

# How Co-Creation Can Help Your Business Grow and Succeed



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What is co-creation? It largely depends on whom you ask. Like "lean," "agile," and numerous other buzzword methodologies, its core tenets have been adapted to fit a massive number of industries, with businesses of all sizes striving to innovate practices that reflect its core directive: build value by soliciting and absorbing input.



Co-creation helps small companies looking for feedback on new products.

In other words, co-creation is all about taking an active, intelligent stance toward feedback and then finding effective ways to solicit, consider, and implement it. Moreover, small businesses are particularly suited to this task. Their inherent flexibility and agility (there's that word again!) allows them to integrate input from customers, employees, and business partners faster and more fully than others, with none of the inertia that may hamper their larger counterparts. That's especially true when the practice is used in conjunction with the democratizing power of technology.

Here's how to make this methodology work in your business:

## Co-Creation Means Redefining Service

Without getting all armchair-philosopher on you, embracing a co-creative mindset means rebuilding, or at least refreshing, your understanding of concepts such as service. Take these three examples of regular people buying regular things:

- A man hires a plumber to fix his frozen pipes during a nasty winter chill.
- A teenage girl drains her savings account to buy a cheap beater car on Craigslist.
- A gourmet cooking enthusiast spends too much of her sales bonus on a high-end blender.

In all three cases, these people are ultimately buying a service, whether it was water, transportation, or high-grade food chopping. Though this seems like common knowledge, it's important to keep it in mind as you consider ways to embrace the methodology, if only because it keeps you thinking about novel ways to provide value.

## Collaborative Advantages for Small Businesses

As the name implies, co-creation is all about directed collaboration. That could mean collaboration while designing a product, solving a problem, or determining products to put on a new location's shelves — or any number of other value-focused team efforts. The small company that works with a call center vendor to constantly evolve an effective script is co-creating, as is a large business such as Lego®, which constantly solicits ideas from its core of superfans.

This is where those advantages mentioned up top come in. Although most small companies can't open a web portal to ask thousands of fans for their opinions on products or offerings, they can implement, roll with, and even abandon changes with less transitional pain than a larger organization might. This is an important quality when making continued feedback part of your processes.

Of course, adaptability means different things to different organizations. A company looking to provide a better, more consistent customer experience based on employee or customer feedback with cloud integration tools may benefit from the average small business's centralized power structure, where one person or small group can implement major changes without institutional inertia or layers of oversight slowing down progress.

A smaller company looking to change customer-facing aspects or design a new product, on the other hand, may benefit from a lower signal-to-noise ratio as it curates an ideal combination of co-creators, such as customers, employees, and trusted vendor employees. While having a large pool of customers to draw from is hardly a bad thing, there are advantages to being up close and personal with the people who drive the business.

## The Democracy of Technology

Businesses can also be the customer in the co-creative relationship. Looking back at the call center example, there is a chain of co-creating fun. The business, a "customer" to the vendor, works in collaboration to improve a script, which was written based on collaborative changes, which were made to provide better value to customers — and so on and so forth.

On top of that, technology's tendency to get better, more accessible, and more affordable means smaller companies can effectively collaborate at the enterprise level without the infrastructure requirements and costs associated with full-blown enterprise tools. Cloud technology's long-term trickle-down to smaller organizations comes to mind as a primary enabler of communication and collaboration. Teleconferencing and video conferencing, project management, and numerous other tools enable close integration between unrelated businesses, allowing the company seeking collaboration to assign more responsibility and autonomy to collaborators (including customers and vendors) without relinquishing control.

## A Collaborative Future

As a methodology, co-creation is less of a thing to adopt and more the shape all business is taking. The never-ending push for a more satisfied customer and rapid advancement in technology are quite literally changing the way businesses operate, giving rise to an era where collaboration is constant and design-by-committee is something businesses strive for and search out. Don't dismiss this movement as a buzzword – capitalize on your strengths as a small organization, get involved with your vendors, and get co-creating.

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