

Unlocking Opportunity Together:

Research on digital adoption and access for underserved small businesses

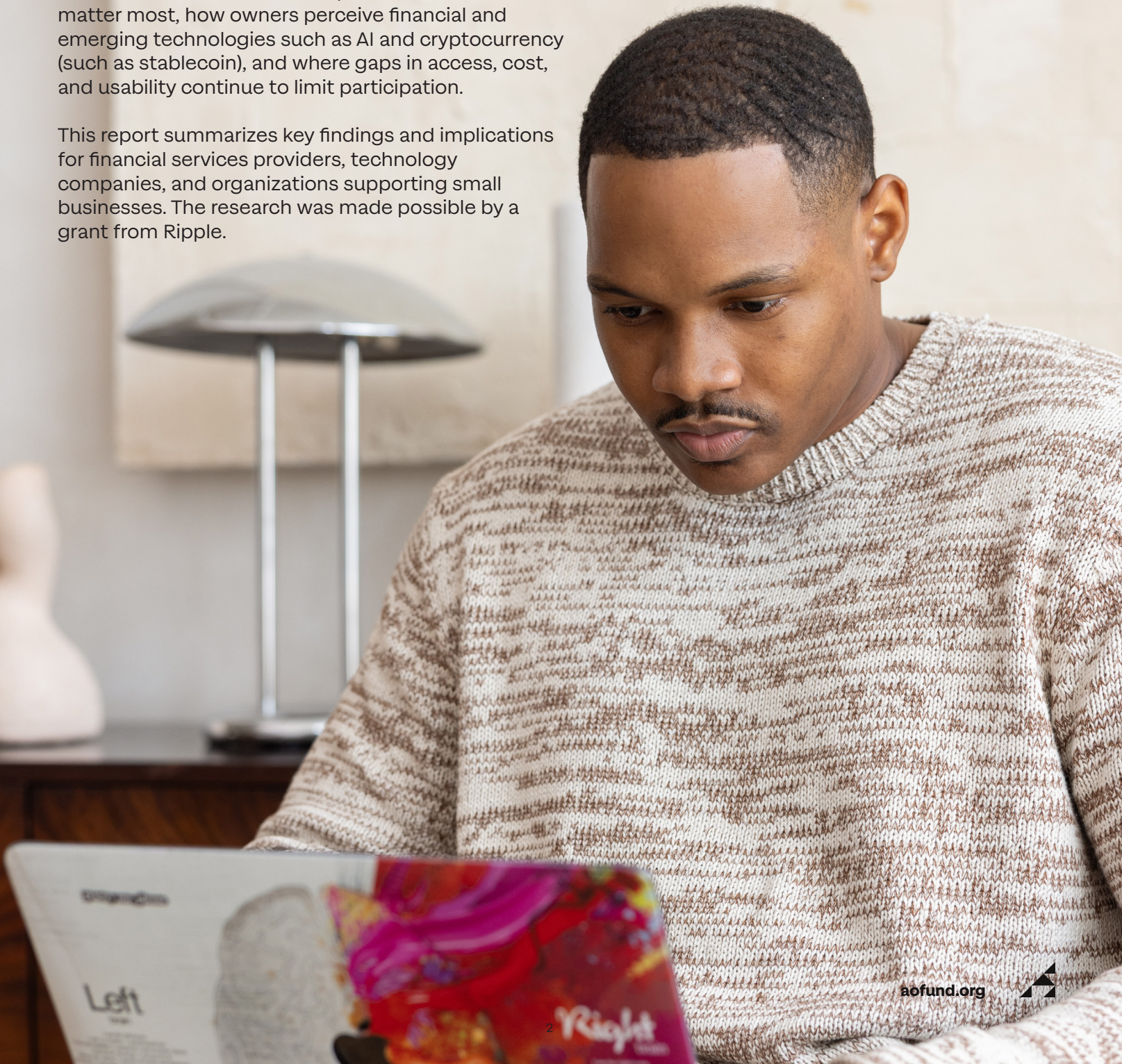
A national survey from Accion Opportunity Fund



Introduction

Digital tools have become foundational to small business success in the United States. To better understand how businesses engage with technology—and what barriers still exist—Accion Opportunity Fund, a mission-driven nonprofit small business lender, conducted a national survey of 600 small business owners, with a focus on those who are low-income or operate in economically distressed communities. The research explores which tools matter most, how owners perceive financial and emerging technologies such as AI and cryptocurrency (such as stablecoin), and where gaps in access, cost, and usability continue to limit participation.

