



19 MUST-HAVE BUSINESS TOOLS

[for each stage of your business]

19 Must Have Tools *for each stage of your online business*

Listed here are must have online business tools that will help you scale your business without pulling your hair out! I get into more detail about **some of the tools in this post**, but today I want to break it down into 3 different stages for your business.

STAGE 1

The Early Years - Building Your Platform

These are the years of major overwhelm and uncertainty. You have ideas about what to do and are battling with a little bit of fear about whether it will all work out. You're probably unsure about which tools you need right now. And you're on a tight budget so you don't want to overthink what you need.

Let me help. At this stage your focus should be on building a platform for your business and getting it ready for serious take-off.

The tools you need right now are ones that will help you:

- **Optimize your website** for gathering leads, because your website is the hub of your marketing
- **Create consistent content**, because content is the cornerstone of your business
- **Build your email list**, because, well, it's a must-have and you need it

1 BLUEHOST

This might seem like the most basic step to take, but many people don't have a website yet. Your website is the #1 must have online business tool. It's the soul of your business and the cornerstone of your brand and all of your marketing. It's where you:

- Show the world what you sell, your mission, and what you stand for.
- Drive traffic and start building real relationships with your visitors
- Build your mailing lists (a must-have for every online business!)
- Gain clarity on your business model and your message

Have I sold you yet? I hope so, friend! Your website is seriously the Swiss Army knife of your online business.

I recommend WordPress and **Bluehost** for hosting. It's affordable and you can always get reach tech support, which is a huge deal when your site breaks and you need to fix it, like, now!



2 LEADPAGES

You need a way to collect names and emails for your content. That's where landing pages come in. Landing pages are different from other web pages in that their goal is to do one thing: gather names and emails.

Leadpages is pretty much the go-to for landing pages. You can choose from hundreds of high-converting templates from their page builder library and they even show you the highest converting ones. They've got everything from squeeze pages to webinars, lead magnets, sales pages... it's all in there. Just pick a template, change the colors, text and images, hit publish and you're done.

If you have design and coding skills, one downside has been the lack of customization features. Their new drag and drop builder addresses this and I can't wait to try it.

3 THRIVE LEADS

I use Leadpages for the forms on my landing pages and Thrive Leads for all the other opt-in forms on my site.

Thrive Leads by Thrive Themes has the same functionality as SumoMe (plus more) without the monthly subscription. You pay once for Thrive Leads and its yours. I use it to for welcome mats, pop-ups, sidebars and content upgrades throughout my site. One of the things I love most is the "states" feature where you can show different content to people who have already subscribed.

I'm such a fan of Thrive Leads that I'm going to check out their page builder to see how it compares to Leadpages. I'm also going to do a detailed tutorial to show you how to use it, so keep your eyes open for that soon.

4 DRIP

When it comes to email service providers, I recommend choosing a platform that has the features you need today, plus others you can grow into as your business and your list grow. You want to be able to stick with your platform once your list reaches 1K and beyond without having to switch.

I actually use **Infusionsoft** and find that it has a bit more features than what I need (and a hefty price tag too). If were to start over my choice would be Drip and here's why. Drip looks super easy to use and you can still get robust features, like the ability string multiple campaigns together and create trigger events similar to Infusionsoft. It also integrates seamlessly with Leadpages.



5 CANVA

Finally, we can dig into the art of things! **Canva** is a great tool for non-designers to create amazing visual content. You will feel like a pro, but you don't need to be one (yet) to use it. Create eBooks, cheat sheets, workbooks, and checklists selecting from the huge library of over 700 templates. Just pick one, add a cover image, masthead, images and overlays for only \$1, style your headline, add text, branded colors, fonts, and links. The interface is user-friendly so you can just jump in there and start creating.

If you're more familiar with Microsoft Word or Powerpoint, you can use those for digital freebies too. Some other tools are Adobe InDesign (my favorite), PicMonkey, and even Google Docs.

6 TRIPOD KIT + LIGHT

I recommend placing a focus on video right from day one. Video has definitely become a major player in the content game so it makes sense to get in on the bandwagon. Plus, it's so much easier to record your content than it is to write it as a blog post! Articles that take me hours to write, but it takes me only 45 minutes to record from the minute the idea pops in my head to my final take. Here's another perk – you can take that video and turn it into a post in less than an hour. It's all about repurposing content, am I right?

This **diva ring light** will make it look like you're in natural light regardless of the time of day or location. Even when natural light isn't available, it will seem like daytime and you'll feel (and look) like a pro on camera. While you're at it, grab a **tripod** for your iPhone. You can set up a video station and be ready to record whenever!



STAGE 2:

The Growth Years - Course Creation

So you're a few years into it and you've got some revenue coming in, your list is growing, and maybe (just maybe!) you still feel a bit overwhelmed about what to do next.

Now it's time to move beyond selling one-on-one services and into a "one-to-many" business model. The best way to do this is to start creating online courses. These tools will help you do that:

7 POWERPOINT

If your course is content-rich, you're going to want to create a slide show for it. Even though I'm a mac person, I've used Powerpoint for as long as I can remember from my days as the "graphics girl" at a corporate gig. So it just works for me. If you're a Keynoter, feel free to use that instead.

You can actually record your whole slide show from **Powerpoint** and Keynote, audio and all. It's actually pretty simple to do. If you're on a really tight budget or just getting started with courses, you might want to save yourself the extra expense of a separate app for that.

If you want to edit your videos, that's where you're going to get stuck. Powerpoint and Keynote do not have video editing capabilities. Which leads me to my next tool...

8 SCREENFLOW

Screenflow is a video and screencasting app that will record your screen and is super easy to use. It will record audio from your external mic and even video from your webcam. And it's got great editing features too. You can add text overlays, graphics, splice your video, and remove background noise, and more. If you want an even simpler solution, use Quicktime for free.

