

# BIG DATA

## A guide for small to medium-sized businesses

Big data is transforming big business – but it's not just large corporations that can benefit. Carl Davis, CIO of Verus360, provides a step-by-step guide to how SMEs can harness the power of data – boosting productivity, sales and profit.



# Contents

1.	Why do small businesses need big data?	1
2.	How to make your in-house data work harder	3
3.	The benefits of using a cloud CRM	4
	Six of the most popular cloud CRMs	4
	• Base	5
	• Microsoft Dynamics	5
	• Sage CRM	6
	• Salesforce	6
	• SugarCRM	7
	• Zoho	7
4.	Cloud CRM is only as good as the data you <b>feed it</b>	9
	• Confluence	10
	• Todoist	10
5.	How CRM data makes your business more attractive to would-be investors	11

<b>6.</b>	<b>Data tools for SMEs</b>	<b>12</b>
	• Google Analytics	12
	• SimilarWeb	13
	• Google Adword Keyword Planner	13
	• Google Trends	13
	• Hootsuite	14
	• Canopy Labs	14
<b>7.</b>	<b>Getting started with data tools</b>	<b>15</b>
	• Google Analytics	15
	<i>Google Analytics tutorial videos: an overview</i>	16
	• SimilarWeb	16
	• Hootsuite	17
	<b>Data visualisation tools</b>	<b>18</b>
	• Google Fusion Tables	19
	• IBM Watson Analytics	19
	• Slemma	20
	• Tableau	20
	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>21</b>

*All prices and rates stated are correct as of date of publication. Where specific companies are quoted, the information has been taken from publicly available or quoted data from that company.*

# Section 1

## Why do small businesses need big data?



Big data is transforming the modern business landscape, allowing small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to compete with large corporations on a level playing field.

Despite what you may think, big data really isn't just for multinationals with huge IT budgets and dedicated in-house data scientists. SMEs can also harness the power of big data to boost their productivity, sales and that all-important bottom line.

So what exactly is big data? Quite simply, it's the huge volume of information generated globally every day, from people's digital footprints (their usage of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, websites and mobile apps) to phone GPS signals and transaction records, plus government and public data.

There's so much out there that 90% of the data in the world today was created in the last two years. In fact, the digital universe is actually doubling in size every two years, and by 2020 the data we create annually will reach 44 zettabytes (44 trillion gigabytes), according to the IDC. However, only 22% of this data is useful in terms of analysis – so it isn't so much about big data, but smart data – and analysing the right data sets.

It's never been a better time for SMEs to discover the potential of big data. In order to benefit from this data they must be prepared to look for insights, patterns or trends in customer behaviour.

While many SMEs may not have the time or the resources to sift through reams and reams of data, it's surprising how much valuable insight can be gained by digging deep into just a few data sets.

For instance, a small retailer can see how their Facebook messages are affecting sales and customer engagement by offering coupons and discounts. A taxi firm can use weather data and local events listings from mobile apps to predict a surge in customer demand, and provide more drivers on duty accordingly.



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With easy access to cost-effective software, today's SMEs are now able to tap into the rich insights of both in-house and external data.

However, the sheer volume of available data can often be overwhelming for time-poor business people, making it difficult for them to know where to start. So how do you go about this?

Well, the key thing to remember is that, whichever data source you

choose, the key to successful data analytics is integration into your business operation. And the good news for SMEs is that the playing field has been levelled of late, thanks to a whole host of nifty tools and platforms (some of which are free) out there to help gather, analyse and store data – enabling businesses to better understand customer behaviour, monitor competitors, more effectively manage their time and improve efficiency.

Our guide provides an overview of how to make your in-house data work harder to deliver a better

customer experience – by improving productivity and fostering greater collaboration between colleagues and departments.

We've included a comparison of six of the most popular internet-based (cloud) CRMs on the market, plus a round-up of cost-effective tools (such as Google Analytics) for analysing external data sets and monitoring competitors – as well as tips on how to start using them.

***So what are you waiting for?***

# Section 2

## How to make your in-house data work harder

Before you look beyond the walls of your business (towards the data that existing and potential clients leave on your website, the web at large and through social media), a good starting point is your internal data.

