



Top 12 Tools I Use for My Business



2020 marks the start of our 14th year in business which is not only bucking the odds but is a pretty solid accomplishment according to a Small Business Trends study that states that most new businesses don't make it beyond year two. The study went on to say that of all small businesses started in 2014:

- 80 percent made it to the second year (2015)
 - 70 percent made it to the third year (2016)
 - 62 percent made it to the fourth year (2017)
 - 56 percent made it to the fifth year (2018)
- Given those numbers, only about half of all startups actually survive to their fifth year.

How to Leverage Your Time and Resources

Overall, our business provides various services that our clients value enough to pay for. Our primary services include:

- [Website development](#)
- [Search engine optimization \(SEO\)](#)
- [Content marketing](#)
- [Email marketing](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- and more



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And what helps us execute these tasks efficiently and cost-effectively is the right combination of tools that allow us to automate much of it while being able to maintain creativity and monitor results.

I'd like to share our top 12 favorite tools with you now (Please note, where available, affiliate links were used. We only recommend what we use):

Organizational

Basecamp: The backbone of our business that lets us keep all client information in one place in the cloud, accessible by all team members wherever we are. It also allows us to schedule and monitor to-do lists and milestones and assign and monitor tasks to specific team members while keeping track of projects in an organized manner. We didn't start using Basecamp until our 5th or 6th year in business and it proved a game-changer once we started using it. Now, we are able to keep all logins, passwords, logos, content (text, video, graphics, PDFs, etc.), forms, menus, etc. in one place. With so much data and digital pieces flying around, it gave us a secure, organized and accessible place to put each clients entire account information, whether it's website content or SEO reports in a single place for easy retrieval by authorized team members. Costs are around \$49 to \$149 a month depending on how many projects.

Creative

Canva: This is a miracle tool set that allows you to easily create beautiful images and graphics for a wide variety of uses that now include social media sizes, Power Point slides, animated GIFS, resumes, gift certificates and even video and T-Shirts! The super easy interface allows anyone to create highly professional layouts and includes tons of free icons, fonts, clip art and templates and is waaaay simpler and easier to use than PowerPoint. Makes professional graphic creation a snap. Need a quick graphic for a blog post — bing! Need a new header for your YouTube channel — boom! Need to crop, resize and add text to a Facebook post — bam! Not only super-fast and easy but actually fun! We used the free version for years before recently upgrading to the premium model for \$12.95 a month.

Promo: A stupid easy way for creating highly professional looking videos with captions set to music. I was a video producer before I started Samson Media so I really appreciate and value the high-end nature of the stock video library that



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Promo provides. It's all drop and drag, point and click. Finished videos can be output in HD for desktops and square-size for Instagram and mobile and downloaded as web-ready MP4 files for easy upload to other editing programs or straight to YouTube and Vimeo. Around \$90 a month for up to 4 videos that accumulate if you don't use them.

Websites

Flywheel Hosting: I really can't overstate how Flywheel, as a hosting company, changed my life as a website developer. We had been through the horrors of hosting companies like Host Gator and Network Solutions with multi-day site outages, off-shore tech support and outrageous fees while jumping through hoops to fix malware issues and update PHP, etc. I literally would lose sleep as I would sit by helplessly while my 50+ client accounts would be subjected to spotty uptime and generally shitty service. Not anymore. At the risk of jinxing myself I will say that Flywheel has become like a partner to our business. It is 100% WordPress only hosting (which is all the sites we build) that offers free SSL, staging sites, daily restorable backups and, get this — FREE migrations! Yes, they migrate sites from other services like GoDaddy to my Flywheel account for free — within 24 hours! While it's not cheap, it is worth every single red cent. While I have several packages based on 50+ sites that we host for around \$500 a month, that comes out to about \$10 a month per site. We charge \$20 a month so it more than covers our costs, but in the end, the superior site security, stellar tech support and ease of use — priceless!

Elegant Themes – DIVI: The DIVI Theme from Elegant Themes is so versatile as a website builder for self-hosted WordPress sites that it really is the only theme you will ever need. While some website developers may look down their nose at using themes let me first address this by saying there is NO LIMIT to what you can do with Divi. So, if coding is your thing and you like to spend hours creating a website you can still do so with DIVI. But instead of spending hours building a sound foundation, with DIVI, you can spend minutes creating the solid foundation and an infinite amount of your time customizing it from there. But you don't have to! The templates within the theme package are gorgeous, updated layouts that provide a beautiful, high-end basis for mobile-friendly websites with all the bells and whistles. The DIVI Builder that comes with the theme allows web designers to create completely customized sections such as calls to action or testimonial layouts and then save them to your own library so they can be



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added to other pages with one click of the mouse. And the main advantage of our team using DIVI is that when we perform maintenance, changes and updates for our various clients, everything on the backend dashboard is uniform and standardized in the same places, no matter the site. A HUGE time saver when maintaining over 50+ websites. Unlimited downloads of the DIVI Theme: \$89 per year or lifetime membership of around \$200 (varies with sales and discounts).

