

Where do you grow from here?

A guide to technology for SMEs

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The technology you need for the growth you want

So here you are. Economy on the rise. Opportunities opening up. Time to push the button for growth. But which button? Where's your best opportunity? Where are your quickest wins and where will you find the answers? Right here.

Technology works

You're in business to serve your customers and the right technology can help you to do that better, more cost-effectively and more competently. It can also help you to increase revenues and create more opportunities for growth.

Learn from the best

The best people to help you find your route to growth are the ones who've already taken it. What are they doing and what does their success look like? In this guide, learn what small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Ireland have been getting up to—their projects, the outcomes and the lessons learned.

What next?

Theories don't grow a business; practical steps do. So how do you work out what steps to take next? This guide shows you the kinds of projects, initiatives and investments that will get you there.

Where can technology take you?

Improved customer experience

Sometimes customers want to interact digitally because it can be quicker and easier. They want the option to book online. They want to reach you through social media and hear back from you the same way. Sometimes customers prefer to talk, in which case you need a phone system that directs the call to the right person. And if a customer visits your business, research shows they want to access free, secure Wi-Fi.¹ How many of these customer expectations are you meeting now?

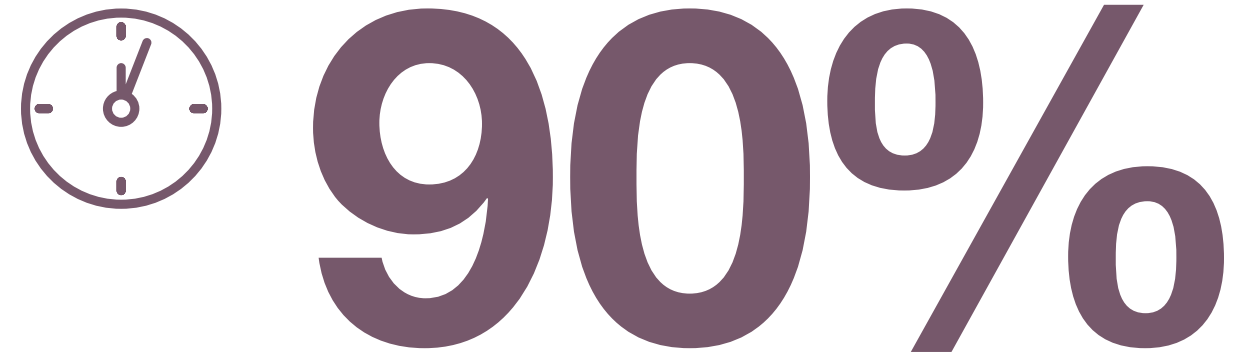
Automated marketing and selling

It may sound strange, but the more you automate customer relationships, the more personal they can be. So why not SMS your customers? A staggering 90% are opened within three minutes² and they don't have to be text-based. You can send videos, photos, links to websites—and you can get a report back so you know when an action has been taken, which means you can quickly and effectively follow it up.

Improved operations

If you're still reliant on paperwork, it's time to realise the keyboard is mightier than the pen. Paper files are hard to share and back up, they take up expensive storage space and they're tricky to keep secure. If you're using them for financial transactions, are you sure your process is compliant? A digital payment system would eliminate manual inputs, increase data security and, of course, save time and money.

¹. [Survey highlighted on Small Biz Trends, 2014](#)



**of SMS are opened
within three minutes²**

². [Successful Mobile Marketing Campaigns: Tips For Small Businesses, 2016](#)

Where can technology take you?

Expanded operations

If you're still nervous about investing in infrastructure and expanding operations, the cloud is a cost-effective option. It gives you access to almost infinite resources for CRM, project management, data storage, marketing and endless other applications. It comes with an on/off switch so you don't have to invest in more than you need, and you can quickly scale back when necessary. Research by Deloitte³ shows that SMEs using the cloud grow 26% faster.

New products and services

You may think you've exploited all opportunities for revenue, but technology can help you discover new openings in your market. Analysing customer relations and marketing data, for example, can uncover a new customer need or inspire new ways to communicate and collaborate with customers and partners. Cloud APIs open up avenues to offer new services to customers, and cloud software can empower you to create new products. Even financial procurement software and digital payment programs can help turn what are traditionally cost centres into revenue generators.

Attracting and retaining high-quality employees

Technology such as Wi-Fi, the latest hardware (tablets and smartphones) and the latest software solutions can help employees work smarter, be more productive and be more efficient. Just as importantly, it can make their jobs more satisfying and more fun. So if you're not offering them digital tools, mobility and unified communications, they'll soon be looking for an employer that is.