Your in-house data might sit in a number of different places:

- ✓ your customer database emails
- ✓ spreadsheets
- ✓ call sheets
- ✓ invoices

Integrating the information into a simple customer relationship management (CRM) system will give you a 360° view of your customers and your business. By tracking customer data – such as birthdays, anniversaries and favourite products – you'll deliver a better customer experience across all touch points,



targeting the right person with the right message at the right time. For instance, if your call sheets show that one of your customers regularly re-orders an item every three months, a CRM system will prompt you to email or call them two weeks before their order is due to offer them a discount.

The easiest option for SMEs is a cloud-based CRM, as these doesn't require any hardware and can be accessed from anywhere that has an internet connection.

# Section 3

## The benefits of using a cloud CRM

A CRM system is one of the most useful pieces of software that SMEs can invest in. CRMs are no longer just an option for big businesses. Cloud solutions have now brought the costs down so much that they are affordable for SMEs.

The easiest option for SMEs is a cloud-based CRM – an off-the-shelf piece of software with no set-up costs or need for specialist internal IT resources. The CRM provider hosts the software and you simply pay a monthly subscription. Most CRM systems offer a 30-day trial, and there are even some free ones out there.

## Six of the most popular cloud CRMs

*(These are just a small selection of those available, and we recommend that you do some research to see which one suits your business best)*

- [Base](#)
- [Microsoft Dynamics](#)
- [Sage CRM](#)
- [Salesforce](#)
- [SugarCRM](#)
- [Zoho](#)

See our [Cloud CRM comparison chart on page 8](#).

## Base



**COST:** \$25 - \$125

**BEST FOR:** Businesses with sales professionals who need to access the CRM remotely.

PROS	CONS
Clean, modern user interface. Base is designed to work seamlessly from mobile and tablets through its apps.	Lack of social integration. Time-consuming to add notes or tasks. Leads and contacts display can't be customised.

## Microsoft Dynamics



**COST:** £40.50 - £124.60 (minimum 5 users)

**BEST FOR:** Medium to large businesses that have invested heavily in Microsoft products and will use the CRM to make API calls – Microsoft doesn't charge for database calls.

PROS	CONS
Beautiful dashboards. Seamless integration with other Microsoft products (Sharepoint, Outlook, Excel). Extensive social listening, analysis and engagement.	Fairly unintuitive navigation. Relatively expensive for smaller organisations due to there being a minimum number of users (see <a href="#">Cloud CRM comparison chart on page 8</a> ).

## Sage CRM



**COST:** \$20 - 50

**BEST FOR:** Small businesses (there is no minimum number of users), and businesses using [Sage Accounting](#), as it is easy to integrate into the existing system. The accountancy company also offers [Sage Life](#), a real-time accounting dashboard built on the Salesforce platform, which offers actionable business insights.

PROS	CONS
A user-friendly interface with a generous amount of storage (2GB) even at entry level. It can support up to 50 users making it suitable for larger companies too.	Limited social integration. Reports can be hard to navigate. Technical upgrades are relatively expensive.

## Salesforce



**COST:** \$20 - \$50 (minimum 5 users)

**BEST FOR:** Larger businesses (the minimum number of users is 5) with sales teams looking to perform a variety of functions – it comes with a large number of extensions and plug-ins.

PROS	CONS
Huge capabilities to meet the most complex of business needs, including social CRM, collaboration tools, automated workflow, sales forecasting in real time and opportunity management.	Only 1GB of storage at lower subscription levels and relatively expensive, with prices starting at £45 x 5 users per month. Unintuitive user interface. Difficult to set up and master.

## SugarCRM



**COST:** \$40 - \$140 (minimum 5 users)

**BEST FOR:** Businesses looking for a simple CRM that offers more features than an entry level one (such as Zoho), but not as complex as those offered by systems such as Salesforce.

PROS	CONS
Simple to learn and use, it has a generous 15GB of storage and a thriving market place of add-ons – a cost-effective alternative to contracting developers.	High acquisition cost for small businesses (minimum of 5 users) and missing some of the features of other CRMs, such as territory management.

## Zoho



**COST:** \$20 - \$35

**BEST FOR:** Start-ups, small organisations and CRM/data novices.

PROS	CONS
Free for up to 10 users (with limited functionality), it has scalable add-on features and is easy to set up.	Not suitable for larger businesses as it doesn't have the required flexibility in terms of software or configuration. No LinkedIn integration in its social tool.