This report summarizes key findings and implications for financial services providers, technology companies, and organizations supporting small businesses. The research was made possible by a grant from Ripple.





About Ripple’s grant

Ripple, the leading provider of blockchain-based enterprise solutions across traditional and digital finance, announced a \$15 million commitment in September 2025 to Accion Opportunity Fund. This funding, delivered in Ripple USD (RLUSD), Ripple’s U.S. dollar-backed stablecoin, is expanding access to capital for underserved small business owners and equipping them with digital know-how to compete and grow in today’s rapidly evolving economy.



Ripple’s partnership will enable AOF to accelerate the development of its digitization and educational programs for small businesses, creating a ripple effect of innovation and jobs nationwide.

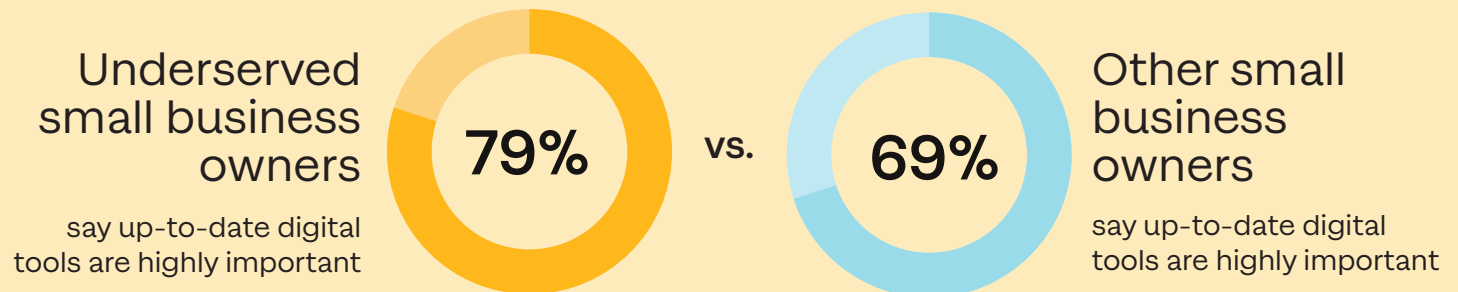
Luz Urrutia
President & CEO
Accion Opportunity Fund

