

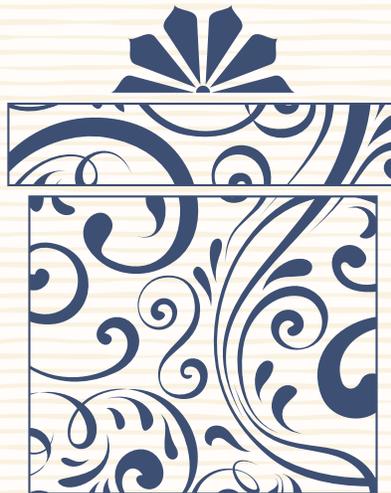
# SelfInformed

Published by the National Association for the Self-Employed

December 2019



# • **How Small Businesses Prepare for the Holidays and Plan for the New Year**



When it comes to the holiday season, small business owners have a lot to do. Not only do you need to be ready for the biggest shopping days of the year, but you also have to plan ahead for the new year.

According to **Deloitte's 2018 Holiday Shopping Survey**, over 70% of Americans planned to do their holiday shopping from mid to late November. That means that as an entrepreneur, you always have to be thinking ahead about how best to prepare so that you can efficiently juggle the balancing act that is business management over the holiday season.

### Effective Communication with Customers is Crucial

Remember that your customers are being bombarded by sales, discounts, doorbusters, and ads galore. Just taping up a few signs or your reduced holiday hours isn't going to cut it. Your messaging has to adapt in order to fit the customer's shopping mindset.

For example, if they're doing the majority of their shopping in November, it's a smart idea to keep your microbusiness front-of-mind by letting them know about how your products would make great gifts, as well as plant some ideas in their mind about what to get and for whom.

By December, a lot of the shopping has already been done, so it's a good idea to focus on the last-minute gift shopper, reminding them that a gift purchased from a small business is not only meaningful to both giver and recipient, but it also helps keep money in the local economy. Shoppers are generally in a feel-good-do-good mood, and this is the point at which your message can ring as true as a set of silver bells.

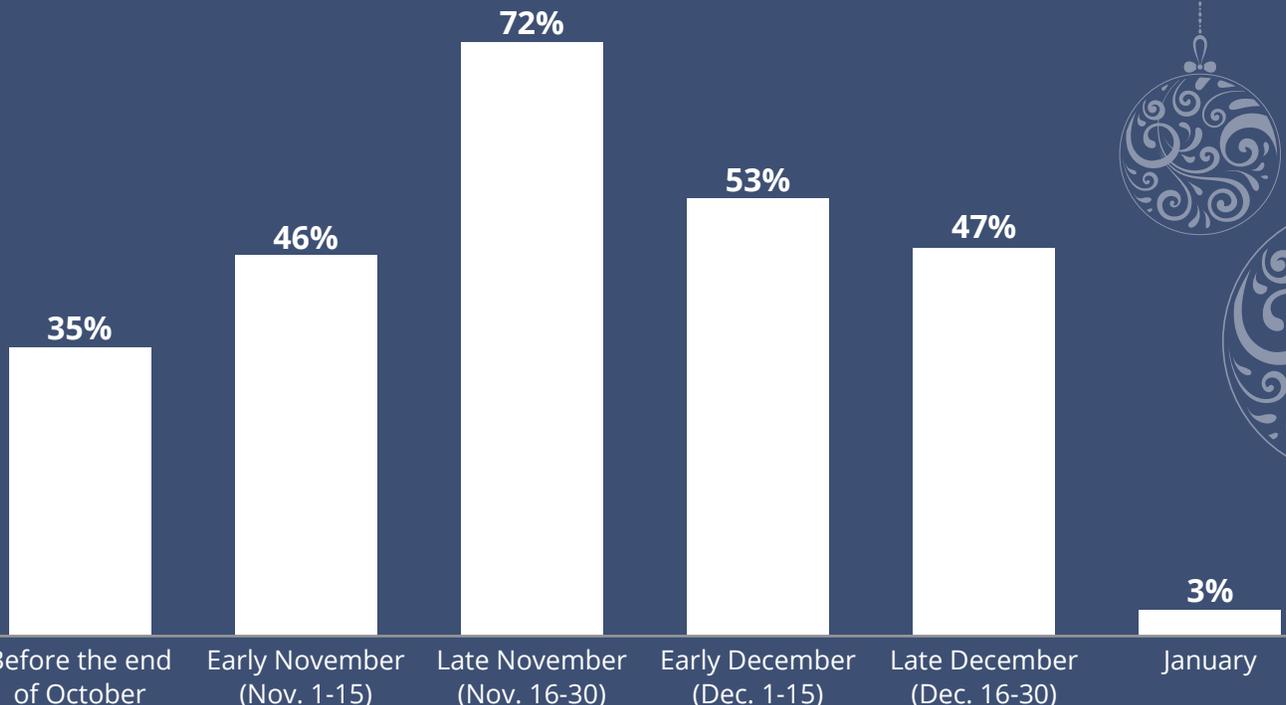
### Understanding How Customers Interact with Your Business

Beyond signage and proper message targeting, it's also important to consider other touch-points where customers are going to be interacting with your business. For small businesses, this is most typically your telephone support and website.

