

The 5 Financial Tools Every Small Business Needs.

A short, opinionated stack. Not every tool on the market – the five you actually need to run a clean, cash-flow positive business without a CPA on retainer.

You don't need twenty financial apps to run a business. You need five – one for each thing money actually does. Here's the stack we'd recommend to a friend starting out today.

01

BANKING & CASH MANAGEMENT

Mercury

A business checking account is the foundation. Don't run your business out of a personal account, and don't use a legacy bank that charges \$15 a month for nothing. Mercury is built for modern small businesses: free, no minimums, FDIC-insured, instant transfers between accounts, and a dashboard that doesn't look like it was designed in 2003.

Best for:

Any small business owner, freelancer, or founder running a non-cash business.

[Open an account at mercury.com](https://mercury.com)

02

BOOKKEEPING & ACCOUNTING

QuickBooks Online

Bookkeeping isn't optional. It's how you know whether your business is actually profitable, what you can deduct at tax time, and whether you can afford to hire. QuickBooks is the universal standard – almost every CPA, accountant, and bookkeeper in the country uses it, which means handing off your books later is frictionless.

Best for:

Anyone past about \$50K/year in revenue, or anyone who plans to hire a bookkeeper in the next 12 months.

[Try QuickBooks Online](#)

03

PAYROLL

Gusto

The moment you hire your first employee – or start paying yourself a W-2 salary – payroll becomes a legal minefield. Tax withholdings, multi-state filings, year-end W-2s. Gusto automates all of it for around \$40 a month plus \$6 per employee. Half the cost of a CPA doing it manually, with far fewer errors.

Best for:

Any business with one or more W-2 employees, including yourself.

[Sign up with Gusto](#)

04

EXPENSE MANAGEMENT & CARDS

Ramp

Issuing corporate cards used to require a credit check, a personal guarantee, and an enterprise sales call. Ramp made it free. Unlimited cards, automatic receipt collection, spend categorization, QuickBooks integration. No monthly fee, no annual fee, and 1.5% cashback on every transaction.

Best for:

Any business spending \$5K/month or more on cards, or anyone tired of chasing employees for receipts.

[Apply for Ramp](#)

05

INVOICING & CLIENT OPERATIONS

HoneyBook

For service businesses — agencies, consultants, freelancers — sending invoices through email and chasing payments through Venmo is amateur hour. HoneyBook bundles invoicing, contracts, project management, and payments into one tool. Clients pay you faster because there's no friction. You look more professional because the experience is clean.

Best for:

Service businesses (consulting, agencies, freelancing). If you sell physical products or run e-commerce, FreshBooks or Shopify will fit better.

[Try HoneyBook](#)

One last thing.

Tools matter, but discipline matters more. Bank the money the day it lands. Reconcile your books monthly, not at year-end. Pay yourself a real salary, not whatever happens to be left over. Keep business and personal money separated by a wall, not a thin line.

If you found this useful, follow Clarivex for more short, sharp small business finance content:

[TikTok @clarivexhq](#) · [Instagram @clarivexhq](#) · [YouTube @clarivexhq](#)

Affiliate disclosure: Some links in this guide are affiliate links. We may earn a commission — at no extra cost to you — if you sign up for a tool we recommend. Our editorial decisions are never influenced by commission rates.