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Building Your Brand

Special Report

Your brand is an essential currency that's as good as gold. It says you're able, capable, creative and committed to succeed. This team of experts has great ideas on how you can build a brand and project an image that says you are up to any challenge: **Tami Enfield**, Brand Yourself Consulting; **Larry Davis**, Fox Tracks Print and Marketing Solutions; and **Lori Spiess**, OffiCenters/VirtualOffiCenters.

Harness the Power of the Virtual Office

You're Building a Great Brand. You Don't Have to Do It Alone. Come In for Flexible Space, Community, Collaborative Environment and New Opportunities.

By Lori Spiess

VirtualOffiCenters

Just because you're a small business doesn't mean you can't stand out in a big way. An important part of standing out is to make sure there is alignment with your brand, what you do, how you act and how you present yourself to the world.

Most large successful companies have their fancy board rooms, conference rooms, receptionists and support staff and the latest office equipment. It all supports their brand and image. It sends the message they are successful and have the resources to deliver on their promises.

You don't have to spend a million to look like a million. Even a small, one-person company, can burnish their brand with a showcase work environment like much larger companies, but at a fraction of the cost by joining the growing virtual office trend.

With a virtual office, you get to keep your home office and its advantages, but also acquire an enhanced public persona of corporate brick and mortar with an array of services you can buy on an as-needed basis.

For most new businesses, most of which start off home based, the virtual office is the business model for the future. It is not just a low-cost means of projecting your brand image, but many of my clients at OffiCenters/VirtualOffiCenters say it has had a direct impact on their success.

It is amazing to see businesses blossom and grow in this model. I often hear people say they didn't realize there were so many resources and options available to them.

Virtual Office Services

The backbone of our virtual office is the array of services that improve your productivity and enhance your image and brand. When a client calls you, we can have someone answer the phone with your company name. People aren't impressed by the automated phone tree options.

Live answering is having a rebirth that's very retro right now. It's also interactive. The receptionist can take messages, answer basic questions and schedule appointments. Your callers feel like there are being handled with care. That reflects well on you.

We have people to manage your mail, shipping and receiving as needed. If you're waiting for a check and are out of town, we'll call you if it doesn't arrive so you can react. There is someone at "your" office every day to accept mail and packages or to help with presentations, spreadsheets or big projects.

Adding virtual office capabilities means you can have a mailbox service, copiers, printers, access to conference rooms and furnished offices. You can even use an office for as little as 30 minutes. Your name is listed in the



building directory.

Another reason virtual office plans are catching fire is because they are very flexible. You're looking at a 30-day commitment and you only pay for what you need. That equates to a great value!

Virtual Community

The most significant benefit to emerge in the past few years for our virtual office members is interaction, collaboration and networking. A home office doesn't have to be lonely. Members come to our office locations not just to use space, but to interact with other business owners. We offer events, such as free networking events, and a Lunch and Learn educational seminar series for clients that showcase client businesses.

We even created a whole new social media campaign to keep members up to date on events. Our holiday lunches are legendary. Our spaces are always

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busy, full of buzz and positive energy. It's all about creating a real community.

Collaboration

With the wide variety of members we have, collaboration has become an important tool for helping just about any business look larger and more capable. Projects they couldn't handle themselves become possible when they can reach out to people with whom they regularly network. With the right partners, everyone can be more effective and efficient.

A key way to build your brand is to tell more people about what you do. We help our members do that with our B2B directory called "CONNECT," where every member gets a free listing and, in return, commits to buying from the network when possible.

Through our member newsletter, we help tell their stories by promoting what they are working on, such as their seminars, projects, specials meetings, books and accomplishments in general. The newsletter goes out to more than 1,000 businesses that are part of OffiCenters and VirtualOffiCenters.

In that environment, you get an idea of what people are doing. If you need a partner, you can easily assemble a team for just about any project imaginable.

Some members report sales increases from 40 percent to 50 percent just from being part of this community. Two attorneys formed a partnership based on a successful collaboration. And a web designer got more business after teaming up with members in IT and social media to start a Google Hangout for live streaming our Lunch and Learn seminars to all five of our locations. And these are just a few of the stories we hear about every day.

Collaborating enhances the promise that your brand can deliver. You don't just project a larger image, you are actually larger. If a prospective client needs a skill you don't have, you know exactly where to find it. You can increase your sales and promote your business merely by expanding your collaborative resources. Their clients see a difference. We are stronger – Together!

Our virtual office members value the home office lifestyle, but isolation continues to be the number one problem plaguing home-based businesses.

Getting out of your home office more often has significant ben-

efits. Interacting with other virtual office members is a chance to learn from those who are at different stages of their business life cycle and talk to someone who has been there. Information is very powerful. The energy is very contagious.

Flex Space

We have a variety of space that fit your needs on any given day at a location that is convenient to you. We have 24/7 office space, offices by the hour, open work space, small and large conference and training rooms.

Sometimes you just need to be in a productive environment. For that we have drop-in co-working space, which is open space with tables and work surfaces where you can work quietly on your own or casually meet others who are there for the same reason you are. No appointment needed.

It's a magical place. You can hang out all day long or not. You never know what's going to happen. I can't go into the spaces anymore without hearing stories of incredible opportunities coming together.

Our virtual office members know that when they walk into the co-working space, there will be people looking for collaboration and conversation. It's all about human interaction, free networking, making connections and creating a sense of community.

We're no longer selling 4 walls like in the old days. Now, our focus is finding ways to help our members raise the bar and run great businesses that live up to their brand.

Virtual offices are aimed at what we call gazelle businesses: small, quick, highly flexible and frugal businesses. This isn't just a stopgap measure until they move into a physical office. This is a business and lifestyle choice.

With virtual office options, you won't have to be a one-man band. As you grow your business, keep in mind that you now have very powerful options to make you more responsive to customers, project a stronger image, preserve your sanity and leverage all the advantages of your home office.

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Lori Spiess CEO of OffiCenters/VirtualOffiCenters has provided workspace solutions to the Twin Cities since 1981. She is an innovator, leader and motivator who helps businesses do their best work. Her company won Most Innovative Workspace 2014 and she made the 2015 Minnesota Business Magazine's (Real) Power 50 List. Spiess, a recent cancer survivor, has a new motto: Life is short. Work someplace awesome! She can be reached at:

*lori.spiess@virtualofficenters.com or (612) 373-7070
www.virtualofficenters.com*

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