# Cloud CRM comparison chart



	BASE	Microsoft Dynamics CRM	sage	salesforce	SUGARCRM	Zoho
PRICE PER USER/MONTH	\$25 - \$125	£40.50 - £124.60 <i>(Min. 5 users)</i>	\$20 - \$50	£45 - £170 <i>(Min. 5 users)</i>	\$40 - \$150 <i>(Min. 5 users)</i>	0 - \$35
FREE TRIAL	14 days	30 days	30 days	30 days	7 days	15 days
SUPPORT						
online	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
live chat	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
phone	✗	24/7 freephone	9am-5pm, Mon-Fri freephone	8am-6pm Mon-Fri *Premier upwards only	*Sugar Enterprise upwards only	24/7 freephone for paid customers
STORAGE	From 2GB	From 5GB	From 2GB	From 1GB	From 15GB	From 1GB
SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION	✗ <i>(contact info integration only)</i>	✓	✓ <i>(contact info integration &amp; message creation)</i>	✓	✓	✓
MOBILE APP	✓	✗ <i>(mobile website)</i>	✓ <i>*Professional upwards only</i>	✓	✓	✓
CUSTOM REPORTS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
TERRITORY MANAGEMENT	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
TASK AUTOMATION	✓ <i>*Professional upwards only</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

# Section 4

## Cloud CRM is only as good as the data you feed it

Having a CRM is no silver bullet. You need to enrich it with data such as your customer list (names, addresses emails), a secondary list of people you're actively selling to, as well as a detailed record of your contact with clients and prospects. This will help you manage your sales pipeline, convert enquiries into customers and up-sell to existing customers.

Building a centralised record of your contact with clients and prospects is not as labour-intensive as it sounds. CRMs can track phone calls, incoming and outgoing emails – most of which are automated once you've set up the system. For instance, CRMs usually have add-ons and widgets which allow you to file emails directly from your Outlook box to the CRM, and will automatically file the messages under the client's and – if relevant – company name. A CRM can also act

as a document repository, allowing you to file all your customer records and contracts in one place.

Some CRMs have a facility to monitor your firm's efficiency and time management. You can use it to track how much time you spend on a client or to find out who your best customers are. If your business has more than 10 employees and/or they're geographically dispersed, you could look into collaboration software, which allows you to share knowledge in a closed, secure network. Collaboration tools include [Confluence](#) and [Todoist](#).



# Confluence



**COST:** From \$10 a month

Confluence is just one of many such tools, providing a central online space for you, your colleagues and business partners to communicate, collaborate, share ideas, assign tasks and make decisions.

**Board of Directors Briefing Meeting - January 20th, 2015**  
Created by Ryan Anderson, last modified a minute ago

**Date**  
Jan 20, 2015

**Goals**

- Brief the Board of Directors on:
  - Product strategy
  - Current sales numbers
  - Forecasts for FY2015
  - Answer questions from board

**Attendees**

- @Ryan Lee
- @Harvey Jennings
- @Alana Grant
- The TIS Board of Directors

**Discussion Items**

Time	Item	Who
10min	Intros	

**Briefing Deck**

Teams In Space  
Board of Directors Briefing

**Comment Thread:**

1 of 1

Ryan Lee

@Alana Grant - Are the forecasts ready to go into the presentation?  
Resolve • Like • just now

Alana Grant

Ryan Lee - You can find the raw numbers and graphs on this page: Teams in Space FY2015 Financial Forecasts  
Let me know if you have any

# Todoist



**COST:** Free to £18 a year

Show menu 1097 Karma

**Today** Fri 19 Jul

- Exhibitor contracts 3 IT Expo
- Conference call with Alice and Jean delegatedDavid IT Expo
- Call Fred delegatedAllan IT Expo
- Finalize exhibitor contracts in\_progress IT Expo
- Send new business plan to Mary delegatedDavid Personnel
- Send final version of our flyer for journalists delegatedAllan Press

Another tool for productivity/collaboration tool is Todoist. A simple, 'to do' list based and task and project management tool, it works across multiple platforms and devices – web, Android, iOS, Windows, Gmail and Chrome – plus there's also an Outlook plug-in.

