

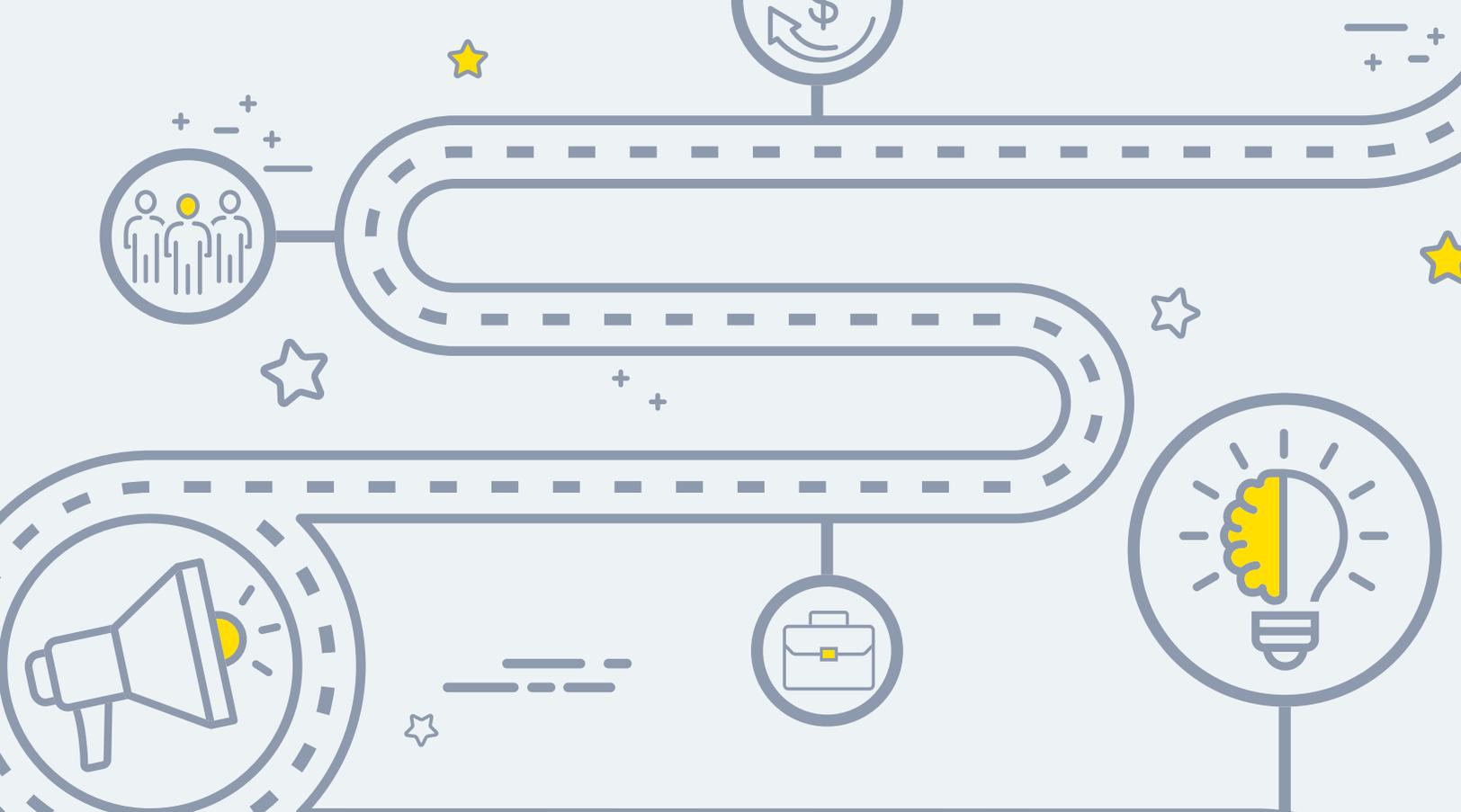
# SelfInformed

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## 5 Reasons You Need to Rethink Your Marketing Plan





5 REASONS YOU NEED TO

# Rethink Your Marketing Plan

Marketing is an important part of growing a business. No matter how great your product or service, if no one knows you exist, especially your target audience, you may find it difficult to pay the bills. A good marketing strategy can put you on the right track to gain new and repeat customers. Unfortunately, many small business owners put marketing on the back burner, and by doing so, may be sending their potential customers to their competitors.

