

Use Technology To Look Bigger When You're Small

by Jane Applegate

(NAPSA)—If you operate a small business, your staff may consist of you, two cats and a dog, but when you have the right telecommunications technology in place, you can easily give customers and clients



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the impression that you are operating a much bigger business.

You can ensure customers, vendors and others see your small business as “big time” by making certain that you are easy to reach and responsive. Even if you can’t afford to hire a full-time receptionist or a 24/7 staff, you can cast a big shadow with a few dollars invested in separate phone and fax lines, voicemail and a mobile phone that is with you when you’re out of the office.

The Internet is another way to enlarge the appearance of your business; they don’t call it the World Wide Web for nothing! An online “storefront” can bring your products or services to customers around the world as well as around the block.

There’s no better time to be a small business owner in search of high-tech, high-touch telecommunications for the home-based or outside office. Pricing is extremely competitive and many companies are offering new bundled services designed specifically for busy, cost-conscious entrepreneurs. An integrated communications provider like Sprint, for instance, has a variety of local, long distance, wireless and high-speed data bundles and the expertise to help you determine exactly what products and services you need to run a productive and profitable business.

No matter what company you choose to work with, no small business should be without the basics: a high-speed Internet connection, (DSL, fractional T-1, etc.), at least

two phone lines (one dedicated 24/7 to the fax machine), affordable local and long-distance service, a wireless phone, voicemail and a toll-free telephone number. Having a toll-free number encourages your customers to call you at no charge. Toll-free numbers also create the impression of belonging to a much bigger business without spending a lot of money.

To figure out what’s best for your particular business, ask yourself these questions:

1. What can I do to be more accessible to my clients and employees? Do I need a wireless phone?

2. What do my employees need to work more productively in the office, on the road and at home? Do they need laptops with wireless modems? Extra phone lines? A faster connection to the Internet?

3. What can we do to encourage clients and customers to do more business with my company? Should we install two toll-free numbers—one for employees and one for customers?

You might consider surveying your customers by telephone or via e-mail to ask them for suggestions. Customers are generally happy to provide honest answers to help you improve your company operations.

The most successful entrepreneurs I’ve profiled for the past 13 years in my books and columns are always setting the bar higher. They invest in the most updated hardware, software and telecommunications to remain ahead of their competition. They monitor costs, but aren’t afraid to spend money where it counts—on making themselves and their company easy to do business with.

Jane Applegate is America’s leading small business management expert and author of The Entrepreneur’s Desk Reference. For more information, visit www.sprint.com/janeapplegate.