26%

**faster growth for SMEs
that use the cloud³**

³. Small business, big technology. Deloitte 2014

Real life, real business, real success

Businesses like yours in Ireland are currently using technology to drive their growth and success. Here are some of their real stories.

Hospitality

Hotel guests increasingly demand more than comfortable beds and a full Irish breakfast. They want to be connected just like they would be at home or in the office. A 93-room hotel in Ireland with hotel-wide Wi-Fi, deployed a 100MB symmetrical wireless leased line to provide their guests with a fast and reliable internet connection.

Manufacturing

If your sites are scattered across a wide area, keeping tabs on production can be time-consuming and inefficient. For a large company producing milk, cheese and nutrition products, monitoring the quantities of process ingredients in hoppers meant a lot of hopping from place to place. By installing machine-to-machine sensors (M2M), they now remotely keep tabs on levels. No more inspection visits, and no more production downtime.

Services

There's self-service, and then there's real self-service. Integration of CCTV and secure payment technology enables a chain of totally unmanned Irish petrol stations to check a customer's age, authorise payments and even make sure no-one's smoking at the pump. It all happens behind the scenes and all the customer knows is they fill their tank fast and go.

Retail

In-store shopping isn't dead. A large department store utilising free in-store Wi-Fi creates digital experiences that make shopping more personal and satisfying. They promote flash offers, give instant discount vouchers and even offer a free coffee. As a result, they gain insights from demographic profile right down to the customer's route through the store. Car dealerships still deal with real live customers, too, especially on a test drive. So the dealer takes along a tablet pre-loaded with order forms and pictures of models in different colours, in case the customer wants something different. Today's online shopping mentality means retailers must do everything they can to move the sales cycle further along while they have the customer's attention. Either that, or risk losing them.

Healthcare

The Irish like the authenticity of doing business face-to-face, especially in the field of healthcare. Facial and other visual cues for establishing trust are highly important when doctors offer opinions, collaborate on diagnoses or share insights and new techniques. Video and telemedicine optimise the effectiveness of medical professionals. And in business, face-to-face sales or customer service may not be life-saving but can help bridge regional barriers, speed-up sales on large ticket items and improve retention.



Assess, prioritise, act

Is your technology up to the job? Is it as ready to drive growth as you are? This three-step action plan will help you to assess, prioritise and act on the right technology-driven opportunities for your business.

Ask the hard questions

- How did you get where you are today? Have you followed a thoughtful, well-planned strategy focused on meeting the needs of customers and operations or have you been reactive, making short-term fixes when something breaks?
- Is this how you want to continue? Where do you want to take your business in a month's time? In a year? In three years?
- What are three specific ways you'd like to make things better for your customers? What three improvements could help your business run better? What could make the people running your business more successful? How could you make work more enjoyable?

Ask the people who know

- Do you know how to grow? Perhaps you're unsure about the best direction to take, or feeling a little hesitant about investing in technology? That's okay. You're in your business, not the business of technology, so there are bound to be options and opportunities that you won't be aware of. That's why we recommend getting advice.
- Ask someone you can trust. Solutions which have worked for another business may not work for yours, however strongly your peers recommend them. For solutions that specifically solve your problems and fit your way of doing business, you need advice from professionals with a wider view.

Get your head in the cloud

- You may think the cloud is not for you just yet, but if you have a smartphone, tweet, use Dropbox or Google Docs, then you're already using the cloud. So are your customers, partners and – this is what's really important – your competitors. So anyone who wants to stay connected with customers, integrated with partners and on a par with competitors can't ignore the cloud any longer.
- Investing in fixed assets is costly, cumbersome and comes with considerable financial risk. Investing in cloud technology requires a much smaller upfront cost and payment is typically based on usage. You can also scale down or up quickly if you need to. All of which is good for reducing risk, supporting growth and all-round future-proofing.





Where to now?

Onwards and upwards, that's where. Here are a few signposts to help you on your journey to growth.

Knowledge is power

The more you know, the more you can do and the more successfully you can do it. To give you a flying start, have a look at what Irish SMEs and technology experts share in these blog posts. [Discover how asking “what if”](#) can help you plan, scale up or even scale back your technology cost-effectively. Are you wondering about building social media presence for your business? [Read about one business which has already done it, with kisses!](#)

Talk is cheap

Actually, it's free. Talk to an SME technology expert from Three Ireland on **1800 330 303** about your business, your needs and Three's possible solutions. [Request a call back now.](#)

The answer is out there

[Find out more](#) about the kind of technology solutions that are available to help your business grow.

