

## **Prepare Small Businesses for Changes**

Maintaining status quo can have severe consequences for small business. This situation often arises when the “that is the way we have always done it” mentality is present.

Not changing because of tradition or policy, or simply not taking the time to look forward, often can mean the slow, or sometimes rapid, decline of a business.

Change is occurring all around us. It is occurring at the macro level with the aging of society. The last of the baby boomer generation hits 50 years of age in 2014. The median income has been slow to rise except in certain areas of the country, such as North Dakota. The racial makeup of the country is changing. Population growth and shifting are occurring continuously.

Not only are people and communities changing, but our wishes and wants also are changing. Many products today include more and more technology. Have you looked at new automobiles lately, or what about farm equipment? A recent experience with drone potential for agriculture was a clear demonstration of this. Or what about the fact that more than 20,000 new items will hit the shelves in supermarkets across the country?

“Change surrounds us,” says (Insert name and title) of (Insert county). “We see it happening all over in our communities. It may not be happening quickly at times, but there is hardly a store operating today like they did only a few years back.”

Business owners need to stay current with the macro changes in the world in general, as well as with the changes in their respective industry. The changes that need to be watched include new products and services.

“Customers face a daily barrage of marketing efforts introducing them to new products, services or ways that should make their life easier,” says Glenn Muske, the North Dakota State University Extension Service’s rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist. “And not all of these new offerings are even a change but instead just represent a new competitor on the scene who promises to offer something new, better, faster, easier, with that home-made taste, etc.”

Two key tactics for small-business owners can help them respond effectively to the changing marketplace.

The first tactic is to remain vigilant to the environment.

“It is necessary to find time, preferably every day, to do a scan of the changes occurring,” says Muske. “Because so many of the changes are slow or subtle or because we get so used to the world as it is, it may be important to enlist the aid of a mentor, a trade group or even the local chamber of commerce to help track the changes occurring.”

In addition, you always need to be watchful of change. On trips out of town, stay observant to new ideas and processes. Every change you see probably is headed your way

Keeping up with the trends also means using online resources as well as traditional media.

The second tactic is analysis and action. Once a change is identified or suspected, ask what it means for your business. Some may have little bearing and can be set aside safely, while others bear further watching, and some demand immediate action.

“Staying vigilant is key for the small-business owner,” says (Insert last name). “But once a shift in the way things are being done is noticed, it is time for action. Chances are, it is not something that will just go away.”

For help in keeping track of trends and changes, as well as preparing a response, contact your local Extension Service office at [insert phone number and email address]. Also visit NDSU’s small-business support website at [www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness) and sign up for the monthly newsletter. Or check out Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz](http://www.facebook.com/NDSUextsmallbiz) or Twitter at @gmuske.

Other resources include <http://powerofbusiness.net> and [www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship](http://www.eXtension.org/entrepreneurship). The Small Business Administration and its related organizations, such as the Small Business Development Centers and SCORE, also can be valuable resources.

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