

SelfInformed

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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WHY EVERY SMALL BUSINESS NEEDS A STRONG

ONLINE PRESENCE

IN 2026



How to Attract Customers, Build Your Brand, and Grow Your Business in a Digital World

Being a small business owner in 2026 means that you have more to consider than ever before. Whether you're a micro business owner, SMB (small to medium sized business), self employed, or an entrepreneur, you know that having a strong online presence is crucial to your success, but it can also feel overwhelming to navigate.

These days, having a solid business plan isn't enough on its own. You need a professional website, a consistent social media presence, and a digital marketing strategy in order to create visibility, trust, and to ensure long-term business growth.

A New Digital Landscape for Small Business Owners

In just the last ten years, the way people do business has been completely transformed. Today, the first interaction that a potential customer or client has with your business may be online. What they find (or don't find) can make all the difference in whether they decide to trust you with their business.

For self-employed individuals, family businesses, and micro business owners, this shift to a digital-first economy presents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, it means you're competing for attention in a crowded online marketplace. On the other, it gives you access to tools and platforms that were once reserved for large corporations with significant marketing budgets. Today, even a solo entrepreneur can build a trusted brand, reach people across the country—or the world—and sell entirely online.

Your Website is Your Digital Storefront

Think of your website as your business's digital headquarters. It's often the first impression a potential customer will have of your brand—and it needs to do more than just look nice. A good website makes your business look professional, explains what you offer, and works for you around the clock.

For small business owners, your website should clearly tell your story and explain who you are, what you offer, and how someone can get in touch. At a bare minimum make sure to include:

- An About page
- A Home page
- Your products and/or services
- A Contact page (including hours and location)
- A mobile-friendly version

Studies show that **75% of consumers** judge a company's credibility based on its website design alone. In other words, if your website looks outdated or is hard to navigate, you may be losing business before a customer even reaches out.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is another critical component. When someone types a relevant term into Google—like “family-owned bakery near me” or “independent tax advisor”—you want your business to show up in the results. Basic SEO practices, like using keywords naturally on your pages, writing clear headlines, and optimizing page load speed, can help your website rank higher and attract more visitors.

The good news? You don't need to hire a developer or learn how to code to get a great-looking site up and running. Platforms like Wix, Squarespace, and WordPress offer affordable, user-friendly tools to

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help entrepreneurs create professional websites quickly. For e-commerce businesses, Shopify and BigCommerce provide robust options for selling online with built-in marketing tools.

Your website isn't just a placeholder—it's a key part of how you build trust, attract new business, and grow your revenue over time.

Social Media as a Relationship-Building Tool

While your website is the foundation of your online presence, social media allows you to bring your brand to life and connect with your audience in real time. For micro business owners, it's an essential tool for building community, sharing updates, and fostering customer loyalty without a large advertising budget.

Expanding your business's online presence through social media is essential, but choosing the right platform depends significantly on your target audience's age demographics. Here's a **breakdown** to help you align your social media strategy with your customers:

- **Facebook:** With over 3 billion monthly active users, Facebook's largest user group is aged 25-34, accounting for 31.1% of its audience. It's also popular among individuals over 35, making it ideal for businesses targeting a broad age range.
- **Instagram:** Boasting 2 billion monthly active users, Instagram's primary demographic is 18-24-year-olds, representing 31.7% of users. It's particularly effective for brands focusing on visual content and aiming to engage younger audiences.
- **TikTok:** This platform has 2 billion monthly active users, with the largest age group being 25-34, accounting for 35.3% of users. TikTok is suitable for brands aiming to create engaging, short-form video content for a younger audience.
- **YouTube:** With 2.5 billion monthly active users, YouTube reaches a wide audience, with the highest usage among 25-34-year-olds, who make up 21.7% of users. Notably, it has substantial reach across all age groups, indicating its cross-generational appeal.

Understanding these demographics can help you focus your efforts on the platforms where your target customers are most active, ensuring more effective engagement and resource utilization.



Whatever platform you choose, showing up regularly makes a big difference. Posting regularly, responding to comments, and sharing behind-the-scenes content helps humanize your brand and build trust. Storytelling—sharing how your business started, what drives you, and how you help others—resonates more than polished ads or hard sales pitches.

