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For small business owners who survived the recession, now is a good time to take stock of where their business stands and whether and how they want to grow.

Experts say it may behoove business owners to take some risks, especially as the state and local economy is faring much better than parts of the country that were devastated during the recession.

“Now that the economy is improving and lenders are loosening up a bit, it’s a better time for those companies that have an expansion plan to go after funding,” said Richard Sifuentes, assistant director at the University of Texas at San Antonio’s Small Business Development Center.

Most businesses have expansion plans, of course. Those companies that are holding back have told Sifuentes that they’re waiting to see how they’ll be affected by the Affordable Care Act.

“There will be additional costs,” he said, “depending on the size of the business.”

Anita Leffel, assistant director of the Center for Innovation and Technology Entrepreneurship at UTSA, said she’s familiar with business owners’ reluctance to take a chance.

“We’ve almost gotten into a place where we aren’t willing to take a risk,” Leffel said. Many business owners “are caught up in being fearful. But the question they should ask is: Can I do something more than I have been doing?”

If a business owner wants to institute a growth plan, “the owner has to ask — what’s

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according to a survey conducted in June and July by the National Small Business Association. That’s up from 38 percent six months ago.

At Gold Research Inc., a San Antonio-based market research and consulting firm that includes restaurant chains and retail outlets among its clients, director Nitin Sharma said the business climate “has definitely improved.

“We aren’t on a hiring spree, but I think we’ll be making some hires late this year or early next year.”

Sharma said hiring is picking up among his clients, and that many are concentrating on ways they can keep existing customers happy rather than focusing on gaining more customers.

T.J. Haygood, CEO of Confidential Search Solutions, a firm that recruits professionals and provides staffing services, said she’s optimistic, even after the recession forced her to cut the size of her staff from eight to two.

In the first half of this year, business has picked up for the four-year-old San Antonio firm. Haygood recently hired a third employee and may hire a fourth late this year or in early 2014.

It was necessary to hire a third person, she said, not just to handle existing work but to go after additional business.

Still, some jitters remain. Haygood expanded her office space, but she asked for and got a six-month lease rather than year-long one.

“I was a little hesitant to sign for a year,” she said. “I didn’t want to put myself in an uncomfortable position in case things turn south.”

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