With regard to your phone, you'll want to make sure that if you're going to be closed, that customers know about your reduced hours well in advance. Most people expect that shops will be closed over the holidays, but giving them ample notice as to your hours of operation also encourages them

## Peak Holiday Shopping Season Is Upon Us

% of U.S. consumers who expect to do holiday shopping during the following periods in 2018



Based on a survey of 4,036 U.S. consumers who were asked when they are likely to begin their holiday shopping when they expect to complete it. Source: Deloitte

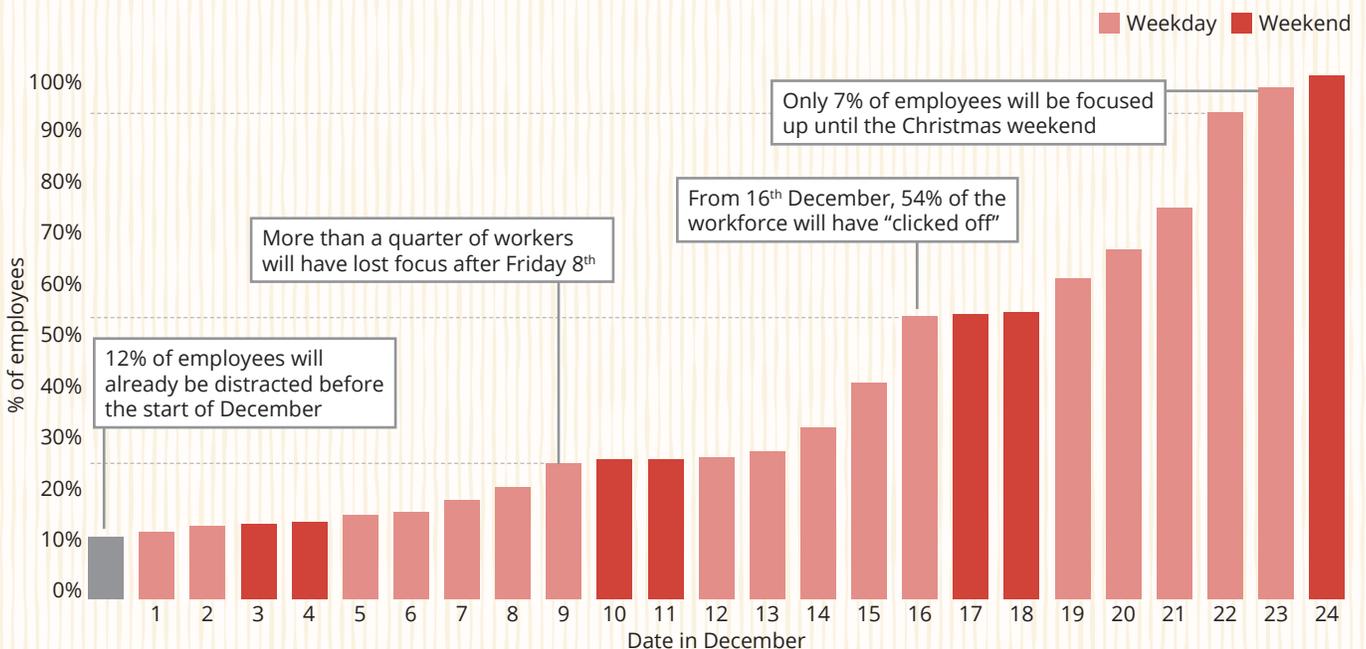
to take action on making a purchase. Show these updated hours in-store as well as announcing them on your website and voicemail.

And speaking of websites, you'll want to make sure that yours is properly optimized for mobile. Why? Because, according to Google, 76% of people who search on their smartphones for a product or service nearby **end up visiting that business within a day**. Plus, considering that more searches now happen on mobile than desktop, you could be leaving money on the table by not having a site that's tailored to both smartphones and desktops alike.

