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# What tech should a start-up invest in during its first year?

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Keep things as simple as possible and hunt around for cost-efficient solutions, as these small business owners did.

When it comes to surviving as a business, the first year is crucial.

Plenty of start-ups fail to make it beyond their fledgling 12 months and one vital aspect of how they navigate those choppy waters post-launch is their technology setup (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/connect/small-business/business-solutions/>). Get it right and your company should be effective and efficient enough to grow responsibly, but spend too much or on the wrong software and systems, and your business will be going backwards before it has even begun.

One company that not only made it through its first year but continues to thrive is Smartology (<https://www.smartology.net/>), a digital ad agency that was founded in 2010. It launched with three staff and a home office, but now boasts 30 employees and is set to hire more globally.

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The firm's chief executive, Mark Bembridge, says that start-ups should not try to run before they can walk. "Don't invest in technology too quickly and keep things simple – let it work for you, not drown you," advises the founder, who used a cork board, rather than a complex bespoke system, for project management. "In the early days, tying up limited staff in complex tech is not helpful."

**“The less you have, the more creative it makes you be with limited assets”**

Craig Martindale, Marley Hannah Photography

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## Hunt for deals

In January, when couple Craig Martindale and Amy Jane Hannah decided to turn their love of photography into a business, they already owned the most important thing: cameras.

But they had little else, so bargain-spotting and bulk-buying was the name of the game. “We bought a laptop that supported Adobe's Photoshop Lightroom software, which required a subscription,” says Mr Martindale of [Marley Hannah Photography](https://www.facebook.com/MarleyHannahPhotography/). “When we first started trading, we supplied photos only on USB sticks, which we bought in bulk to save costs.”

The couple constantly hunt around for the best possible price, whether it be for lenses or props – and the same applies to tech. “The less you have, the more creative it makes you be with your limited assets,” he states.

“I spent hours testing, learning and refining, which I would not have had to do if I had outsourced”

Sarah Louise Smith, S L Social

As well as the photography, Ms Hannah has also focused on marketing, but she decided against a costly website and domain name. “With most communication now done through social media, we decided that it would be more beneficial to get our name out using those,” she says.

The business’s homepage is a Facebook page. “We use it to sell our services to the entire North West of England – and for free,” she adds. “We also use the likes of [Schpok](https://en.shpock.com/) and [Gumtree](https://www.gumtree.com/) to widen our visibility online.”

## Use cheaper web-based tools

If you’re a sole trader or start-up with hardly any budget at all, how realistic is it not to spend a single penny on tech? Not only is it feasible, explains Sarah Louise Smith – who started her social media coaching firm, [S L Social](http://www.slsocial.co.uk/), three years ago – but it’s actually

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Now a Google technician offering other start-ups advice for free as part of the [Digital Garage UK](https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage) (<https://learndigital.withgoogle.com/digitalgarage>) tour, she urges new businesses to take advantage of free web-based tools. “My ultimate find is [Canva](https://www.canva.com/) (<https://www.canva.com/>), an online tool for creating ads, menus, flyers and other visual content for free,” she says. “You can create imagery for your website, emails and social media.”

She adds: “[Trello](https://trello.com/) (<https://trello.com/>) is also a fab piece of tech that I’ve used from day one. It’s an online project management tool that’s simple and vital when your business is moving fast – you can create ‘lists’ and ‘boards’ for a variety of subjects to keep track of where you are.”

The only downside of a zero-cost approach is having to do a lot of the testing and learning yourself, says Ms Smith. “I spent hours in month one researching, watching online tutorials and testing, learning and refining, which I would not have had to do if I had outsourced.”

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