The Post: [Any chance we could make running a business easier?]

Sarah Trotman | June 26, 2026

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OPINION: When Finance Minister Nicola Willis delivered Budget 2026, one message stood out for small business owners: the Government had heard the concerns of businesses struggling through a period of rising costs, weak demand, and increasing compliance burdens.

For many SMEs, the challenge isn't planning for growth. It's maintaining cashflow, retaining staff, and finding enough time to focus on customers rather than paperwork.

We can solve every challenge facing small businesses overnight. But there are several practical changes designed to reduce costs, free up time, and give business owners more confidence to invest in their future.

Less paperwork = more time for business

Talk to almost any small business owner and you'll hear the same frustrations: compliance is growing, administration is consuming valuable hours, and every new requirement seems to come with another form to complete.

The Budget included several measures intended to reduce that burden.

Businesses will no longer need to maintain detailed depreciation schedules for low-value assets when calculating Fringe Benefit Tax. While not a headline-grabbing change, it removes an unnecessary layer of complexity that has frustrated many business owners and accountants.

For companies investing in research and development, access to R&D tax incentives will be simplified by allowing claims to be made during the year rather than waiting until year-end. For businesses managing tight cashflow, getting support sooner can make a meaningful difference.

The Government is also continuing work on reforming New Zealand's resource management system. For businesses trying to expand, develop property, or navigate consenting processes, reducing delays and uncertainty remains a significant priority.

Cashflow remains king

The reality for many SMEs is that profitability isn't the immediate issue, cashflow is.

Businesses across New Zealand continue to face rising operating costs, higher wage bills, elevated insurance premiums, and subdued consumer spending. Many owners report that customers are delaying purchases, reducing discretionary spending, or seeking lower-cost alternatives.

Against that backdrop, measures that allow businesses to access incentives earlier, reduce compliance costs, or simplify administrative processes can have an outsized impact.

Every hour spent on compliance is an hour not spent selling, innovating, or serving customers.

Confidence matters

Economic forecasts suggest inflation is easing and interest rates are expected to continue trending lower. While those improvements won't be felt immediately by every business, they provide some hope that conditions may gradually improve over the coming year.

However, business owners don't make decisions based solely on economic forecasts. They make decisions based on what they see in their bank accounts, on their order books, and in conversations with customers.

That is why practical changes that reduce friction, lower compliance costs, and improve certainty matter. They won't solve every challenge facing SMEs, but they can help business owners spend less time navigating bureaucracy and more time focused on growing their businesses.

For many New Zealand SMEs, that's exactly what's needed right now.