

Taking your small business online for the first time (list of free software)

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So you want to set up a small business online for the first time. Maybe you normally teach in-person classes like yoga, or you're a therapist, and you want to conduct sessions remotely.

There are many tools available for you to take advantage of, and the bulk of which I'm recommending are free or low-cost. The essential equipment that you need is access to the internet, either through a smartphone, laptop or computer.

Here's a list of the software I have used in my career as a freelancer working remotely. All of these tools are web-based, which means you don't need to download any software. You use them within your web browser, such as Chrome, or Firefox, on any device.

The trick to setting up a successful remote business is to use a combination of these tools to deliver a virtual service.

Conducting remote video meetings or calls

Zoom is an online meeting tool which is free for the basic plan, and you can have up to a hundred participants. You could use it to conduct a remote yoga class, for example, with everyone taking part in front of their computer or smartphone.

When you set up your Zoom account, you are given a unique link that you can send out to whoever you want to access the class. Only you as the organiser need to have Zoom. You just agree on the time and make sure you are inside the "meeting room" when your participants click on the link.

zoom.us

Google Hangouts is free, and fulfils essentially the same function as Skype. You access Google Hangouts through your Google account. Other people also have to use Google Hangouts if you want to interact with them on this service.

hangouts.google.com

Scheduling invites

If you need to schedule invites with multiple people, you can use Google Calendar to set up a time and a date, and then invite attendees using their email address. Google Calendar is free.

calendar.google.com

You can also use EventBrite to invite people to a remote event, which is free if you want to organise a free event.

[eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

If you want to organise bookings with individual customers in a more professional and

organised way, you can use You Can Book Me. One calendar for one person costs \$10 per month.

This software is really good if you want to book lots of one-to-one remote meetings, for example with individual clients who want a solo session with you.

youcanbook.me

Sharing documents and collaborating with many people

I use Google Drive to share a lot of documents remotely, and this is tool free for the 15 GB storage plan. You can share with anyone using Google Drive, as long as you have their email address.

google.com/drive

Trello is a good organisational tool which is also free.

You can collaborate with other people on Trello, but the free plan limits you to ten sharing "boards". The software uses a card system which you can use in any way you want. I use Trello for organising my freelance jobs, and some clients share cards with me when I have a job to complete.

trello.com

Collaborating closely with a team

On my remote team, we use Slack to collaborate with each other. It's essentially a big online workspace where you can message people publicly or privately, share documents, and video chat or call.

You could use Slack if you are working closely with a particular team. It's free for the basic plan.

Slack.com

Receiving online payments

If you want to take payments online, you could use a number of different tools. My favourite is Wave, which is completely free, and you can use it to send invoices. I allow people just to pay me directly into my bank account.

waveapps.com

Some other people use PayPal, probably because you can pay someone directly within PayPal, and a lot of people are familiar with the tool. PayPal allows you to easily take payments up front, say if you want people to pre-book a class and send you the money at the same time.

paypal.com

TransferWise is a very good payment processing tool which you can use to receive domestic and international payments with no fees. It's also free to use.

transferwise.com

Setting up your own blog

You may want to set up a blog very quickly. A free tool you can use is wordpress.com (different to wordpress.org but by the same company). You can easily set up a blog with no coding experience.

If you want a custom domain (eg something like mybusiness.com rather than mybusiness.wordpress.com) then you will need to pay a one-off fee for that.

wordpress.com

Promoting your business on social media

If you want to promote yourself, Instagram is very effective for small businesses. If you dare, you can also use twitter! Both these social media apps are free to use (you only pay if you want to promote your ads).

Twitter is more text-based and better for the B2B industries, in my opinion.

twitter.com

Instagram is image-based and suits businesses on the more creative side.

[instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com)

Creating beautiful promotional images

Especially if you're using something like Instagram, it can be very useful to create beautiful images to promote your business. You can use Canva which is a free image editing tool that has lots of templates for creating images for social media.

Canva is free for the basic plan.

[canva.com](https://www.canva.com)

When you make your promotional images, you might need some beautiful stock photos to use as a background, for example. There are many, many free sites for stock photos, my favourite of which is Unsplash.

[unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

Another excellent free stock photo site is Pexels.

[pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com)

Emailing lots of people

If you want to start building an email list and sending out emails to your customers, you can use a tool called MailChimp. For example, you might want to collect emails so you can let people know when classes are on.

You collect email addresses and store them in MailChimp, then create attractive looking emails using the templates in MailChimp.

MailChimp is free for the basic plans.

[mailchimp.com](https://www.mailchimp.com)

Final remarks

There you go! I hope that helps. Every situation is unique, and something that works for me might not work for you.

If you've already got a bit of an established business and you want to take it online, then that should be (relatively) easier than starting from nothing.