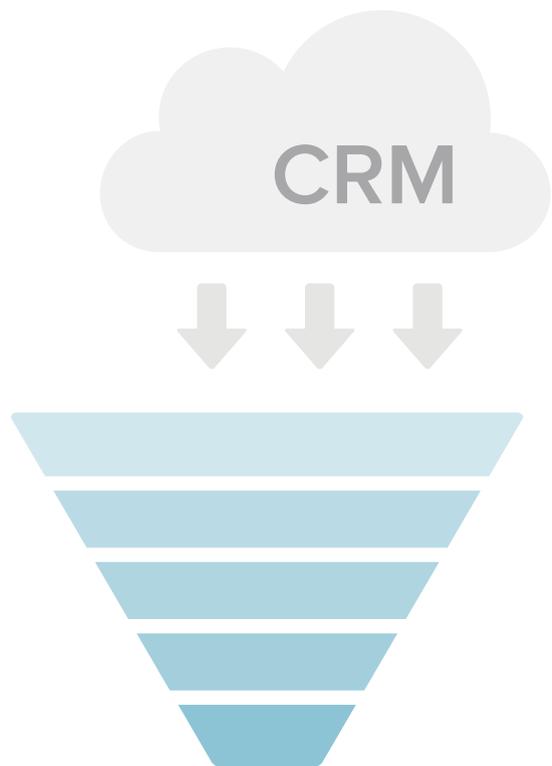
# Section 5

## How CRM data makes your business more attractive to would-be investors

Potential investors may ask you what your sales pipeline looks like. With the right data input, a CRM is able to reveal the shape and size of your sales funnel. If, say, you're chasing several contracts, you can input the value of the contracts and forecast the likelihood of converting a particular client to a sale – creating an accurate forecast of how big your sales pipeline is. This will also help you plan your finances more effectively.

You can also use a CRM system to improve the efficiency of your internal workflows. If it takes several departments to deliver a customer's request, you can create a workflow management system within the CRM to take a task from inception to completion – instead of relying on

internal emails. When one department finishes their part of the process, the system alerts the next person along the chain – and, unlike emails, which degrade over time, the task remains active on the relevant person's 'to do' list until it has been completed.



# Section 6

## Data tools for SMEs

There are many free or affordable data analysis tools which SMEs can use to turn big volumes of raw data into actionable analysis. These include:

- [Google Analytics](#)
- [SimilarWeb](#)
- [Google Adword Keyword Planner](#)
- [Google Trends](#)
- [Hootsuite](#)
- [Canopy Labs](#)

### Google Analytics

**COST:** Free

**BEST FOR:** Analysing your website and social media pages

Google's free website monitoring tool is a great way to gather basic data from a website or mobile app. Use it to track and analyse visitor behaviour, from dwell time (how long visitors are staying on your website) to bounce rates (visitors who enter your site and leave immediately). Other handy insights include conversion rates (how successful your site is at turning visits into purchases), where your site traffic is coming from, and the impact of social media on your business.

**COST:** From free

**BEST FOR:** Monitoring competitors

Similar Web compares the performance of your website with your competitors in terms of site traffic, referrals, audience analysis and keywords their website is using. The information is presented in user-friendly graphs and pie charts, making it easy to get a quick overview. **NB:** you need to upgrade to the paid-for Pro service to add more competitors and tools to your analysis.

## Google Adword Keyword Planner

**COST:** Free

**BEST FOR:** Exploring new markets and gauging demand

Another free tool, Google Adword Keyword Planner helps you track trends and demands from people's Google searches. For instance, if you're looking to open a dry cleaning shop in Epsom, Surrey, and want to gauge demand, you can type in 'Dry Cleaners in Epsom Surrey' and see how many searches there are for those keywords.

## Google Trends

**COST:** Free

**BEST FOR:** Spotting past trends and predicting future demand

If you are looking for more historical trends on Google search activity, another useful tool is Google Trends. This will give you a breakdown of demand for a particular search term or product over a longer period of time. This vast data set can help you gauge past and future trends broken down by month, year, country and related searches.