Social media also allows you to harness the power of social proof. When a satisfied customer tags your business, leaves a glowing comment, or posts a positive review, it signals to others that you're trustworthy and deliver value. Encourage happy clients to share their experiences and consider reposting user-generated content (with permission) to amplify your reach.

To save time, tools like Buffer, Hootsuite, Sprout Social or Later can help you schedule posts in advance and manage multiple platforms from one dashboard. If you're only using Instagram and Facebook, you can even schedule posts on Meta Business Suite for free!

Social media isn't just about selling—it's about showing up, listening, and building authentic relationships. For self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs, that connection can be the difference between being seen—and being forgotten.

The Power of Digital Marketing

Once you've laid the groundwork with a strong website and active social media presence, digital marketing helps you amplify your reach and turn casual browsers into loyal customers. For many small business owners, digital marketing might sound overwhelming—but it doesn't have to be.

There are several key channels that entrepreneurs can explore, depending on their goals and resources:



Email Marketing: Still one of the most cost-effective tools for small businesses. Platforms like Mailchimp, Flodesk, Klaviyo, or Constant Contact allow you to build and manage an email list, send newsletters, announce promotions, or share helpful content. Regular communication keeps your brand top-of-mind and helps foster repeat business.



Content Marketing: Creating and sharing helpful, relevant content—such as blog posts, videos, or guides—builds authority and educates your audience. For example, a family-run landscaping business could publish seasonal lawn care tips to attract local readers and earn their trust before they even request a quote.



Search Engine Marketing (SEM): Tools like Google Ads can drive traffic to your website based on specific keywords. This can be especially valuable when you're launching a new product or offering a limited-time service.



Social Media Advertising: Boosted posts or targeted ads on platforms like Facebook and Instagram allow you to reach very specific audiences based on interests, geography, and demographics.

Even with a modest budget, micro business owners can see a significant return on investment by using digital tools strategically. The key is to start small, measure your results, and adjust as needed. You don't need to do everything at once—instead, focus on the channels that align best with your business model and audience.

If you're unsure where to begin, The National Association for the Self-Employed (NASE) offers educational tools, expert guidance, and resources to help you explore the digital marketing landscape and choose the best path forward.

The Benefits of Being Found Online


Visibility is everything. In today's digital age, if your business can't be found online, many potential customers will assume it doesn't exist. That's why establishing an online presence is critical—not just for growing your business, but for ensuring you're even considered in the first place.

Search engines are the starting point for most customer journeys. Whether someone is searching for "best accountant near me" or "custom jewelry in Portland," they're likely to make decisions based on what shows up in the first few results. That's why having a Google Business Profile is essential for any small business owner. It's free, easy to set up, and allows you to appear in local search results—complete with your location, contact info, reviews, and photos.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) plays a major role in increasing your visibility. This involves optimizing your website so that search engines can understand what your business offers and match it to relevant searches. Simple steps like using keywords, writing descriptive page titles, and adding alt text to images can help your site climb the ranks.

It's also important to be listed on reputable online directories and review platforms. Yelp, Angi, and even industry-specific directories can help entrepreneurs gain exposure and credibility. The more places your business appears online—especially with positive reviews—the more likely new customers are to trust you.

Reviews are a form of digital word-of-mouth, and they matter. According to [BrightLocal's Consumer Review Survey](#), in 2024 81% of consumers read online reviews for local businesses before making a decision. Encourage satisfied customers to leave



feedback, respond to all reviews professionally, and showcase testimonials on your website.

Ultimately, being discoverable online makes it easier for customers to find you, trust you, and choose you—three things every business needs to thrive.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Building an online presence is essential—but it's not always straightforward. Many small business owners dive into the digital world without a clear plan, which can lead to frustration, wasted time, and missed opportunities. Here are some of the most common mistakes and how to avoid them:

- **Inconsistent Branding**
Your website says one thing, your social media says another, and your email tone doesn't match either. This confuses customers and weakens your brand identity. Make sure your visuals, tone, and messaging are aligned across every platform.
- **Trying to Be Everywhere at Once**
It's tempting to sign up for every social media channel, but spreading yourself too thin can dilute your efforts. Focus on one or two platforms where your target audience is active and build a strong presence there before expanding.
- **Posting Without a Strategy**
Without a plan, content can feel random or inconsistent. Create a simple content calendar, set goals, and track what types of posts get the most engagement. Your efforts should be intentional and aligned with your business objectives.
- **Neglecting Your Website**
Launching a website isn't a one-and-done task. Regular updates, security checks, and fresh content help keep your site relevant and trustworthy. Broken links, outdated information, or a non-responsive design can quickly turn potential customers away.
- **Ignoring Analytics**
Most digital tools include built-in analytics that show how your audience is interacting with your content. Reviewing this data helps you understand what's working and where you need to pivot.

