

How to automate your business, so you can focus on what you do best

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In an age of disruption, it's increasingly a case of survival of the most digitally agile. Below, industry experts run through the business tasks that can now be left to computers.

Automation can slash costs, eliminate human error, facilitate rapid growth and free up time for business owners to dedicate to other important activities.

It can do all those things, but only if business owners embrace it. If you want to avoid finding yourself outperformed by forward-thinking competitors, read on for more information about the latest tech and trends.

Kick it to the cloud

"Cloud-based services (<http://www.pcmag.com/article/345308/20-of-the-best-cloud-services-for-smbs>) can enable a business to outsource the back-office functions of their business to third parties," says Michael Peters (Peters' accountancy and finance firm Peters & Partners (<https://www.petersandpartners.com.au/>) provides advice to SMEs about automation and outsourcing).

"These services can include accounting, taxation strategy, human resources, information technology and legal support. The service package available can also be tailored to the size of the business, aspirational goals and levels of growth to ensure appropriate support is provided at each stage of development for the business," Peters says.

The types of services increasingly being automated include invoices, accounts and cashflow management. There's even a role for automation in sales and marketing. Some of the more popular Customer Relationship Management (CRM) options are Bpm'online (<https://www.bpmonline.com/>), HubSpot (<https://www.hubspot.com/>), Infusionsoft (<https://www.infusionsoft.com/>), Microsoft Dynamics (<https://dynamics.microsoft.com/en-au/>) and Salesforce (<https://www.salesforce.com/au/>).

"Introducing a Customer Relationship Management system can transform the way client servicing occurs," says Peters. "Information flowing from business websites, electronic direct mail campaigns as well as mobile applications in real-time provides snapshots on client behaviours and preferences. This, in turn, means you can automatically send out things like special offers and updates on new products."

Simplify your social media marketing

Management tools such as Buffer (<https://buffer.com/>), Hootsuite (<https://hootsuite.com/>) and SocialPilot (<https://socialpilot.co/>) can connect a business with a plethora of social media platforms. This means posts can simultaneously appear on multiple platforms (think Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram) at regularly scheduled intervals. Content can be pre-approved then uploaded by staff when appropriate (for example, when the media is focusing on an issue related to that content). Most importantly of all, these tools make it simple to measure the conversions being achieved in different social channels.

Automating the gig economy

"As a general rule, technology used to most benefit large, well-resourced businesses," observes Jarrod McGrath (McGrath is the owner of Smart WFM (<http://www.smartwfm.com/>) and author of The Digital Workforce (<http://www.smartwfm.com/store/The-Digital-Workforce-p103186018>)).

"Up until recently, software packages had to be bought outright, often at a cost of tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars. Then there would be a prolonged roll-out period involving lots of staff training. With the cloud, business owners can instantly download a software solution for free for a trial period. Even when they do start paying for it, it's maybe \$5-\$10 per month, per employee. Plus, the product is usually user-friendly, meaning staff can get the hang of it quickly.

"The Blockbuster vs Netflix story keeps playing out," McGrath continues. "A complacent incumbent doesn't want to invest in upgrading its legacy systems. Its workforce doesn't want to change the way they've been doing things for the last 20 years. Along comes a smaller business with digital at its core that is willing to keep innovating and evolving. Suddenly, the large business is sent to its Darwinian fate and the small business isn't so small anymore."



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Tinder for jobs

Companies such as Kronos (<https://www.kronos.com.au/>), Deputy (<https://www.deputy.com/>)
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(<https://www.ceridian.ca/blog/2014/02/automate-payroll-processing-time-cost-savings/>) already provide automated solutions for activities such as hiring, onboarding, rostering, paying, performance managing and measuring the productivity of workers. In the not too distant future, McGrath sees Tinder-like technology connecting gig-economy workers with business owners. Well Covered (<https://www.steadfast.com.au/well-covered>)



(If a 'Dating app for casual shifts' app sounds far-fetched, consider the impact the likes of Airtasker (<https://www.airtasker.com/>) and Freelancer.com (<https://www.freelancer.com/>) have had on the labour market. Also, while they are yet to achieve mass penetration, Millennial-friendly recruitment apps such as Found Careers (<https://found.careers/>) are already being used (<https://www.businessinsider.com.au/this-australian-tinder-for-jobs-lets-employers-pick-staff-according-to-gender-and-heritage-2017-7>) by hospitality, retail and defence industry employers to source staff.)

"Say I'm a café owner who needs a barista to work a certain shift," he says. "Currently I have to have a pre-existing relationship with a number of baristas. I need to ring, email or text them individually to see if they are available to work that shift. In the near future, I'll be able to go to an app on my phone and send out an alert that I need a barista for a particular shift at a particular location. All the baristas who have indicated they are free to work at that time around that location will receive an alert and one of them will claim the shift. The barista and the café owner may never have met before and may never meet again. But there will be a rating system, as there is with Uber drivers and passengers, to reassure each party they are dealing with someone reliable".

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