

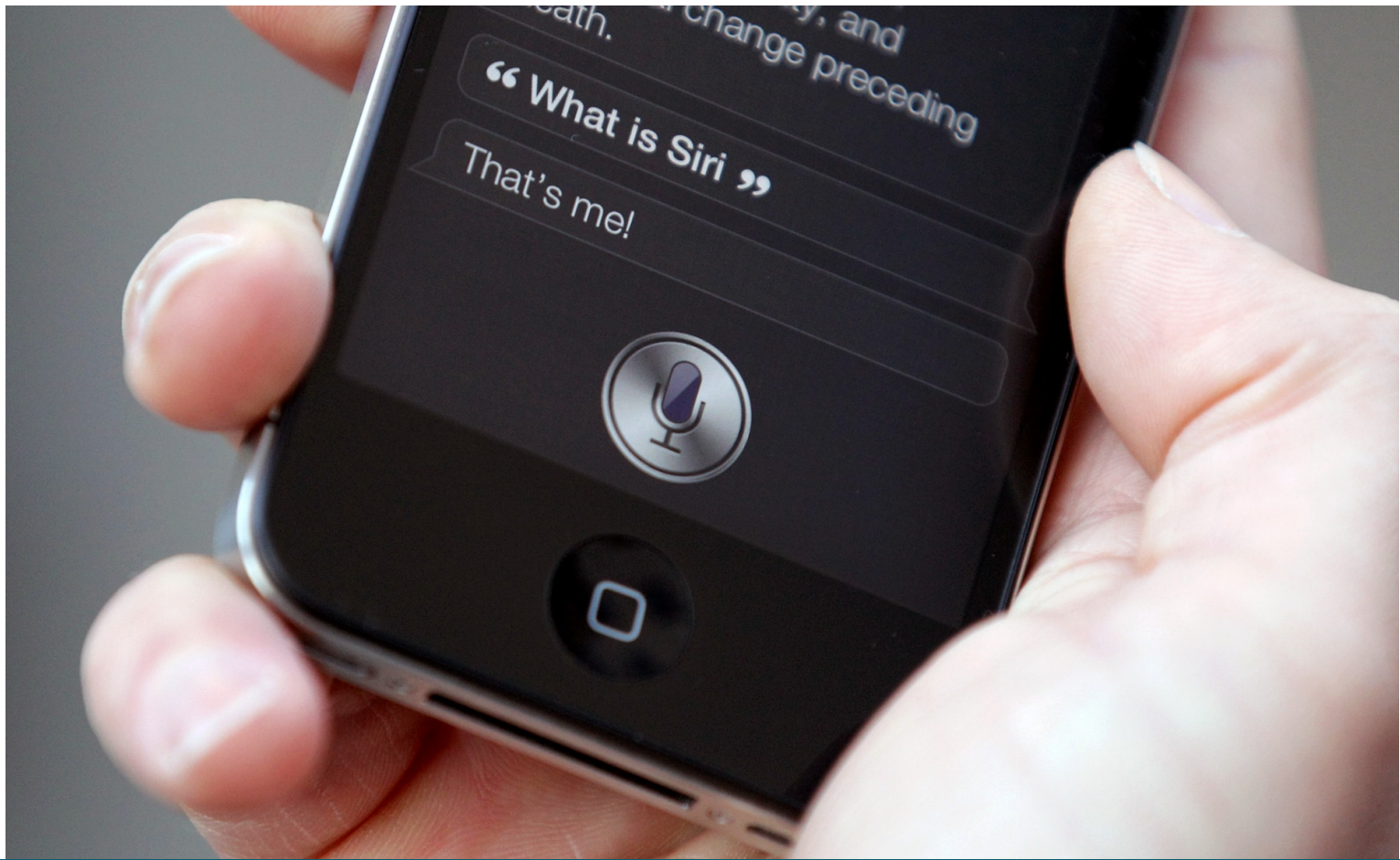
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Four cheap and easy tech hacks for small businesses

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From administration automation to digital marketing tools, small business owners share their favourite tech hacks that make running their companies simpler.

• *What's missing from this list? Share your top resources in the comments section below*

Being a sole trader or running a small business has got its fair share of upsides, but things can become more difficult when it comes to making the most of tech.

Technology is, after all, the great leveller, and by using the hacks that these small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have discovered, businesses of any size can more than match the bigger players at their own game.

Hack one: virtual assistance

Directors at big companies may have a personal assistant, but small business owners have their very own (and often forgotten) assistant in their pocket – the smartphone assistant feature.

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From Apple's Siri to Samsung's Bixby, these sophisticated programmes employ a form of artificial intelligence and can assist with managing schedules and setting reminders.

Paper-based diaries come with the problems of having to always have them to hand, requiring a pen to write in them, and needing to physically check them for reminders, says Leon Brown, who runs software and training firm, [Nextpoint](http://www.nextpoint.co.uk/).

“The [smartphone assistant](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/connect/small-business/tech/the-benefits-of-virtual-)

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There are many free learning videos on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/) (<https://www.youtube.com/>), and community knowledge-sharing websites such as [Quora](https://www.quora.com/) (<https://www.quora.com/>) are dedicated to answering questions.

Google currently also has two [Digital Garages](https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage/) (<https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage/>) in Leeds and Birmingham, where small businesses can access a range of free courses, but also online learning wherever they are.

Rachel Ferla of [Organise Chaos Ltd](http://www.organisechaos.com/) (<http://www.organisechaos.com/>) provides training at the Google Garage in Leeds twice a week: “Courses are on a wide range of topics, including how to build a digital marketing plan, reach new customers online, raising visibility and using social media.”

Firms can also access free face-to-face mentoring sessions to gain advice about their websites and digital marketing strategies, she adds.

Hack three: build a positive profile

These days an online reputation goes a long way, with sites such as [TripAdvisor](https://www.tripadvisor.com/) (<https://www.tripadvisor.com/>) and [Trustpilot](https://uk.trustpilot.com/) (<https://uk.trustpilot.com/>) having a big impact on how companies are viewed by would-be customers.

“Hootsuite delivers key insights to help you understand how the business is performing”

Ben Michaelis, ThinkEngine

In a survey of more than 1,000 people by Zendesk, 90pc said that their buying decisions were influenced by positive reviews online, while 86pc said the same for negative ones.

Alex Boothman, the founder of [MyLegalAdviser](https://mylegaladviser.co.uk/) (<https://mylegaladviser.co.uk/>), says that using private feedback prompts can be beneficial for the visible ones:

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“It also has an analytics feature that delivers key insights to help you understand how your business is performing, where to improve, and where you can grow engagement or click-through rates.”

However, try to avoid posting the same things on all social media channels at the same time, he advises: “It’s important to take an extra few minutes to post them all separately, because audiences on different channels will consume information differently.”

Direct email marketing is also something in which many large businesses invest heavily. With the right software, it’s easily within reach of SMEs.

The email marketing service, MailChimp, has helped ThinkEngine drives sales under a “[Forever Free](https://mailchimp.com/pricing/free/)” plan, which doesn't cost anything so long as you've got 2,000 or fewer subscribers across all lists in your account. As your lists and needs grow, prices will change.

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