Even basic insights—like which posts got the most clicks—can help improve future performance.

- **Failing to Ask for Help**

You don't have to figure it all out alone. Many entrepreneurs delay digital efforts because they feel overwhelmed. That's where organizations like NASE come in—offering resources, education, and expert support to help you move forward with clarity and confidence.

Avoiding these common pitfalls can save time, money, and stress—while positioning your business for sustainable digital growth.

How NASE Supports Entrepreneurs in Going Digital

At The National Association for the Self-Employed, we understand the unique challenges self-employed individuals, micro business owners, and family-run businesses face in today's competitive marketplace. That's why we're committed to providing the tools, resources, and support you need to build a successful business—online and off.

Through your NASE membership, you gain access to:

- **Small Business Grants** to fund technology upgrades, marketing efforts, or website improvements
- **Business Development Resources** including webinars, articles, and how-to guides on digital marketing and e-commerce
- **Expert Advice** from professionals who understand the self-employed journey and can offer personalized guidance
- **Affordable Tools** and discounts on services that help build and maintain your digital presence
- **Networking Opportunities** to learn from other NASE members who are navigating the same digital landscape

Whether you're just starting out or looking to expand your reach, NASE is here to help you take that next digital step. We don't just support businesses—we empower entrepreneurs to grow with confidence.

For more information about NASE's member benefits and business resources, visit www.nase.org.

Building a Business for the Digital Age

A strong online presence isn't a luxury—it's a foundation for long-term business success. Whether you're running a one-person operation, managing a family business, or building a micro business from the ground up, your digital footprint is how the world finds, learns about, and connects with you. It's how you build trust, establish credibility, and compete effectively in today's marketplace.

The good news? You don't need a massive budget or a team of marketing experts to get started. With the right tools, guidance, and a little consistency, you can create a powerful online presence that helps you attract customers, grow your revenue, and build the business you've envisioned. And with the support of The National Association for the Self-Employed, you're never going it alone.

Let NASE Help You Grow Online

As a member of NASE, you have access to expert resources, personalized support, and financial tools that can help you strengthen your digital presence—without feeling overwhelmed. Whether you need help creating a website, launching a digital marketing campaign, or learning the ins and outs of SEO, we're here for you.

Visit www.nase.org to explore our full suite of small business resources, apply for business grants, or connect with experts who understand what it takes to thrive as a self-employed business owner in today's digital economy.

See the Latest Press Releases from NASE



NASE Provides Financial Grants to Support Small Businesses in CA, FL, GA, NY, OR, and WI

Dec 01, 2025

NASE announced today \$28,000 in Growth Grants to seven local small businesses for the third quarter of 2025, including three sponsored by AARP.

[READ FULL STORY →](#)



NASE Salutes the Power and Ingenuity of America's Entrepreneurs on Small Business Saturday

Nov 23, 2025

NASE encouraged the American public to show their support for our nation's new and existing mom-and-pop small businesses, and #ShopSmall this Small Business Saturday, November 29th.

[READ FULL STORY →](#)

[READ ALL PRESS RELEASES](#)

NOW ACCEPTING
Growth Grant Applications

Multiple Growth Grants of \$4,000 are Awarded Each Quarter

Since 2006, the NASE has awarded nearly \$1,000,000 to members just like you through the Growth Grants program by providing small business grants. These grants can be used for things like marketing, advertising, hiring employees, expanding facilities, buying new equipment and other specific business needs. Applications are accepted 365 days a year and you may save your progress, the application doesn't have to be completed in one sitting.

APPLY NOW



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ANNOUNCEMENT



Dependent Scholarship Applications Opened January 1st

Multiple College Scholarships of \$3,000 are Awarded Each Year

This program is open to legal dependents of NASE Members, ages 16–24. To apply, students need to be high school students or college undergraduates planning to enroll in college for the upcoming fall semester. The application period is **January 1st through April 30th**.