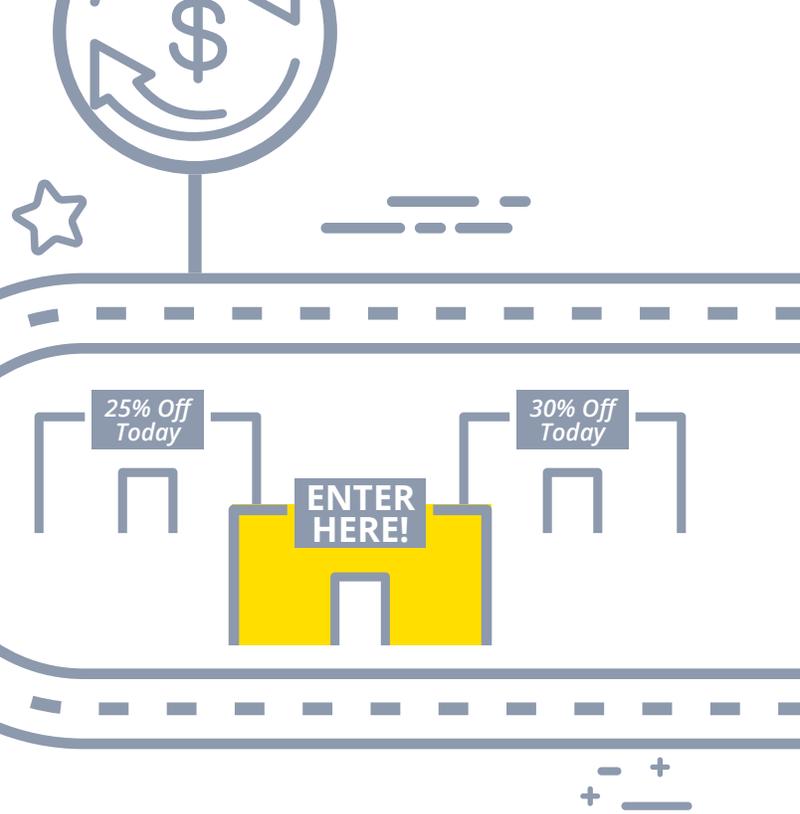
In fact, some experts **recommend having a marketing plan** even before opening the doors and starting a business ("**Don't start,**" 2017). If cost is a concern, today's technology makes marketing more affordable with the ability to reach customers through virtual means. So, maybe it's time to implement a good plan or rethink your current strategy. Here are a few reasons why you should get started on a new or updated marketing plan.

## 1. Expose your brand.

Even as individuals, we all have a “brand.” Remember your childhood when you and your friends would give each other nicknames? Sometimes that nickname matched a physical trait, a talent, or something a person was known for—think “Squints” or “Yeah-Yeah” in the movie classic, *Sandlot*. Whether you like it or not, your business also has a brand. But do you know what your brand is? More importantly, do your customers know your brand? Does your brand represent “the plumbing business down the street?” Or, “that bakery around the corner?” How you are perceived compared to your competitors is what makes your brand. And the good news is that you can manage your brand and decide **how it should be positioned** (“A Simple Definition,” 2016).

Building a brand is just as important to a small business or self-employed individual as it is to a large corporation. Your brand defines what you do. It tells the world what makes you different and why you are unique. Ask yourself, “What do customers think of when your product or service comes to mind?” Then, ask actual customers for their feedback. Does their description match how you want your business to be perceived? Once you’ve established what your brand represents, communicate it to your target audience as part of your marketing plan. It should also be expressed in your vision, mission, and tagline.

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## 2. Compete with your competition.