## Hootsuite



**COST:** Free

**BEST FOR:** Managing social media and customer engagement

This popular dashboard tool helps companies (and individuals) manage their social media presence through a single view. The free version of Hootsuite will let you manage up to three social network profiles (such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn), including scheduling posts when you're out of the office. You can also set up 'streams' (lists) of groups of accounts, or keywords, to keep track of industry trends or customer conversations and run reports on these to help you plan future sales.

## Canopy Labs



**COST:** Free 14-day trial

**BEST FOR:** Understanding the customer journey

This customer analytics platform from Toronto-based Canopy Labs takes a business's customer data (emails, sales records, web browsing data) and analyses it to help businesses understand and optimise their customer's journey. They offer a free 14-day trial for firms with up to 5,000 customers. Prices start at \$250.

# Section 7

## Getting started with data tools

Here's our quick guide on how to get up and running with a selection of the most popular data tools:

- [Google Analytics](#)
- [SimilarWeb](#)
- [Hootsuite](#)

### Google Analytics

Google's free website monitoring tool, [Google Analytics](#), helps businesses make sense of where website visitors come from and what they do once they land on their website: in short it measures customer acquisition, behaviour and conversions.

1. Google Analytics works best if you have a Gmail account – so if you haven't got one already, start off by creating one.
2. The next step you take depends on how familiar you are with data analytics. If you're new to it, it's worth investing time reading up on Google Analytics before you set up your account to help you decide what you're most interested in measuring and tracking.

You'll find everything you need in Google's [Analytics Academy](#), which is packed with video tutorials, blogs, how-to guides, advice and user forums.

Once you've familiarised yourself with what's on offer, use Google's [step-by-step guide](#) to set up your Google Analytics account.

# Google Analytics tutorial videos: an overview

- [Google Analytics Overview Step by Step Tutorial 2014](#)  
This Google YouTube video is a good starting point, as it talks you through the dashboard.
- [Getting started with Google Analytics](#)  
An introduction to the tools, this clip shows you how to measure and make the most of the insights that are available.

Google Analytics can also be integrated with [Google AdWords Keyword Planner](#) and other similar tools to help you find new markets, plan your advertising campaigns and refine your website's search engine optimisation so that new prospects can find you.

The [GrowthHackers user forum](#) also offers useful advice on avoiding common Google Analytics pitfalls.

## SimilarWeb

**FREE VERSION:** Compare two websites/mobile apps

1. Go to the Similar Web homepage and type in a website or mobile app and then add a competitor.
2. You'll see the results of the two websites or mobile apps – eBay.com versus Amazon.com, for example.

The free version provides the following insights:

- Traffic overview and engagement statistics – visits, time on site, page views and bounce rate (percentage of visitors who leave the website after visiting just one page)
- Traffic sources – direct, referrals, search, social, mail, display

To gain deeper insights you need to pay for the Pro version, starting at \$199 per month (minimum subscription: one month).

**SIMILARWEB PRO:** Compare up to 5 websites/mobile apps at a time when you type in the websites/mobile apps. In addition to the results available in the free version, you'll also see:

- Geography – where most of the traffic is coming from
- Top referring sites – which could help with potential partnerships
- Top organic and paid for search terms leading people to competitor websites – which could help you tailor your search engine optimisation (SEO) and pay per click (PPC) campaigns
- Top social networks creating a buzz around a website
- Audience interests
- Display advertising – the top publishers and networks sending traffic to your competitors
- Similar sites you should be researching

This short video tutorial, [Introduction to Similar Web Pro](#), demonstrates how to use the platform. There are a number of help topics for users with videos, webinars and FAQs.

## Hootsuite

**FREE VERSION:** up to 3 social media profiles

**HOOTSUITE PRO:** up to 100 social profiles (free 30-day trial, from £6.99 per month)

**HOOTSUITE ENTERPRISE:** unlimited social profiles, price on request

1. To set up an account, go to Hootsuite.com and either sign up with an email or password or via your Facebook, Twitter or Google account. A dashboard will then appear.
2. Make sure you've selected the Home icon at the top of the sidebar on the left, then follow the prompts to add social networks (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) and streams from each one – e.g. Timeline (Facebook), Mentions (Twitter).

3. To schedule a message, select a social network from the dropdown menu in the top left box (look for the 'Send to' box).
4. Then type the message in the 'Compose message' box. Once you've written your message and added the relevant urls and [hashtags](#), use the calendar icon to schedule a time to send the message or choose 'Send now'.



