

Small Business Solutions

Top Five Tips For Starting A Virtual Business ㊦

(NAPSA)—Are you a virtual worker or thinking of becoming one? If you are, you're not alone. There's been a rise in virtual workers of 800 percent in just the past five years (Nemertes Research 2005). A big reason for this dramatic increase is that it's a great way to start a company, especially if you can work from a home office or out in the field.

With that in mind, a team of experts at Hewlett-Packard came up with these five tips on how to successfully operate a business from your home.

Tip #1: Make sure your business can operate "virtually." Are you meeting with contacts at your place of business or theirs? Do you spend most of your time outside the office?

- Good candidates for a virtual business include architects, interior designers, homebuilders, computer professionals, accountants and other service professionals whose work is actually conducted in other people's homes or businesses—ranging from cleaning services to home repair.

Tip #2: Consider your personality. Are you a self-starter or do you need inspiration from others to get things done? Do you prefer quiet time to work or do you thrive around other people who can provide reinforcement and support? Are your management skills suited for a phone-based relationship with your remote team?

Tip #3: Hire the right people. Do you have trustworthy employees who can get the job done, even if they are not physically in the same office? How much of their work is actually

done outside the office? Do you have access to a mature talent pool of potential employees if you are just starting out or planning to expand?

Tip #4: Leverage technology. Go wireless and take security to heart. Do you have the technology in place to support a virtual business or a good technology advisor who can help wire your business for success? Have you considered streamlining your office with an all-in-one fax-printer-copier, notebooks, PDAs and a wireless LAN network? Fight security threats with anti-virus, vulnerability and business protection solutions to protect your data and secure your networked PCs. For added security, think about connecting through a wireless virtual private network (VPN) and watch your productivity expand. Did you know that with Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) you can place a call anywhere in the world from an Internet connection without incurring long-distance fees? Even away from the home office, your employees can tap into WiFi networks at Internet cafes. Thanks to technology, many virtual companies have the face of a traditional company—yet operate with lower overhead and greater flexibility to stay competitive.

Tip #5: Create an online storefront and take advantage of e-commerce. An online presence can give your business the appearance of a traditional brick-and-mortar company. Small companies can grow into larger companies with an effective virtual business strategy.