Key findings



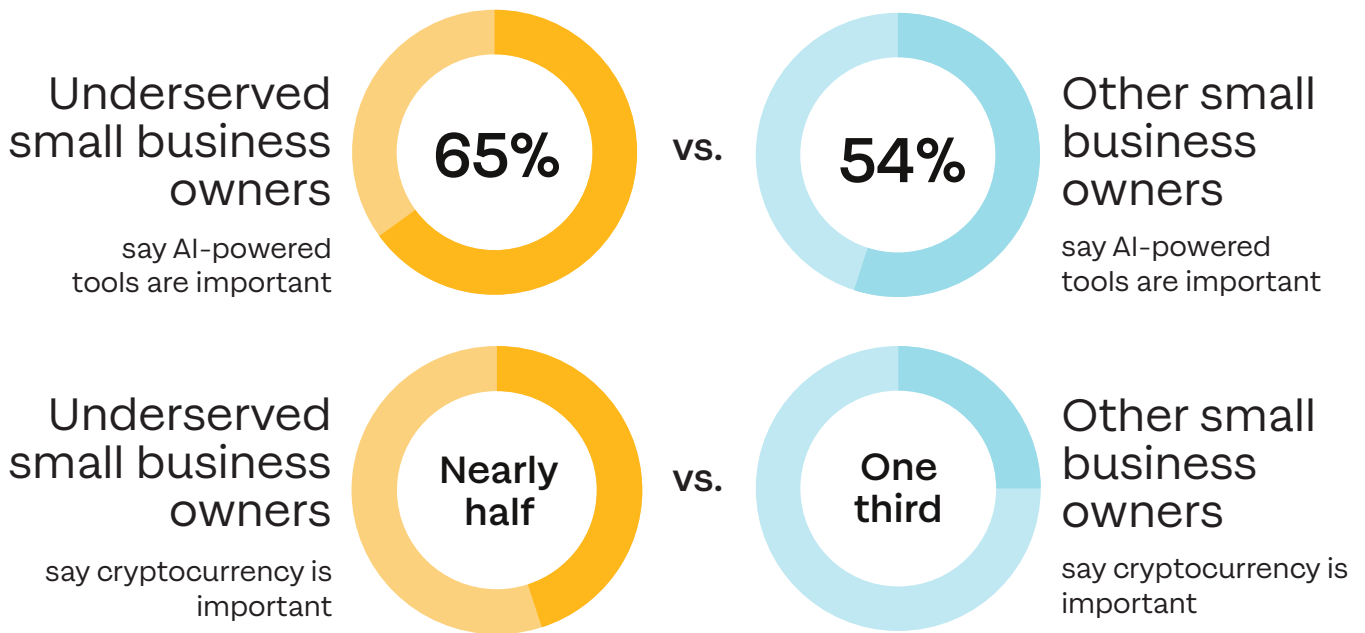
Digital tools are no longer optional

Digital tools are essential to day-to-day operations—small business owners say that without them, their business would fall behind competitors.



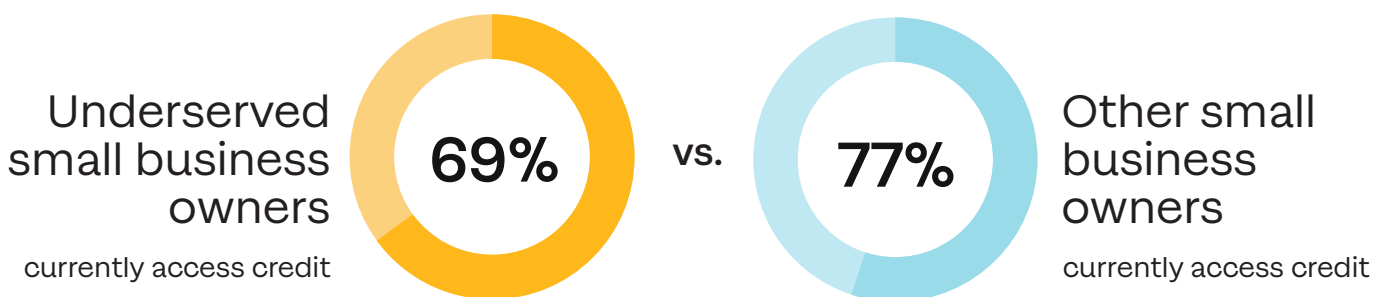
Embracing new technologies

Underserved small business owners have been resourceful in embracing new tech offerings such as AI and cryptocurrency (such as stablecoin).



Other small business owners continue to lean on traditional payments.

Credit access



Small business owners most commonly access credit through business credit cards and lines of credit.

Trust in financial institutions

Three quarters of underserved small business owners trust brick and mortar financial institutions—credit unions most of all, followed by large banks—compared to only 53% who trust online-only institutions.

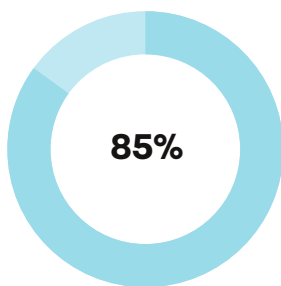
Digital tools are now essential for business

The findings show that digital tools are no longer optional for small businesses—they are operational necessities, especially in underserved communities.