**TIP**

To shorten your urls – especially important for Twitter, which only has a 140-character limit – type the url into the 'Add a link' box (also in the Compose message box) and then choose 'Shrink'.

[Hootsuite's extensive help section](#) has step-by step guides, articles and webinars on a variety of topics, from getting started, setting up an account and composing and managing messages/conversations, to creating analytics reports, customised reports and dashboards.

## Data visualisation tools

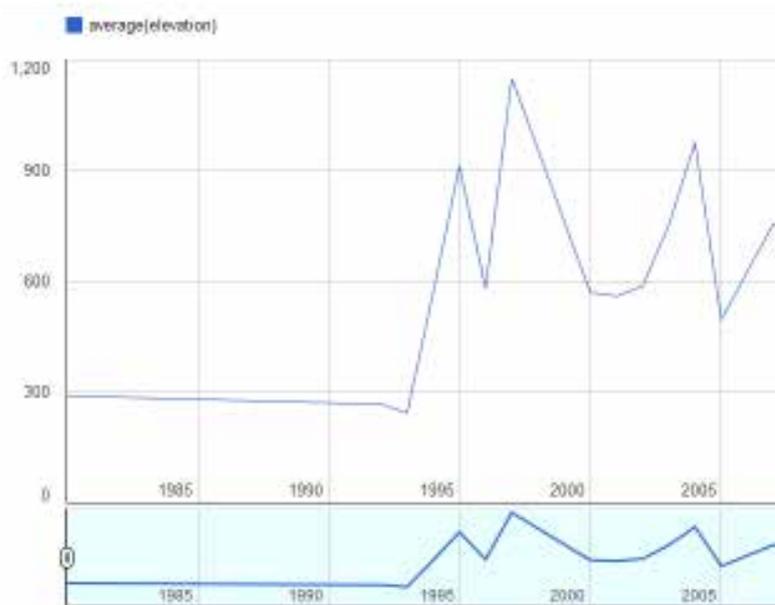
Increasingly, businesses are using data visualisation tools when reporting on and sharing insights. By placing data in a visual format, it is easier to spot patterns, trends and correlations about your business that you can translate in to sales. Some of the most common types of data visualisation are infographics, geographic maps, heat maps, pie charts and graphs. There are many data visualisation tools out there, some of which are complex and require coding experience, while others can be mastered by non-techies with a bit of time and patience. These include:

- [Google Fusion Tables](#)
- [IBM Watson Analytics](#)
- [Slemma](#)
- [Tableau](#)

## Google Fusion Tables

**COST:** Free

Turn data from Google Analytics and Excel spreadsheets into charts, maps, tables and other user-friendly formats. This [Google YouTube video tutorial](#) explains how to integrate Google Analytics and Fusion Tables.



## IBM Watson Analytics

**COST:** From free, to \$30 per user per month for the Personal edition, and \$90 per user per month (minimum 2 users) for the Professional edition

A relative newcomer to the data analytics market, IBM Watson Analytics is an impressive and user-friendly tool that offers the benefits of advanced analytics without the complexity. A state of the art cloud-based resource, designed to run on desktop and mobile devices, it allows you to visually analyse data, predict future trends, and create sleek presentations, reports or dashboards that focus on visual storytelling. It's also useful for collaborative working, as well as sourcing, cleaning, refining and preparing data sets.

## Slemma



**COST** : From free, to \$29 per user per month

A recently launched browser-based data visualisation tool aimed at smaller businesses, Slemma allows you to pull data from 300+ sources to create a customised dashboard.



## Tableau



**COST** : Free 14 day trial

Industry leader Tableau has some of the best visualisation tools on the market and offers [free training videos](#).



# Conclusion

Whichever data analysis software and tools you choose, the key is to start small. Refine and rationalise the data you have, so that you have a solid base to build from.

By taking time to enrich your customer database and ensuring your internal communication and collaboration system is in good shape, you'll be in a much stronger position to make sense of the data flowing into and around your business.

That way, instead of feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data that is available, you'll be able to focus on what you value, and use those insights to grow your business.



Verus360 is a UK-based business dedicated to delivering innovative online business finance products and services to small-to-medium-sized businesses (SMEs).

## Get in touch

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