APPLY NOW



Member Benefits

Visit [NASE.org](https://www.nase.org) to learn more about the following benefits!



Request a Health Insurance Quote Through NASE

[Click Here](#)

The 2026 ACA **Open Enrollment Period** (*six weeks*) runs from **November 1, 2025**, through **December 15, 2025**. This is when you can buy individual and family insurance plans from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace or your state's marketplace.

Plans sold during Open Enrollment start as early as **January 1, 2025**. **January 15, 2026**, Open Enrollment ends. **February 1, 2026**, coverage starts for those who enroll in or change plans December 16 through January 15 and pay their first premium.

[Click Here](#) to learn more.

Protecting small business dreams. One customized policy at a time.

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Underwritten by Hiscox Insurance Inc., a Chicago based insurer.

Get Insurance Customized To Your Small Business

Hiscox offers professional service businesses a new way to buy small business insurance online in minutes. We specialize in protecting IT/technology, marketing, consulting, and many other professional service businesses, tailoring coverage to the specific risks in each industry.

Why do I need small business insurance?

Small business owners have a lot going on, and it's easy to let something like business insurance drop to the bottom of the list. But it's important to protect your business from claims and lawsuits that you can't see coming.

How much does business insurance cost?

The cost of small business insurance depends on the industry you're in, the size of your business, the type of insurance, and other factors. Most small businesses spend \$30 a month or less for a general liability policy, but your costs could vary. You can get a quote in the box above to find out how much your coverage may cost.

What is the difference between general liability and professional liability insurance?

General liability insurance covers someone else's claim of bodily injury, property damage or personal injury. This means if someone gets hurt at your place of business, or their property is damaged, you're covered. You're also covered for claims that you damaged someone's reputation by slander or libel.

Professional liability insurance covers your professional services or advice. This is sometimes called errors and omissions insurance because it covers something you did that you shouldn't have (an error) and something you should have done that you didn't (an omission). Professional liability insurance protects you for defense costs even if the claim against you is found to be without merit.

[Get a Quote](#)



Member Benefits

Visit [NASE.org](https://www.nase.org) to learn more about the following benefits!

UENI
DONE-FOR-YOU BUSINESS WEBSITE
\$79 **87% OFF**
 FREE DOMAIN NAME INCLUDED
 30-DAY MONEYBACK GUARANTEE
10 year ANNIVERSARY ✨ ~~\$599~~ - ONLY \$79 GET YOURS TODAY ✨

Website for \$79!

Get a website package worth over \$1500 with everything you need to succeed. No tech, design, or SEO skills needed. UENI will build your dream website from A to Z in 7 days. Then they'll support you to help your business grow.

Our friends at UENI will get your website or e-commerce store built, launched, and working for you in a week. NASE members get **\$520 off the setup fee (usually \$599) for their done-for-you website or webstore.**

With UENI, you'll get more than just a website, they provide the ultimate website package: multi-page mobile-friendly design, SEO copywriting, secure hosting, custom domain name and email, e-commerce, and appointments functionality, 0% commissions on your sales and bookings, an easy-to-use website editor, and world-class human support.

Just think pay a \$79 setup fee and get a new, professionally designed website. After that, UENI maintains your website for just \$16.99/month – less than the price of your Netflix subscription!

To ensure you are 100% happy with the service, you can try it for 30 days and get a full refund if it doesn't meet your expectations. No questions asked.

[Start Building Today!](#)



Apply for a NASE Growth Grant sponsored by AARP today. There will be three winners each quarter awarded a \$4,000 grant to support the growth of their business. [Sponsorship Showcase](#)



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Ivan Stavrev

Ivan Stavrev is a NASE member from Woodstock, Georgia and the Founder & CEO of Intellimark Group LLC. He holds a Master's in Analytics from the Georgia Institute of Technology and has spent his career at the intersection of data, customer experience, and technology. Intellimark is a data-driven consulting firm that helps corporations and government agencies make smarter decisions through research, advanced analytics, and AI solutions. Their work ranges from survey-based insights and predictive modeling to agentic AI tools and interactive dashboards, all designed to connect data directly to business impact.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

When and why did you join NASE?

I joined NASE earlier this year to connect with other entrepreneurs, gain access to resources that support small business growth, and tap into practical tools that can help scale Intellimark. As a founder, I value organizations that advocate for small businesses and provide a community of peers facing similar challenges.