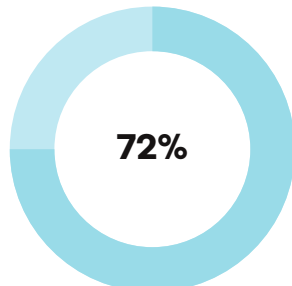
- **75%** of all small business owners say digital tools are critical to running their business.
- For owners in underserved communities, reliance on digital tools is even stronger, with **four in five** describing them as critical to running their business.
- **88%** of all small business owners say technology makes operations easier, and 84% say learning new tools is worth the time.
- **67%** underserved small business owners say that without digital tools their business would fall behind competitors.



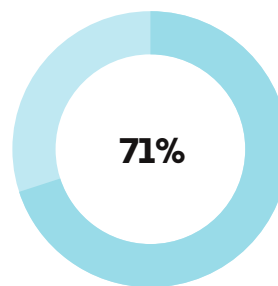
Small business owners most frequently use digital tools in:



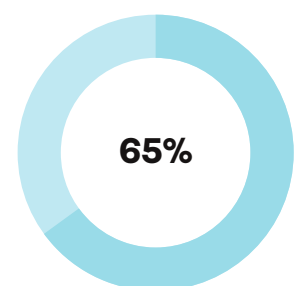
Finance and payments



Operations and technology



Sales and customer experience



Marketing and insights

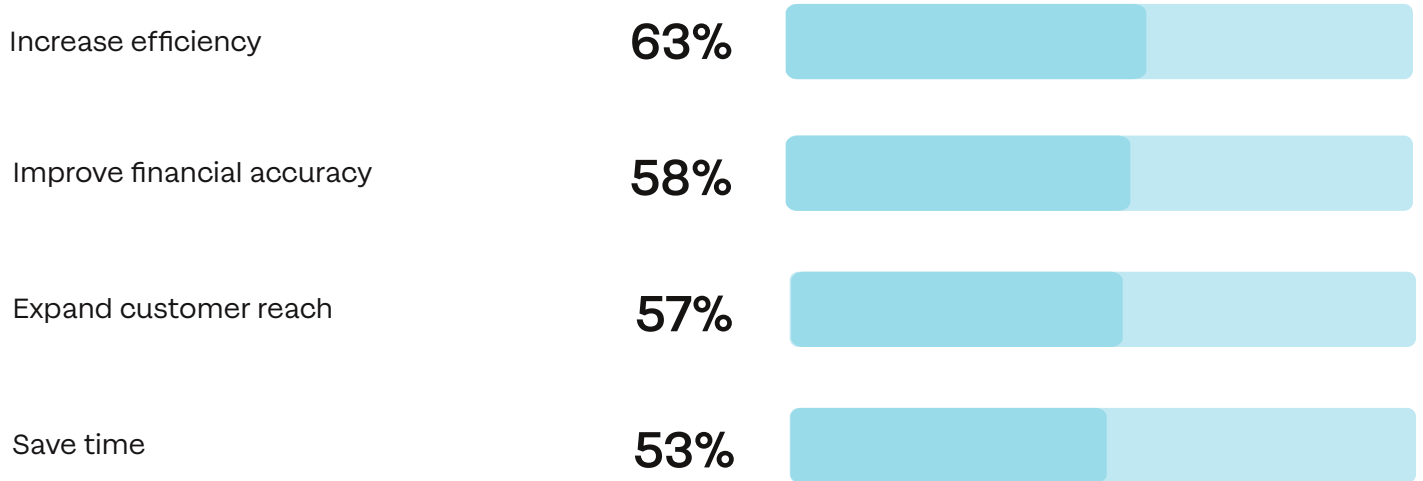
These findings confirm that digital adoption is no longer a growth strategy alone—it is a prerequisite for sustaining a healthy small business.



