

# BACKGROUND ON BUSINESS

## Good Communication Skills and Services Can Boost Sales

by Jane Applegate

(NAPSA)—Small business owner Linda Denny has sold millions of dollars' worth of insurance products and created innovative sales programs for several major corporations.



Applegate

She attributes much of her success to being an excellent communicator and using the telephone to maximize her relationship with clients. She has one great idea that anyone can easily incorporate into a daily routine.

"I take notes on every phone call I make or accept," said Denny, who recently established an Arlington, Va.-based consulting firm that helps companies better understand the powerful women's market. "To free my hands for note-taking, I attach a headset to my office phone. When I'm out and about, I use a headset for my Sprint wireless phone. With the headset, it's easy to take notes about what we are discussing during the conversation."

Denny said she got into the habit of taking notes on the phone when she was working as a compliance officer for a major insurance company. She said her telephone call journals (she uses stenography pads) have been extremely helpful when it comes to following up with clients. She also uses the notes to book future appointments, keep track of commitments made during the call and to meet deadlines.

Denny and other successful small business owners I've met understand that no matter how small their business is, they can appear much bigger to clients if they have the right communications services.

For example:

- An affordable Web site gives your business a "storefront to the world" 24 hours a day in cyberspace. (Sprint and DellHost can provide reliable hosting services at competitive rates for small businesses).

- A toll-free number encourages clients or customers to call your company at no charge to them. You can order several toll-free numbers, using one or two to track response to advertising or marketing promotions and others for employees to call the office.

- The right long-distance plan can make it affordable for you and your employees to make outbound sales calls and return calls promptly to improve customer service. Along with flat per-minute rates, look for plans that offer the flexibility to add or delete options as your business grows or changes.

No matter what company you rely on for phone service, be sure to order enough lines to handle a surge in call volume. Toss out that old answering machine and sign up for a reliable voicemail system. Change your outgoing greeting frequently to keep customers updated on your schedule. Offer an after-hours number for emergencies or forward your office calls to your home.

"When you leave a voicemail message, be sure to speak slowly and repeat your phone number twice," advises Denny. "Say it slowly and say it twice. Nothing is more frustrating than getting an important call that you can't return because you don't know how to reach the person."

*Jane Applegate is author of 201 Great Ideas for Your Small Business, and founder of [www.SBTV.com](http://www.SBTV.com) (Small Business TV), a multimedia Web site providing free resources for business owners. For more great ideas, visit [www.sprint.com/ideas21](http://www.sprint.com/ideas21).*