9 BLUE YETI MIC

Hah! I remember my music days when I would hole up in the studio recording vocals, switching mics, changing placements, getting all crazy about it and you know what? Sometimes a mic is just a mic. All you really need is a microphone that's easy to use at a decent price that cuts out ambient noise.

The **Yeti Mic** is all of that and will make you sound like a sweet songbird for around \$110. Just plug it into your laptop and you're good to go. There's also the Blue Snowball for about half the price. Really any mic made by Blue will give you great sound.



10 VIMEO

Once you've created your videos, you need to upload them to **Vimeo**, which is pretty straightforward. Just create an account, select your plan, and upload our videos. Depending on the size of your videos and how many you have choose the Plus or Pro plan.

11 TEACHABLE

You made it! You're almost there. Next you need a place to house all of your content behind a protected wall so people have to login to access it. That's where **Teachable** comes in.

The interface is really simple, they've got a great design, you can customize and brand your school and they've got tutorials for how to create your first course. They even have an affiliate program which can help you get even more exposure for your courses. You can set up a school to house all of your courses, so as you go from one to many they can all sit under the same roof. Everything is really well organized for a seamless and easy experience for you and your students.

STAGE 3:

Scaling Your Business - Automation

You're ready to take your biz to the next level. Maybe you want to add more team members, but you still need to increase your revenue before you do that. The solution is to start scaling what you've already created. This is the stage to focus on automating your sales process so you can sell more with less effort.

The tools you need at this stage are about streamlining and organizing the work you've done so you scale quickly and easily.

12 WEBINAR JAM

Webinar Jam is pretty easy to use and works with Google Hangouts. There's a one-time fee, which beats the monthly fees on other platforms like GotToWebinar and Crowdcast. Since it works with Google Hangouts you can have unlimited attendees and people will be able to access the webinar on any device or browser (some of the other platforms have limitations on mobile and Safari).

The only downside is that because WJ is recording your live broadcast signal into a streaming video, there can be a delay of a few seconds. The delay is seen only on the presenter's side. It can take a few seconds to see the questions people type in the chat box, but it's easy enough to adjust the pace of your presentation to accommodate for the delay.



13 EVERWEBINAR

Next, get set up to run live and automated webinars with ease! After you run your live webinar a few times and it's working for you, the next step is to turn it into an "on-demand" webinar. That's where EverWebinar comes in. It's a powerful combo of webinar software and WordPress plugin that houses all of your webinars in the cloud. You'll still have the same personal touch but your webinar will be automated.

Before you jump into automation, make sure you run through your webinar live a few times first. You want to get feedback first and tweak it until you feel like you're really providing the value your audience needs. Also experiment with how you offer your product at the end so you can find that balance that sells without being overly salesy or icky.

Note: One platform I want to try soon and is worth mentioning: Webinar Ninja. It seems super easy to use and you can run live and automated webinars all in one, so you don't need to buy two products. I'll update this post once I give it a try.

14 CLICK FUNNELS

Click Funnels is like Leadpages' bigger sister. It's more like a funnel builder than a landing page builder. You choose a funnel and it will set up a sequence of pages for you (which you can add to, edit, or delete). So let's say you're hosting a webinar, it will create every page you need for that webinar. It's easy to put sophisticated and high-performing pages together so that your campaigns convert at a high level.

15 INFUSIONSOFT

I know I said earlier that **Infusionsoft** has more features than I need. It's still a platform that totally rocks! It integrates a CRM, eCommerce and marketing automation all in one. Basically, you can automate your entire business there. Once you have the basics down with Drip (or Mailchimp or Aweber), it's worth looking into.



EVERY STAGE

Organization

The tools listed here will help you stay organized and super productive at every stage of your business.

16 ASANA

A tool like **Asana** will help you manage your projects and get tons of stuff done. I've used other project management tools like Basecamp but this one is so much better! Plus, It's free for up to 15 users!

My virtual assistant and I know exactly what we're working on and I can easily view tasks in their calendar, so I know if what she's working on and if she needs more to do! I can also prioritize tasks so she knows what to focus on each day.

Working this way also forces me to think through each task involved with a project, so inside of a Course project, for instance, I have itemized tasks and an estimate of time needed to complete.

17 DROPBOX

This is a must for any business. **Dropbox** is a cloud-based server that will house all of your project files. You can assign access to different folders for any person on your team so that everyone is working from one central place. Files sync automatically as they're updated so there's version control. You can also easily restore deleted files or prior versions.

18 1PASSWORD

You memorized your password, now you can't remember what the heck it is, am I right? I've updated my password so many times on sooo many different sites, there's no way I can keep track anymore! **1Password** is a password management tool that solves all of that for you. All you need to remember is one password and that will unlock the vault to all the others. Total time-saver.



19 EVERNOTE

Evernote is awesome! At first I had a hard time using it. I thought maybe I'd write my posts as a note inside Evernote to keep them organized, but that didn't work so well for me, mainly because I like to see the files and have multiple pages up on my screen when I'm writing. Plus, the formatting can be sticky.

But I DO love it as a way to store post ideas, passwords, email sequences, and so much more. Basically, anything I might want to reference later I store in Evernote. I save keywords, fonts, tracking pixel codes, that sort of thing. And the Evernote Clipper is a fast and easy way to save and tag articles I find interesting, but may not have time to read right away (so much better than bookmarking!)



Hi! I'm Sandra.

I'm devoted to sharing ideas, resources, and programs to help you start and grow an online business that nourishes your soul and sets your spirit free.

Let me be the spark that ignites the fire to your creative awesomeness.