Digital tools empower—but barriers persist

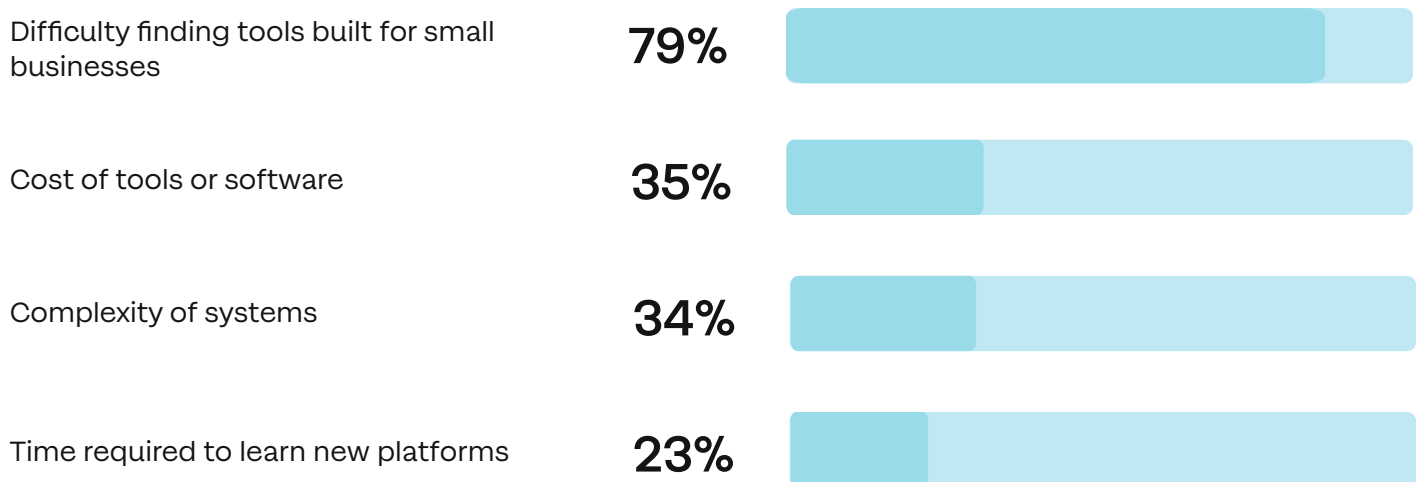
Digital adoption is overwhelmingly associated with positive outcomes.

Owners report that digital tools:



However, significant barriers remain.

The most common include:

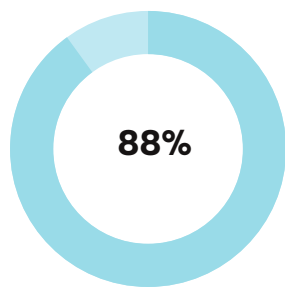


For many small business owners, leveraging digital tools is less about willingness to adopt technology and more about finding the right tools that are relevant, affordable and user-friendly.

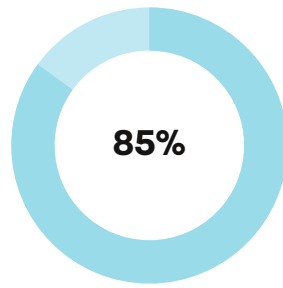
Emerging technologies are gaining momentum

While well-established digital tools like bookkeeping and POS systems dominate current usage, interest in AI and cryptocurrency (such as stablecoin) is accelerating.

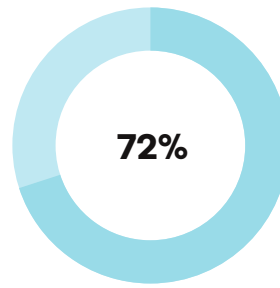
Small business owners—especially those in underserved communities—are showing strong interest in:



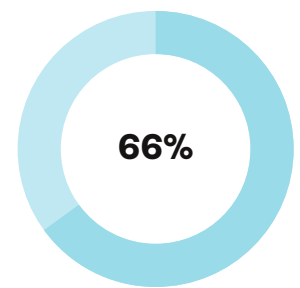
AI-powered tools



AI-driven marketing



Blockchain solutions



Cryptocurrency payments



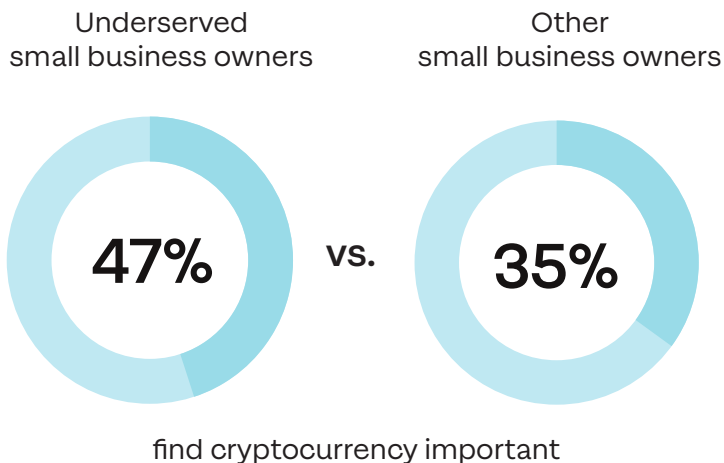
Through our partnership with Accion Opportunity Fund, we're helping expand access to digital tools and exploring how blockchain and crypto can enable faster, more affordable payments for small businesses.

Eric van Miltenburg
SVP Strategic Initiatives, Ripple
AOF partner



Cryptocurrency is growing in importance

While nearly half of owners in underserved communities say cryptocurrency payments are important, only about one-third do elsewhere. 62% of business owners in underserved communities say they have customers interested in paying with cryptocurrency (such as stablecoin) versus 55% in other areas.



Owners cite several potential benefits of cryptocurrency adoption:

- Ability to reach new customers
- Expanded vendor and partner relationships
- Increased efficiency
- Lower transaction costs
- Safer transactions from fraud

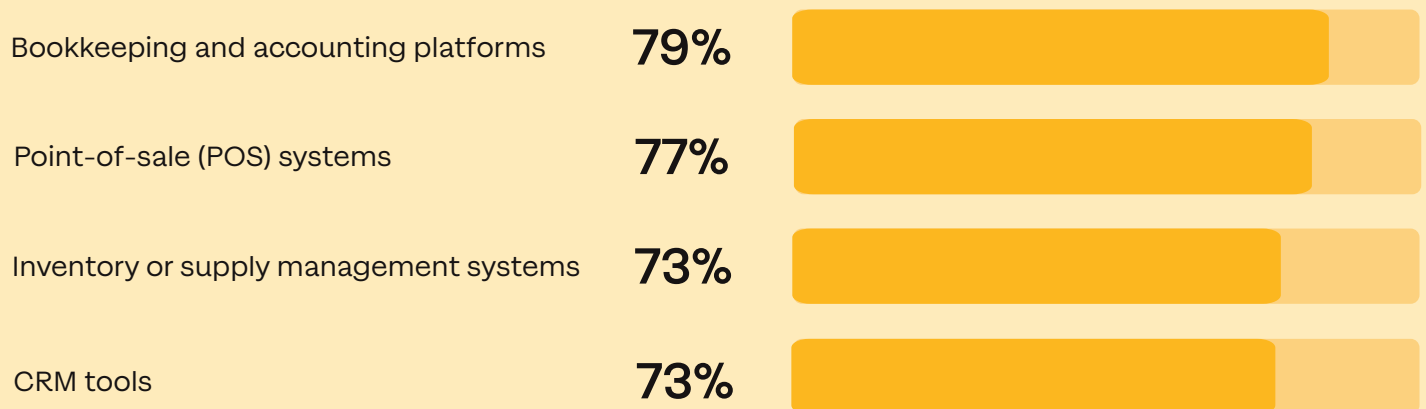
This suggests that emerging financial technologies are viewed not just as fads, but as real pathways to market expansion.