## Staying in the Loop with Staffing and Shifts

It's a fact of life in any industry, employees are going to **"click off"** before the holidays, simply because they're focused on other things, like buying gifts, travel plans, family dinner menus and so on. Commercialization has grown extensively, and as many small businesses compete with big box retailers to take advantage of the longer and longer holiday season, employee productivity starts to take a serious dip... of 50%:

### Last day before "clicking off" for Christmas



That being said, managing employee expectations about time off over the holidays is equally important. There's perhaps no other time as competitive as having off from work over the holidays, but that also doesn't have to mean that you end up juggling all of the work yourself.

For example, you could choose to stagger employee schedules so that you'll always have help on-hand. Or you could simply allot time off under a first-come, first-served basis. Some small business employees don't mind working over the holidays, and are happy to shoulder some of the extra

workload. If yours is a seasonal business or the holidays are your busiest season, this is a great time to pick up some part time or seasonal staff. Depending on your industry, you may also want to entertain the possibility of letting your employees work from home.

There are lots of different strategies to handle what are undoubtedly the most sought-after holidays on the calendar. But the one thing you don't want to do is ignore the issue or wait and hope employees figure it out on their own. All this does is sow internal strife and disagreement, and at worst, it

can lead to poor reviews of the company, which for small businesses, can be hard to overcome.

## Gearing Up for the New Year

Even after the gifts have been exchanged and the holiday treats eaten, there's still the New Year. This is the time of year that's brimming with possibilities and excitement. Small business owners can capitalize on that enthusiasm by hosting group meetings or brainstorming efforts where teams can come together to collaborate.

During this time, it's also important to concentrate on growing your business. Encourage your employees and staff to create their own New Year's resolutions for the company, and work with them one-on-one to clarify those goals so that they're more concrete. In addition, plan to follow-up throughout the year during times when it seems most resolutions fall through the cracks.

Keeping employees energized and motivated is important, and one of the ways to do that is by recognizing their efforts both inside and outside of the workplace. Not only does this help inspire camaraderie in the workplace, but it also makes employees feel more valued, understood and championed by the small businesses they serve.

## Your Small Business Holiday Checklist

With all of these points in mind, it's easy to feel overwhelmed over the holidays. Let's recap:

- **The holiday season starts earlier than ever, and most people are doing their shopping from November 15<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>.** Use this time to introduce them to the benefits of shopping small business and the thoughtfulness that comes with giving something custom or handmade.
- **Make sure that your voicemail, in-store signage and website contain your updated**



**holiday hours** so that customers can know ahead of time when you'll be open and can plan accordingly.

- **Make sure your website displays correctly on mobile devices.** More people are shopping and searching on their smartphones and tablets and you won't want to miss out on that digital and foot traffic.
- **Decide how you're going to handle staff requests for time off** and how you'll handle the "click off" that tends to happen around the holidays. Be ready with part-time or seasonal help and be consistent no matter which method you choose.
- **Keep motivation high in the new year by brainstorming business growth plans** with employees and staff and openly communicating ideas while setting concrete milestones toward making them a reality.

As an organization that was built by and for small businesses, NASE, the National Association for the Self Employed is here to help fuel your business growth. With resources ranging from expert advice to financial calculators to small business grants and scholarships, we have the tools and knowledge to help you handle the holidays with ease and soar into the new year with confidence.



## CAREINGTON SAVINGS PLANS

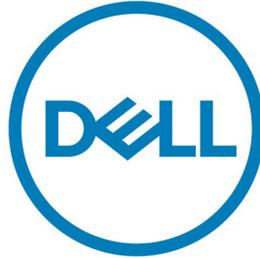
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## SMALL BUSINESS

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- Save an extra 5% on PowerEdge Servers



# Writing Self-Employment

Susie Redfern is the Owner of Milestones Magazine LLC located in Aurora Illinois. Milestones Magazine is both a publication and website dedicated to showcasing programs, products, and services that help people with challenges (any age/type/degree) achieve milestones in their lives.

### **When and why did you join the NASE?**

I joined NASE when I started my home business in the early 1990s, shortly after our family's move back to the Chicago area. At the time, NASE published a print version of its Self-Employed magazine, and I enjoyed reading the articles

### **What inspired you to enter the field you are in?**

Before starting my business, I became the director of a School and Day Care Information Service in New Orleans, where we lived at the time. I was inspired by this experience to enter the information/resource & referral field on my own after we left New Orleans in 1994.

### **When and why did you start your business?**

Milestones Magazine came about earlier this year, as a re-invention of my existing information/resource & referral network and service. The birth of my son, now age 25, who is on the Autism

Spectrum, gave me a first-hand look, from a parent's perspective, of the issues and challenges for a child with disabilities. I decided to use my skill set for finding resources and providing information to use in the current business.