**Knowing what competitors are doing** can be critical to any business (Anon, 2018). Take the fictional story of a trio of pizza businesses who all three were next to each other in the same strip mall. The pizza store (#1) on the far left had a big sign “25% off today” while the pizza store (#3) on the far right posted a sign “30% off today.” But the clever pizza store (#2) in the middle ended up with the most sales for the day as it posted a huge sign that said, “ENTER HERE!” This simple story illustrates why you need to be aware of your competition. What do they offer that you don’t? More importantly, how are they reaching out to their customers and potential customers?

Being aware of your competitors tells you what your business does better and what advantages you offer your customers. These advantages should be shouted out to your target audience! Take what you know gives you the edge and make it known every chance you get. Whether you express it in a brochure, website, or through social media, get it out there. If you have testimonials from some of your customers, add these to your marketing campaigns to confirm what makes your business a better choice.



Today, businesses can communicate real time with their customers online

### 3. Connect with your audience.

Years ago, communicating with customers meant huge store front signs, direct mail, or flyers. Today, businesses can communicate real time with their customers online. Social media makes it possible and affordable to gauge customer satisfaction through feedback on various platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and others. You can post your latest promotions, connect links to your website, run contests, and more. Think of it as an ongoing networking opportunity with customers.

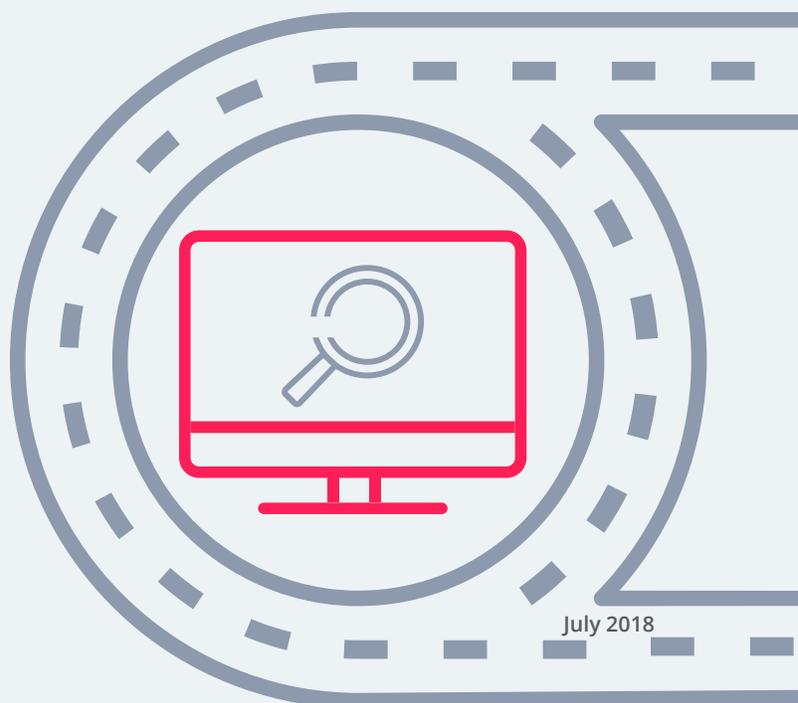
You can also learn how competitors are communicating with their customers by following them on social media. If you don't have a social media account, start with one that your competitors seem to have success with noting their number of followers or likes. Develop a calendar as far in advance as possible to highlight dates or timeframes to post any events or special times of the year that draws in your customers (e.g. back to school). Sprinkle in dates with specials and offers to entice followers to buy your product or use your service. Then fill in the rest of the calendar with weekly or by weekly relevant posts that provide tips and useful information to your customers (e.g. how to turn off water heater safely). Ideally, these informative posts should link to your blog and/or website. Finally, find opportunities to gain insight on what's trending by scanning comments from your customers and your competitors' customers. Consider [Google Trends](#) to get a pulse on hot topics or to explore what topics are trending near you.

