

Getting business advice

Most small businesses owners need input and advice at some stage when they encounter new challenges or tough times. Finding people willing to give advice is easy, but finding the right people to give good advice isn't always as simple as it sounds, especially if you need to make a decision in a hurry.

While there is a lot of information available on the Internet (both good and bad), it is a lot easier to chat through an issue in person and get the right advice. The best way to do this is to develop a network of people who you can call on, either directly for input or to recommend people or businesses you should turn to, when you need input on a particular problem.

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Developing networks

Small businesses often operate in isolation. Developing a network of peers and colleagues is a good way to keep in touch with new developments, and a great resource to access when you need input and advice. There are a number of options to consider and you're not limited to only one or a few of these options.

- Your local chamber of commerce: Your local chamber of commerce is likely to be a useful resource. They should be able to put you in touch with industry bodies, refer you to people who will be able to give you professional advice, and might also have information and resources to help you deal with whatever issues you are facing. Attending meetings and events is also a good way to brush up on skills, and meet and network with other business people operating in your area.
- Your industry body: Most industry sectors have some sort of organisation representing the collective interests of businesses operating in the sector; some will have more than one. They will be able to give you industry-specific advice and put you in touch with other people in your line of business for input and advice.

Both of these sources should also be able to refer you to reputable outside professionals if you need the help of an accountant or a lawyer, for example. They will generally also hold regular meetings where you can meet and get to know other small business owners.

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Using your networks

Once you've met or made contact with a business peer or business professional, swap business cards and keep their details on file. While you can do this manually, it would be more effective to include their details in your contacts on your computer and mobile phone, and to connect with them through other networks like the business-focused [LinkedIn](#) or even [Twitter](#). If you keep people's contact details, you can give them a call whenever you need assistance. Even if they are not able to help you, they might be able to suggest someone who can.

LinkedIn is a great networking resource for business people. There are a number of online groups you can join where you can ask relevant questions and get good advice. If you can't find a forum to suit your needs, you can also create your own.

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Useful sites

For financial or legal advice, it would probably be best to meet face-to-face with your banker, accountant or lawyer, depending on the sort of advice you need. But there are a number of additional resources you can turn to for assistance.

- The New Zealand Companies Office [website](#) is an easy one-stop-shop for registering your business online.
- The [business.govt.nz](#) website has been designed to help small and medium businesses, and contains a lot of useful information and online training.
- [Inland Revenue](#) has lots of advice and information on tax issues and you can also apply [online](#) to arrange a visit from a business tax information officer.
- TechNZ has a useful guide if you'd like more information on [intellectual property management](#), and the [Intellectual Property Office](#) website allows you to do a number of functions online.
- If you're looking for a global expert to help with problems related to new product innovation, [TechNZ](#) might be able to help get your problems solved and your product on the market.
- If you're looking for advice on breaking into the export market or export issues, then it's worth visiting the [New Zealand Trade and Enterprise](#) website.
- For information related to ACC, go to the [ACC Online Services](#) website.
- For the answers to a number of employment or health and safety issues, have a look at the [Department of Labour's](#) website.

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Consider finding a business mentor

If you're not looking for advice on a particular problem but are more interested in long-term or ongoing advice to help you grow and develop your business, you should consider getting a business mentor.

Mentors act as an experienced sounding board for ideas, assist with long-term strategies, assess your business from an independent but supportive point of view and connect you with useful people from within their business network.

A mentor could be a family member, a friend, colleague or business acquaintance – or even a suitably qualified person who you've not met yet. If you don't have someone in mind to approach to be your mentor, you can contact [Business Mentors New Zealand](#) for advice.

In addition, the [Institute of Accredited Business Consultants](#) is a primary source for those seeking long-term business advice, and the [Maori Business Facilitation Service](#) of Te Puni Kokiri (Ministry of Maori Development) offers a mentoring service for Maori new and existing business.

This information is provided by [Business.govt.nz](#)