I self-publish an online magazine that showcases programs, products, and services that help people with challenges (any age/type/degree) achieve milestones in their lives. I also maintain a website, [www.milestonesmagazine.net](http://www.milestonesmagazine.net), that serves as a link to the magazine, and addresses two important issues: suitable child care for children with special needs and employment for adults with disabilities. I do this by maintaining a Child Care Registry and an At Your Service Registry on the website.

With the Child Care Registry database, families and childcare providers can find each other. Families and providers in the database can also access my library of articles (courtesy of North Carolina Extension Service) about adapting a childcare program to serve children with various challenges and diagnoses.

The “At Your Service” registry is designed to link families, community members and businesses seeking and/or offering home-based work (e.g. yard work, snow shoveling) with each other. The main focus is on families who have children with challenges. This initiative is one avenue through which individuals with challenges can find freelance work with flexible hours on a temporary or permanent basis, to build up their skills and provide service to their community.

### **How do you market your business?**

The website and newsletter are the primary marketing methods at this time. Social media, primarily Facebook, is also used. Milestones Magazine has a Facebook business page and a Facebook group. Milestones Magazine just joined “Special Needs & Disabilities Professionals Networking Group”, sponsored by Sterk Law Group, based in southwest suburban Chicago. And Milestones Magazine also attends (as a vendor) various disability resource fairs. Organizing and putting on events (both on-line and physical) is also on the radar for marketing purposes.

### **What challenges have you faced in your business?**

The biggest challenge is getting clients and participants in the initiatives intended to be revenue streams. As a for-profit business, I need it to be paying its own way practically from the start. I haven't yet overcome this challenge, but I do have advertisers in the magazine, article contributors, and lots of moral support.

### **Do you have any employees?**

I do not have any employees currently. I have no current plans to add employees, though the Beginnings program, if it pans out, will hire at least one person to oversee the participants.

### **Can you tell us about your schedule and what a typical day is like for you?**

My schedule is largely home-based work on the computer. I do marketing to get and keep advertisers in Milestones Magazine. I obtain or co-write articles for the magazine and provide content for the newsletters. And most importantly, I serve as a caregiver for my son, who aged out of school district services 3 years ago.



### **What's the best thing about being self-employed?**

The ability to shape the business to serve people with disabilities from a parent's perspective. I have found that many of the enterprises out there have been created by parents to provide products, services, and/or employment for people with disabilities. Milestones Magazine falls into that mold. Also, the ability to work the business around my son and his needs is a great benefit.

### **What's the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?**

I would advise a start-up business owner to follow your passion and tailor your business to provide products, services, and solutions for your clients' problems, not your own (though sometimes they are one and the same).

### **Which NASE member benefit is most important to you?**

The Office Max Copying Perk, allowing me to make black/white copies at 2.5 cents per page, is the most valuable benefit. It allows me to give out literature at events at an affordable cost.



# Small Business Optimism Remains as 2019 Comes to a Close

In two separate studies, Paychex's **Small Business Employment Watch** and US Chamber of Commerce and MetLife's **Small Business Index**, small business growth and optimism continue to grow and remain steady, largely impart to the tight labor market.

## From the Paychex study:

*"The tight labor market continues to positively impact wage growth. Hourly earnings grew 3.11 percent among employees of small businesses, the highest level since reporting began in 2011. Weekly earnings continue to grow, accelerating 3.75 percent in November."*

The increase in wages is directly tied to the tight labor market, which is forcing employers (large and small) to respond with a steady increase in hourly earnings, which have not reached the highest levels in nearly a decade.

## From the MetLife/US Chamber of Commerce study:

*"The MetLife & U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Index reached 71.3 this quarter, up 0.6 points from 70.7 last quarter. This is the highest score since the survey's inception in 2017 and marks the second consecutive quarter that the Index has set a new record."*

Small business owners remain optimistic as to their business healthy and the strength of their local economy.

Additional key findings include:

- 69% percent of small businesses report good health. This is the first time this measure has grown over four consecutive quarters (66% in Q3 2019, 65% in Q2, and 64% in Q1).
- An unprecedented 59% say their local economic outlook is good. This is the most optimistic businesses have felt toward their local economy since the survey's inception (56% last quarter and in Q4 2018).
- 57% say the U.S. economy is in good health, similar to last quarter and continuing an overall positive trend since Q1 (was 58% in Q3, 59% in Q2, and 53% in Q1).

Small business sentiment remains a key indicator for economic growth and confidence, while the ongoing trade war with China has slowed the overall economic growth, small business continue to be a shining bright star of the economy. ■

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