relationship.

## How to Find a Business Mentor

When looking for a business mentor, you must define the qualities and characteristics that you want them to have.

Look for a mentor that inspires you. Someone you would want to be. Qualities that you should look at include:

- expertise
- honest communicator
- good listener
- shared values

## The Service Corps of Retired Executives

(SCORE) is a non-profit organization that offers a free mentoring service to any entrepreneur. These SCORE mentors provide experienced advice, consulting and education. There are other organizations, like the **Women's Business Centers (WBC)** and **Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC)**, that also offer mentoring programs.

Consider former bosses, professors or colleagues. If there are any small business owners in your area that you admire, approach them for help. Even if none of these individuals can help, they may be able to point you in the right direction.

Connect with industry professionals through LinkedIn or X. Trade or local organizations may also have a mentor waiting for you.

## Collaborate with Other Small Business Owners

Reach out to small businesses in your area. There are several ways you can connect and collaborate with other micro business owners.

For example, you and another business can cross-promote and offer discounts to each other's customers. A coffee shop could distribute coupons to a bookstore, and that same bookstore could pass out coupons for the coffee shop. Coffee and books go well together. You could probably find something similar in your industry.

### Share Space with a Business

Share Space with a business that complements yours. It could be a warehouse for products or equipment. Another possibility is for a photographer and a videographer to share a studio.

The point is to reduce costs and streamline operations. It will also merge both of your connections with the community.

### Pool Orders and Negotiate with Vendors

Another way to collaborate is through group buying. If you have businesses with similar needs, pool your orders and negotiate with vendors for a discount. Ensure you approach the vendors as a group. You'll want to establish clear guidelines as to

what each business will pay. Remember to review vendor agreements together to ensure they meet everyone's needs.

### Share Knowledge and Skills with Fellow Business Owners

All boats rise with the tide. When small business owners come together to share knowledge and skills, they become a close-knit and supportive group. This can be done by holding regular meetings or workshops.

Collaborate on training sessions for employees or set up a mentorship program. By combining strengths in sharing skills and knowledge, entrepreneurs open the door for other collaboration.

## Small Business Owners and Meaningful Connections

The saying "no man is an island" is true for entrepreneurs. Although starting a business may be a solitary endeavor, it doesn't have to remain that way. Take the time to build connections with fellow small business owners.

Reach out to those who could mentor you and take advantage of their knowledge and support. Collaborating with fellow entrepreneurs could also take your business to the next level.



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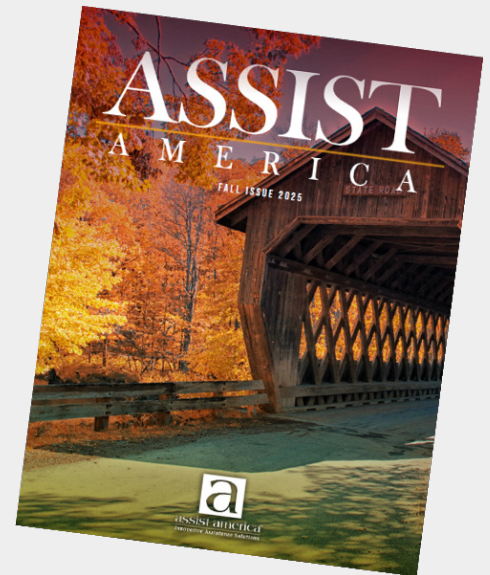
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# Major Changes in Overseas Shipping:

## Trump Administration Ends De Minimis

For years, the U.S. “de minimis” rule (often called *Section 321*) let low-value imports—shipments valued at or under \$800—enter without duties and with light paperwork. That threshold rose from \$200 to \$800 in 2016, catalyzing an explosion of small parcels shipped directly to U.S. consumers. By FY2024, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) was processing more than a billion of these packages annually.



### Why de minimis mattered so much to small businesses

De minimis wasn't only about tariffs; it was a logistics model. By letting millions of small parcels skip formal entry and duty payments, it:

1. **Reduced landed cost** for direct to consumer (DTC) imports (especially fashion, beauty, gadgets).
2. **Compressed lead times** by enabling direct dropship from overseas warehouses/factories to U.S. doorsteps.

3. **Lowered compliance friction** (fewer data elements, simplified processes).
4. **Helped startups test SKUs quickly** without large inventory commitments.

Those advantages drove aggressive pricing from cross-border platforms and helped micro-brands enter the U.S. market fast. Now, with de minimis curtailed, the import math and operating playbooks change—materially.

## Who's affected—and how

### 1. Micro-importers and Direct-to-Consumer brands shipping direct from overseas

If you were relying on direct parcels from Asia or Europe to U.S. consumers, expect:

- **Duties now due** on categories that previously entered free—first for China/Hong Kong from May 2, then more broadly as non-postal de minimis ends. Apparel, footwear, accessories, small electronics, and home goods feel this most.
- **Longer or less predictable transit** if shipments are held for review due to misclassification, valuation issues, or PGA (Partner Government Agency) requirements.

You'll pay duties sooner (or at all), which shifts working-capital needs. If you continue shipping many small parcels, the per-unit burden rises. Consider consolidating freight and using U.S. inventory to spread fixed entry costs across larger lots.

### 2. U.S. SMB retailers competing with ultra-low-priced imports

Brick-and-mortar and domestic e-commerce players may see relative relief as ultra-cheap DTC parcels lose the tariff-free edge. In the last year, major platforms tied to China felt the pressure as exemptions narrowed—yet many remain resilient, so competition won't disappear.

### 3. Marketplaces and cross-border platforms

Marketplaces used to route myriad low-value parcels via de minimis. Post-changes, they face duty exposure, data requirements, and potential re-architecture (e.g., inventory placement in U.S. FTZs).

## What to Watch Next?

**Further CBP rulemaking & guidance:** Expect more clarity on data elements for low-value flows and enforcement priorities at ports. Proposed rules signal the direction: narrower eligibility and more data.

**Marketplace responsibilities:** Platforms will likely assume more compliance obligations to keep shipping reliable—raising seller requirements in the process.

**Legislative tweaks:** Bills like the Import Security and Fairness Act keep the debate live; details change, but the bipartisan appetite for tightening de minimis has been growing.

The U.S. is moving away from the broad, light-touch de minimis regime that fueled a decade of cross-border D2C growth. The shift began with China/HK in May 2025 and broadened with a widely reported non-postal suspension effective August 29, 2025. Compliance standards are rising across the board. The businesses that come out ahead will treat trade compliance and fulfillment design as core competencies—not back-office chores. The sooner you learn under the new rules, the sooner you can turn them into an advantage.

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