

## Web-based tools aid small businesses

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**Dear Dan:** What are some of the best new Web-based tools and technologies we've seen lately for small business? - *Keeping Up*

**Dear Keeping Up:** So far, 2008 has produced a bumper crop of new and interesting Web-based tools, technologies and solutions for small business.

Here are seven of the best and brightest among recent product and service launches.

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- **Self-Serve Appointment Scheduling:** No personal assistant? No worries. TimeDriver ([www.timedriver.com](http://www.timedriver.com)) is a new Web-based service that calls itself an online scheduler of personal appointments.

The idea is to create an online space where sales, service and other professionals, as well as customers and prospects, can quickly book appointments through a single e-mail or Web-site visit. TimeDriver aims to eliminate the irritation of

back-and-forth schedule hunting by helping it happen in one place at one time. It also has features that encourage people to book your time or services.

- **Mobile Money Transfer:** Obopay ([www.obopay.com](http://www.obopay.com)) has launched a service offering a way to transfer money quickly and securely through any mobile phone or carrier. By linking an existing checking or savings account at any U.S. bank with Obopay, customers can send money directly from - or receive money into that account - using any mobile phone. Even without having to sign up with Obopay, anyone can pick up money received this way by having it deposited directly to a bank account or requesting a check. The service can be added to an existing bank account, used with a separate Obopay account, or both.

Users do not need to know a recipient's banking information - only his or her mobile-phone number. Some small businesses are using it as an easy way to pay employees and service providers.

- **Online Event Management:** For business purposes, most online-invitation sites lack a certain savoir-faire. Newly launched Pingg.com is changing that. Choose how your event communications are sent to each guest: via e-mail, SMS/texting, online, print (Pingg will print and mail your invites), or posted to Facebook. Design branded invites by uploading logos, product shots, ad campaigns, etc., and pick fonts and colors to match your business

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brand. With Pingg, you get to customize, create, schedule and track from a single event-management page that can include your business videos.

- **Win \$10K for Your Business Idea:** Gotta love IdeaBlob.com, a still young site that offers a \$10,000 prize monthly to the best eligible business idea, as voted on by site users (like you and me). The newest winner (and fourth overall) is Aaron Fleishman, the Penn State student who snagged the startup cash for an idea about providing health solutions to Third World kids. Anyone can submit a business idea at IdeaBlob and become eligible for the competition, and \$10,000 monthly prize. It's a fun place. The money comes from site sponsor Advanta, one of USA's largest credit-card issuers to small businesses.

- **Identity Theft Rule Compliance:** CompliancePal.com offers easy online tools to help businesses satisfy new federal rules for protecting customers against identity theft. Starting Nov. 1, any business that takes a credit application must comply with the "Identity Theft Red Flags Rule." This includes, for example, auto, motorcycle or RV dealers, property management firms/landlords, as well as mortgage lenders, banks and other credit-granting entities. Rules require that you conduct a risk assessment, identify all accounts, develop a written plan with identity-theft prevention, train appropriate staff and more.

- **Managing Tech Overload:** When it comes to managing communications, PC networks, security, hosted applications and sundry IT goodies, many small businesses run on overload. One answer is to outsource the whole mess. Evolve IP ([www.evolveip.net](http://www.evolveip.net)) joins a new breed of "managed-technology providers" jumping in to help. Evolve bundles all the e-mail, telephone, back-end networking, security and data applications a company needs into a single package that's managed and hosted remotely. The idea is to free business owners from the mind-numbing task of maintaining these systems and trying to coordinate everything among multiple vendors. Evolve works with providers such as IBM, Cisco, Acme Packet and SAP.

- **Power-Packed Servers for Small Business:** Dell has a new line of low-cost, memory-packed servers. PowerEdge R300 rack server (\$1,249 and up) and

T300 tower server (\$999 and up) offer a whopping 24GB of memory, some 3X the capacity of most competitors. Both new PowerEdge models have a bevy of built-in security features to guard against data loss or unauthorized access. Visit [www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com).

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