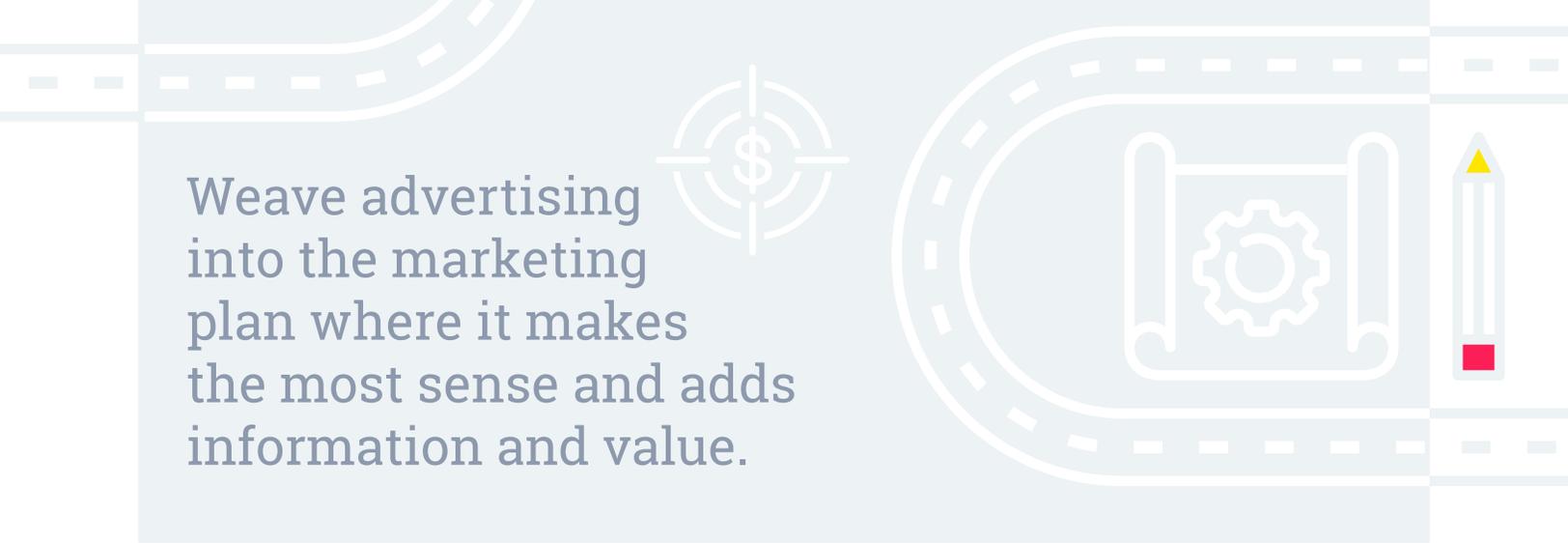
All that said, one of the [top 10 business trends](#) to drive success this year is a reminder that the best connections with customers are live, in-person interactions ([Wallace, 2018](#)). Think about sponsoring a community event or hosting a customer-appreciation day to invite them for a sweet treat and coffee.

### 4. Check your online presence.

Gone are the days when most people used the phone book to find a product or service. Regardless of the type of business, customers now rely heavily on searching the internet to find what options are available. In addition, customers have come to expect an online presence and find legitimacy in businesses that have a website. If you don't have a website, get started as soon as possible. You can find help at [Inmotion Hosting](#) or [GoDaddy](#), or any number of other web hosting companies that feature easy-to-use site builders and hosting plans. Once your website is up and running, fill pages with well written content and keep it fresh with new information whenever possible. Consider seeking help to write your text to be sure it will be found by your customers when they are searching for your type of business (SEO friendly). In addition, add a blog to your website to help tell your story, provide useful information, and share news.

In addition to a website, look into listing your business on referral sites such as Yelp, HomeAdvisor, Angie's List, [NextBizThing](#) and others to send visitors to your website



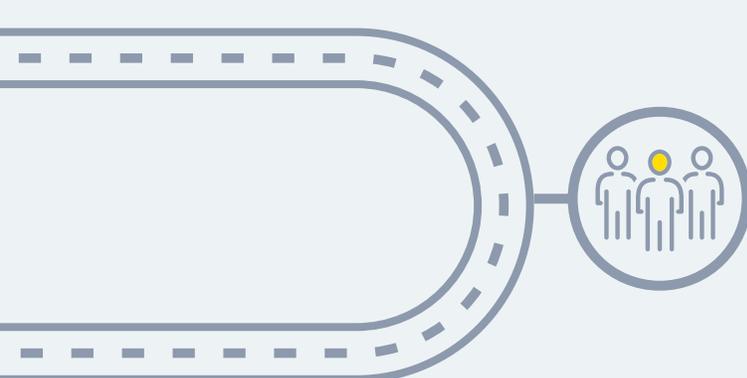


Weave advertising into the marketing plan where it makes the most sense and adds information and value.