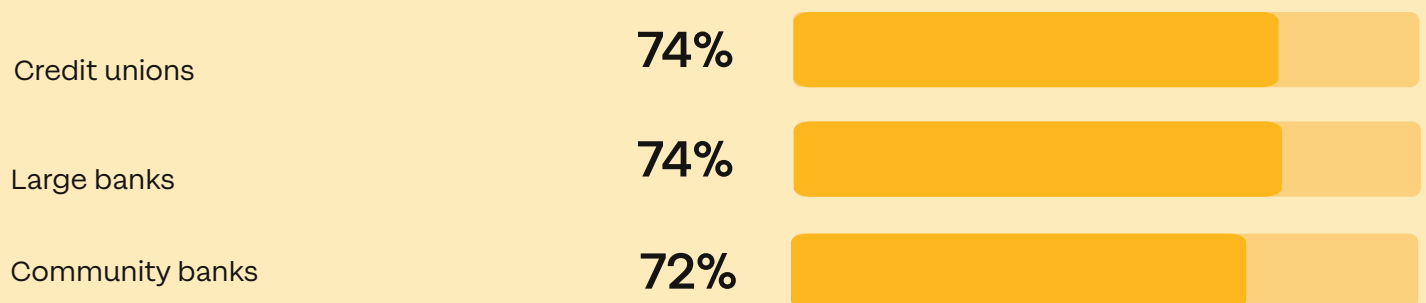
Finance and payment platforms anchor trust

Among all digital technologies, tools related to financial management and transactions remain the most trusted and widely adopted by all small business owners.

Owners report using digital tools for:

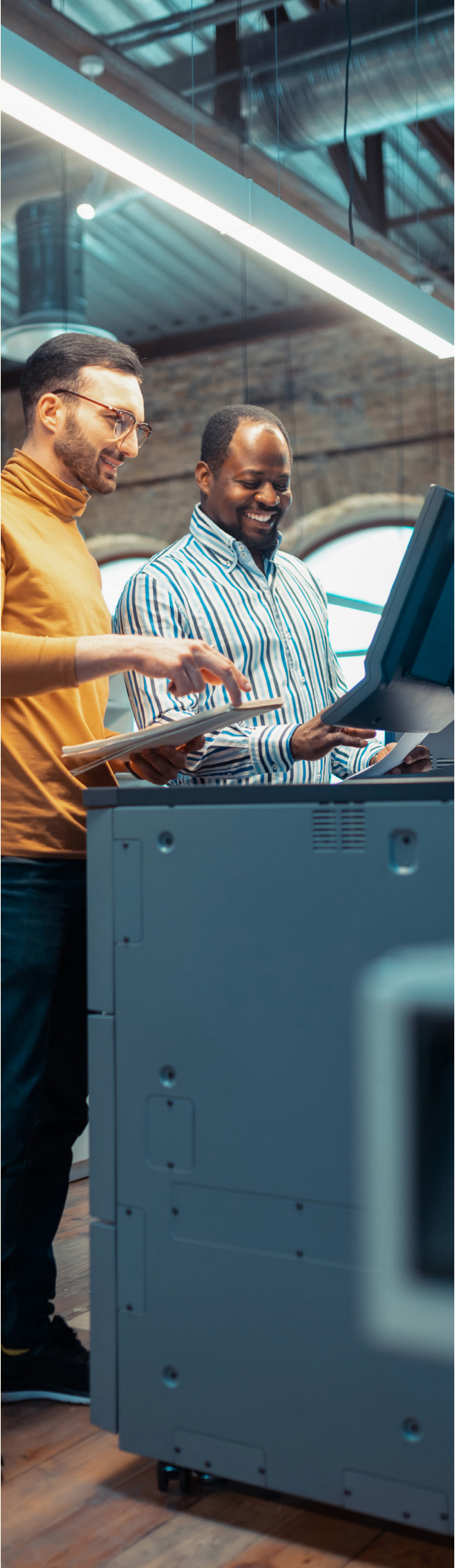


Owners trust:



By contrast, slightly more than half of owners trust online-only lenders or digital banks.

These findings reinforce that trusted financial infrastructure—whether delivered digitally or physically—remains central to running a small business. They also highlight the opportunity for financial services providers without physical branches to build trust with small businesses by offering affordable, relevant products and services with clear and transparent terms.



Credit access and financial behavior

Most small businesses rely on credit to operate and grow:

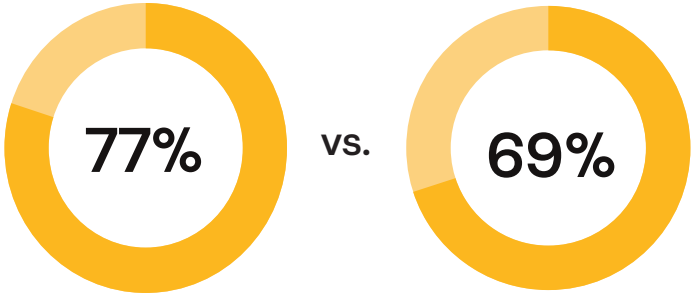
About **7 in 10** (69%) underserved small business owners currently access credit primarily through credit cards or lines of credit.



