

COVER STORY Business strategies for tough times

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Running a small business is difficult enough in the best of times. Finding a market and turning a profit takes smarts, savvy, luck -- and hard work. But when times are tough, entrepreneurs must prove that they're fit for survival and their business concepts are sound.

A good economy hides bad businesses; a bad economy reveals them, said Rafael Cruz, an analyst with Florida Atlantic University's Small Business Development Center. An entrepreneur is making the best of whatever situation you're in.

Large companies may have the cash and momentum to survive a downturn, but small businesses can't count on such protection. The reality is if you're small,

even some big companies are finding it tough these days. Size is not necessarily a savior, said Alan Carsrud, executive director of Florida International University's Entrepreneurship Center. We've seen plenty of large companies fail in this economy.

Indeed, Carsrud suggested small businesses might have an advantage. Small businesses can move to adapt to their local environments, said Carsrud. If

you're local, you have a better understanding of the market. To better understand how small businesses are faring in these tough economic times, The Miami Herald looked at five local companies with distinct strategies.

Anyone can make money in a good time, Carsrud said. If you can make money -- or even hold on -- in a bad time, you've got your act together.

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