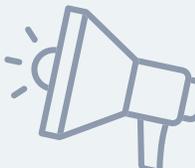
## 5. Don't confuse advertising with marketing.

**Advertising versus marketing** has some entrepreneurs scratching their heads. Placing ads in a newspaper or putting a flyer on someone's doorstep does not constitute a marketing plan ("**The Difference,**" 2017). Advertising should, however, be part of an overall integrated program to gain new business, increase sales through offers, and announce new products or services. Weave advertising into the marketing plan where it makes the most sense and adds information and value. Be sure to consider traditional and digital advertising options based on your objectives. You may find that doing both reinforces your campaign and yields the greatest success. Traditional advertising as well as digital advertising will draw people to your business and website if done well. They can work hand-in-hand to build your business. For example, advertise your website on a storefront window, service truck, business cards, customer bags, etc.

Ideally, your marketing plan should be reviewed and updated yearly and include your budget and objectives. For example, you may want to include efforts to reach a new market segment to increase your customer base and revenue. You may want to incorporate a new and upcoming product launch or have a portion of your plan coincide with new service improvements. Or, maybe next year is the year to celebrate a business or product anniversary. Once you've established what the marketing plan should achieve, outline what options are available to communicate this to your customers based on your budget. The time will be well spent as you explore what your business priorities are and how you plan to move forward in that direction. Otherwise, you may find yourself functioning day-by-day on survival mode, which may prove to be an ineffective roadmap to successfully growing your business. ■



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# Search Engine Optimization vs. Search Engine Marketing



Still unsure about last month's article on SEO & SEM? Read on to find out more.

## **SEO & SEM what's the difference?**

### **SEO, what are organic search results and why are they so important?**

When trying to explain to a member the importance of getting your business' website listed in search engines the terms SEO and SEM always come up. Quite often I'm asked what the difference is between the two.

SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization. SEO is simply the process of optimizing your website so that the various search engines can index the data as you would like them to. For example, if you're trying to feature a product for an upcoming holiday you might include keywords related to the holiday at various points.

### **When optimizing a page (SEO), there are a few key points to remember.**

Content is king! The best sites have lots of wonderful wording that carefully incorporates relevant words that help boost your search engine rankings. Be careful though. Don't simply type a bunch of relevant words in your content. This is known as "stuffing" and can be a detriment in the modern search engines.

Don't forget to style your content. The paragraphs, header and other styling selection you make help search engines establish what the important parts of the content is. Properly formatted content is really important.

The Meta tags are important as well, but don't carry as much weight as they once did. The Meta tags include brief descriptors such as a page's Title, Description and Keywords that help a search engine interpret the content. However, these are simply suggestions. Quite often search engines ignore this content when determining where to list the page in the search results presented to the user.

SEM stands for Search Engine Marketing. SEM is a bit of an umbrella term that includes SEO as well as other practices all aimed as directly marketing your website. SEM is really an overall strategy. SEM takes into account your overall strategy whereas SEO is more specifically targeted.

SEM includes paid advertising, various optimized pages within your site, link exchanges, content exchanges and so much more. The components used are really determined by your overall marketing strategy and budgetary constraints.

Now let's shift our attention to Organic search results. Organic search results are those listings that the website owner has not paid to show at the top of the search results list. These are vital to any successful campaign. These listings are listed based on the search phrase you entered (merit based). Organic search results are very important for a couple of reasons.

Organic search results are harder to get but they are more relevant. Because of that, your users will likely stay on your page longer. Paid search results sometimes don't really have the content the user is looking for but at least get the user to your page. The problem with that is that user won't stay long.