For owners not accessing credit, half of them say they plan to within the next year.

However, access disparities remain:

Owners outside underserved communities access credit at higher rates.



This gap reinforces the continued importance of mission-driven lenders, CDFIs, and affordable financial products.

Where small business owners learn about technology

When seeking information about running their businesses or adopting digital tools, owners most often turn to:

- Online search
- Social media or online communities
- Training programs and workshops
- Peer business networks

This highlights the importance of meeting small business owners where they already seek information: online, peer-driven, and community-based channels.



Implications for the small business ecosystem

The survey findings suggest several strategic priorities for organizations working to advance small business success through digital and financial tools:

1

Focus on surfacing relevant, affordable, user-friendly tools

Relevance to small businesses as well as cost and complexity—not resistance—are the main barriers to digital adoption.

2

Strengthen trusted financial infrastructure

Credit unions, banks, and established digital financial tools remain the backbone of small business confidence.

3

Expand digital training and advisory services

Owners are eager to learn new tools, but need accessible, relevant guidance.

4

Prepare for the next wave of fintech adoption

Interest in AI, automation, and cryptocurrency signals an evolving small business technology landscape.



Conclusion

Access to digital tools is becoming synonymous with access to economic opportunity. Small business owners recognize that technology enables efficiency, customer reach and financial resilience. Yet gaps in affordability, usability, and relevance continue to prevent many small businesses from fully participating in the digital economy.

By addressing these barriers and building trusted pathways to digital adoption, stakeholders across finance, technology, and policy can help ensure that all small businesses—not just the most resourced—benefit from the opportunities of the digital age.



Our partnership with Ripple goes beyond philanthropy—it's a bold investment in AOF so that we can provide a larger number of small businesses with affordable capital, coaching, digital tools and networks to help them improve financial well-being, grow, and succeed.

Luz Urrutia
President & CEO
Accion Opportunity Fund



Methodology and definitions

This report is based on a national survey, conducted by Prosek Partners, of U.S. small business owners, with a focus on those who are low-income or operate in economically distressed communities.

Audience Sample

n=600 Total Small Business Owners (small businesses) n=363 small businesses [of the 600] who are low-income or operate in economically distressed communities (per CDFI and U.S. Census tract definitions) Criteria: U.S. only businesses that have operated for 1+ years, with \$100K-\$1M in annual revenue and have between one and 50 employees.

Method & Timing

10-minute online survey
Survey fielded from December 10, 2025 to December 19, 2025. The margin of error for survey results, at the 95% Confidence Level is +/- 4.0%

Definitions

An underserved small business owner is one who is low-income or operates in economically distressed communities (per CDFI and U.S. Census tract definitions).

A stablecoin is a type of cryptocurrency designed to maintain a 1:1 peg with a stable asset, typically the US dollar. By holding reserves like cash or Treasury bonds, they provide a stable medium of exchange for trading, payments, and inflation hedges.

About Accion Opportunity Fund

As a leading national nonprofit small business lender and Treasury Department-certified Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI), Accion Opportunity Fund provides affordable loans, free business advising, educational resources, and support networks to fuel long-term success.

More than a lender, the organization champions underserved small business owners who are ready to grow, thrive, and build a better future. For over 30 years, Accion Opportunity Fund has expanded access to economic opportunity by creating pathways to both financial and knowledge capital.

About Ripple

Founded in 2012, Ripple is the leading provider of blockchain-based enterprise solutions across traditional and digital finance. Its solutions span global payments, custody, liquidity, and treasury management, serving as a one-stop shop for moving, storing, exchanging, and managing value. Ripple's stablecoin, RLUSD, and the cryptocurrency XRP underpinning these solutions allow Ripple and its customers to shape the modern financial system.





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