What inspired you to enter the field you are in?

Early in my career, I worked for a leading Fortune 500 technology company in Atlanta, where I saw firsthand how customer experience and analytics could make or break a business. Even with massive resources, big organizations often struggled to turn their data into clear actions. That experience showed me both the power of analytics and the gap that still existed — and it inspired me to dedicate my career to helping organizations bridge that gap.

When and why did you start your business?

I started Intellimark in 2024 after realizing there was a real need for a more agile, cost-effective approach to research and analytics. Too many organizations — both companies and government agencies — were stuck with expensive, slow-moving firms that didn't always deliver actionable insights. I wanted to build a lean team that could cut through the noise and use data to drive real decisions, faster and smarter.

How do you market your business?

Most of our growth comes from building relationships — reaching out directly to decision-makers, sharing insights on LinkedIn, and showcasing case studies that highlight the impact we've delivered. We focus less on flashy ads and more on proving our value through data-driven stories and word of mouth. The best marketing for us is when a client sees the results and tells someone else, "You need to work with Intellimark."

What challenges have you faced in your business? How have you overcome them?

One challenge has been earning trust in a crowded industry where big firms dominate. We've overcome that by being the opposite of "one-size-fits-all." We take the time to understand each client's unique challenges, respond quickly, and deliver work that speaks for itself. That intimacy — paired with speed and quality — has helped us stand out and build lasting partnerships.



Do you have any employees?

Right now, Intellimark is lean by design — I handle the strategy and client relationships while partnering with a small network of analysts, data scientists, and fieldwork providers on a project basis. I do plan to expand into a full-time core team as we grow, because the vision has always been to build a strong group that delivers consistently high-quality research and analytics.

What's your schedule like, what's a typical day for you?

No two days look the same. Some days I'm deep in data and building dashboards; other days I'm on calls with clients, learning about their challenges and shaping solutions. There's always a mix of problem-solving, strategy, and execution — and plenty of late nights making sure everything is delivered on time.



What's the best thing about being self-employed?

Freedom to build something meaningful. I get to decide the direction, choose the projects that excite me, and work directly with clients instead of being buried in layers of bureaucracy.

What's the best compliment you've ever received from a client?

A client once told me, *"You understood what we needed better than we did."* That, to me, is the ultimate compliment — it means we listened deeply, connected the dots, and delivered something that created real value.

What's the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?

Start small, move fast, and listen harder than you talk. The relationships you build and the speed with which you deliver will matter more than having everything perfect from day one.

Which NASE member benefit is most important to you?

The access to resources, guidance, and a community of other entrepreneurs is invaluable. It's not just about the benefits themselves but about knowing you're not alone in the journey.

Any other information you would like to share?

At Intellimark, our mission is simple: use data to drive decisions. Whether it's research, analytics, or AI, our goal is always to connect insights with impact in a way that's fast, clear, and tailored to the client.

Looking Into Our Crystal Ball,

What Will 2026 Bring?



In 2026, Congress will operate under the same forces that have defined the last few sessions: narrow margins, high polarization, and a hard midterm clock. Republicans currently hold the House and a slim Senate edge, which usually means floor time goes to must-pass bills and party-line messaging, while bipartisan deals happen mainly where deadlines force them.

The biggest “you can’t dodge it” items are fiscal. FY2026 appropriations are already behind schedule, making another scramble of continuing resolutions or an omnibus likely early in the year. Congress also faces a stack of expiring programs and tax provisions—health extenders, flood insurance in January, energy and healthcare cliffs mid-year, plus bigger year-end deadlines like Export-Import Bank reauthorization and Medicare payment fixes. Expect these to become the main vehicles for bipartisan bargaining.

Domestic policy will be more stop-and-go. A major Affordable Care Act subsidy fight arrives immediately because enhanced credits expired at the end of 2025, making 2026 premiums a real political pressure point. Immigration/border policy, energy permitting, and regulatory rollbacks will see lots of hearings and partisan bills, but only intermittent chances to clear the 60-vote Senate threshold.

Finally, midterms will dominate the second half of the year. With multiple states pursuing mid-decade redistricting or fighting it in court, election rules and maps will be a running subplot that shapes strategy and turnout narratives.

Bottom line: 2026 will be deadline-driven, defense-heavy, and increasingly campaign-colored as November approaches.

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