Organic search results usually hang around longer. Paid search results will be dropped from the results list once the money runs out. However, if organic results are getting traffic the search engines will typically keep these listings in the mix as they want to serve relevant and meaningful results.

Ultimately, there are many different ways to promote your site and content within. Promoting your site can be a bit of a challenge and even a bit of a game. Ultimately, like everything else in life, you get back what you put into it. ■

# Generating Ad Revenue

## THE TOP 10

### 1. Get out of the office!

Connect with networking groups, share ideas and ask for referrals.

### 2. Is your Website up to date?

Can people order products or services direct through your site? If not consider investing in ecommerce.

### 3. Do you have a YouTube Channel?

YouTube is a great place to showcase your products or services. Simple instructional videos that offer helpful or educational tips build good will and trust.

### 4. Affiliate marketing

Receive referral fees from merchants when your followers purchase through a link to a merchant on your website.

### 5. Sell Ad Space on your Website

Offer to sell ad space to merchants who target the same customers.

### 6. Sell digital downloads

If you're selling a product or service like medicare supplement coverage or swimming pool maintenance, offer a digital download for \$.99 to

\$4.99 to explain 'details only the experts know'. Make sure this has value relative to the price.

### 7. Build an email list

Solicit email addresses from your loyal customers and provide coupons or discounts to them via email. This drives revenue.

### 8. Offer Consulting

Offer a webinar for a fee, to a group or personalized one-on-one.

### 9. Create a Conference on your website (or a local coffee shop with a meeting room)

Similar to number 8, but advertise this 'for a limited number of participants' for deeper, educational insights into your products or services.

### 10. Offer writing or speaking services

As an expert in your field let followers know that you're available for speaking engagements or writing articles. This builds goodwill and trust even if you don't charge for it.

#### Terrie Turner

Sunbelt Advertising  
817.966.4867



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### Program Benefits Include:

- Up to 80% off preferred products
- 93,000 products discounted below retail price
- FREE next-day delivery on online orders over \$50 (excludes furniture)
- Conveniently shop online or visit one of our local stores
- Exclusive low printing costs
- 100% satisfaction guaranteed



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Why you need LifeLock after a data breach.

**Putting a freeze on your credit may not be enough.** Identity theft goes beyond credit fraud. With info like your SSN and birthdate, criminals can file tax returns, steal from investment accounts, or rack up medical bills.

You are **11 times** more likely to be a victim of identity fraud if you are notified of a breach. 1 in

4 people have experienced identity theft. If your information has been breached, LifeLock is here to help if a problem arises.

Identity theft can happen for **years to come**. Data breaches can expose information that typically doesn't change like your SSN, birthdate, or name. Criminals can use this info for identity theft long after a breach

[Click Here to Get Protected](#)

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# *Supreme Court:* **States Can Collect Online Sales Tax**



On June 22, the Supreme Court ruled on *South Dakota v. Wayfair* overturning a previous ruling which made much of the internet a tax-free zone.

The recent Supreme Court decision in *South Dakota v. Wayfair* will require states to implement a tax collection system for online retailers, which will have the likelihood of creating a myriad of new challenges for self-employed entrepreneurs. Because of last week's ruling, millions of self-employed businesses offering their goods and services for sale online could now have to navigate a nightmarish web of compliance challenges.

The Government Accounting Office recently released a report showing that this ruling could cause the compliance costs for small businesses to skyrocket. Many of the small 'Mom and Pop' business owners we represent would incur the highest cost if Congress doesn't act.

It is essential to the livelihood of millions of small and family-owned

businesses that Congress act now to provide compliance guidelines on how to proceed. This is not about money; rather, this is about compliance and tax filing and additional time-consuming paperwork in up to 45 different states, many of which have hundreds of local jurisdictions that also generate separate compliance issues. Last week's Supreme Court ruling is likely to have a drastic and devastating effect on the ability of millions of self-employed Americans to start and grow their business. The small business community wants to comply with all laws but need simplicity in doing so. We must continue to support these entrepreneurs by providing them with an effective path forward to ensure they do not get caught up in the maze of complex regulations that will hurt their business and ultimately hurt the American economy. ■

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