

SMALL BUSINESS · ECONOMY 2026

Recession Warnings? Here Is How to Grow Anyway.

In a slow economy customers still buy. They compare more, and go with whoever answers, responds and looks after them best. Eight moves for a tight year.

■ Where the economy is (October 2026)

Measure	Latest	Source
Real GDP, June quarter 2026	+0.4%, only matching population growth	ABS national accounts
GDP per person	Flat, after a small fall in the March quarter	ABS
Cash rate	4.60%, fourth rise of 2026 (29 Sep)	Reserve Bank
Unemployment	4.5%, underutilisation 10.8%	CommBank, 10 Sep 2026
Household spending growth	Slowing from 1.8% toward 1.1% by Q4	CommBank forecast

Customers get choosier, not absent

They ring two or three businesses instead of one, get more quotes and take longer to decide. The total pie may shrink a little, but **the share each business wins can change a lot**. The winners are usually the easiest to buy from, not the cheapest.

■ The eight moves

- 1 Answer every call.** Callers who get voicemail ring the next business.
- 2 Be first to respond.** Voicemail to app, missed-call SMS, a one-hour callback rule.
- 3 Look after existing customers.** Call your best ones before they call you.
- 4 Keep marketing you can measure.** A tracking number on every campaign.
- 5 Cut cost, not capability.** Leaks first, never the ability to answer or follow up.
- 6 Cover the phones without hiring.** AI answering for lunch, after hours and busy times.
- 7 Protect cash flow.** Same-day invoices, SMS reminders, deposits on big jobs.
- 8 Watch five numbers weekly.** Changes show up early when you look often.

■ Missed calls: an illustrative example

Step	Per week
Inbound calls	60
Missed (20%)	12
New enquiries among them (one third)	4
Jobs you would have won (half)	2
Lost revenue at \$400 a job	\$800 a week, about \$41,600 a year

■ Cut these first

- Unused software licences
- Duplicate subscriptions
- Separate phone, internet, SMS and meeting bills
- Old lines nobody uses
- Long lock-in contracts

■ Protect these

- Answering every call
- Fast follow-up on enquiries and quotes
- Tools your team uses to serve customers
- Marketing that measurably brings calls
- Contact with existing customers

■ Five numbers to watch every Monday

Number	What a change tells you
Inbound calls and enquiries	Demand, often weeks before revenue moves
Missed and abandoned calls	How much of that demand you are losing
Quote conversion	Whether you are winning on speed and service
Debtor days	Whether customers are paying more slowly
Repeat customers	Whether existing customers are staying

The one question for every decision this year

Does this make us easier or harder for a customer to buy from? Sort your options by that question **before you sort them by cost**. If cash is already tight, the free Small Business Debt Helpline is on 1800 413 828.