Social Media

Hootsuite: This is a tool that we have used for 10-11 years. It allows us to schedule social media postings for our clients 365/24/7. It interfaces with all the major social media channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram business profiles, Pinterest and even YouTube. Since each social media platform has their own cadence and rhythms, Hootsuite allows us to post several times a day to Twitter, once a day to Facebook and twice a week to Pinterest without actually having to be present at 4pm or 4am, whatever the date or time may be. In addition to the posting, Hootsuite also includes a reporting dashboard to show you how much engagement (follows, likes, reposts/pins/tweets, etc.) you are generating for your efforts. While we've been grandfathered in at \$5.99 a month for the Pro account, the current price is \$29 for a pro account with 1 user. They also offer a more limited version (3 social profiles | 30 Scheduled Messages | 1 user) for free.

Snip.ly: When we found this cool tool it really added some extra kick to our existing social media efforts. You can click this sniply link to see our client **Sterile Space's** logo and clickable call to action (CTA) message in the lower left corner of this page, here: snip.ly/w0uim. The ability to overlay your own CTA and logo over RELEVANT content helps you extend your brand message while leveraging other people's content. Having said that, please note that some sites block this type of overlay capability but many do not. In fact, we've found that most front-page section of the New York Times block the snip.ly overlays while almost all internal feature stories within the NY Times do not. Either way, if you are already doing a concerted social media effort, the ability to leverage other content this way can only help. Monthly plans start at \$29.



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Who.Unfollowed.me: This tool is not only useful but kinda fun to use, too. Once you are already logged into your Twitter account you can launch this free, ad-supported website which will show you all new followers and unfollowers since your last login. Once inside the dashboard, you can follow new followers while tagging and welcoming them as well as unfollow unfollowers with the click of a mouse. A great way to trim the fat and keep your Twitter feed filled with relevant, real followers, quickly and easily. Free.

Email Marketing

Aweber: Aweber is the email marketers email marketing tool. It is very robust in terms of what it can do and also plays nice with dozens of other software programs like **Lead Pages**, CRMs and more. In addition to using Aweber for traditional email blasts, we also use it as an integral part of our lead magnet and lead generation programs as a way to capture opt-in subscribers and deliver special reports, ebooks, white papers and more. After a 30-day free trials, prices start at \$19 a month based on list size and go up from there depending on list size.

Communications

Zoom: We used to use Go To Meeting for many years which was a rock-solid program so I was initially skeptical when I discovered Zoom after participating in a webinar that used it. The main reason for my skepticism was the fact that Zoom was substantially less expensive than GoToMeeting. GTM was \$49 a month while Zoom was only \$14.99. So, we tried out Zoom during a free trial while keeping GTM and even after we signed up for Zoom I kept GTM just in case. Bottom line: dropped the more expensive GTM and have been happily using Zoom for over two years now. I especially like the ease that Zoom connects with most major calendar programs like Google Calendar and Outlook to schedule and invite participants. It also has an easy record feature with surprisingly good audio quality which was never a strong suite of GTM although that might have improved in recent years. We use Zoom several times every week for client training as well as team meetings to review projects and websites. It's actually become an indispensable tool for communicating when a phone call, email or text just won't do it. \$14.99 for up to 100 participants which is more than enough for most businesses.



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Financial

Stripe: This credit card processor integrates easily with shopping cart software like Woo Commerce and is very user friendly to set up and use online and off. While we strictly use it to process client charges on a monthly basis you can integrate it easily into most ecommerce platforms on **WordPress** as well as brick and mortar retail establishments. While we also use Authorize.net, an industry leader in credit card processing, Stripe is waaaay easier to set up and use and the fees they charge are very competitive at 2.9% plus 30 cents for each transaction. Best of all there are no set up fees, no “gateway” fees or carrying costs. If you don’t use it, you don’t pay for it.

Reporting

Agency Analytics: This tool validates everything we do as it relates to **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** and **social media marketing**. For each client account that we manage, it tracks the monthly progress of all website traffic and keyword rankings in easy to read charts and tables. As anyone who has ever used Google Analytics or Google Search Console you know it can sometimes be a bit confusing to look at and to identify pertinent data. That’s not an issue with AA because you have complete granular control over each section of the report that pulls in only the metrics you want to highlight in a clear and concise manner. It also pulls in all social media activity, external link tracking, keyword rankings and even tallies what devices were used to access your website. The Search Console data alone is a treasure-trove of clues for keyword-based content marketing and blogging topics and all reports are completely white labeled so you can brand them with your own agency logo, etc. Prices start at \$49 a month but if you use this Coupon Code you can get 50% off your first order when you sign up: **AA_PARTNER_18391** Oh, and the tech support is wonderful and responsive!

Summary

While there are several other tools we use we have found the dozen tools listed here to have been real game-changers in our ability to grow and offer sophisticated services to our small and medium-sized clients. We hope you



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found this list valuable. You can download the entire check list here as a PDF, no opt-in required:

To learn more about these tools and other ways Samson Media can work for your business please contact us:

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