

NEW BUSINESS MINNESOTA

July 2015

What Every Small Business Should Know



Virtual Office / Office Space

Lori Spiess
VirtualOffiCenters



Social Media Marketing

Dave Meyer
BizzyWeb



Telecommunications

Kevin McGovern
CenturyLink



Taxes

Jonathan Wells
Wells, Schluter, Hanson



Marketing Strategy

Ricardo Ortizcazarín
Cazarín Interactive



HR / Employee Benefits

Susan Ellingson
Above & Beyond Benefits



Choosing a Tax Preparer

Carolyn LaViolette
Minnesota Society of CPAs



Security

Steve Emmer
ADT Security Services Inc.



Better Business Bureau

Dana Badgerow
Better Business Bureau



Payroll

Bernie Schwab
Spruce Valley Payroll & Services



Merchant Services

Carlos Monteiro
ClearPay



Business Banking

Paul Flood
Bremer Bank

Special Report

Most new businesses are overwhelmed by the sheer amount of information required to run a successful enterprise. New Business Minnesota assembled its Small Business Board of Advisors, business pros who work with new and small businesses, to share essential information about their respective fields.

Save this issue. You're going to need it.

What Every Small Business Should Know

Here
Is the “Small
Business Board
of Advisors,” Leading
Business Professionals
Offering Tips and
Guidance that Will
Help Your Business
Survive.

*From
the Publisher: Ever
hear that old phrase: “It’s
not what you know, it’s who you
know”? Now that you’ve launched
your own business, you’re going to find
out how true it really is. Wise business
owners, especially when they are very new
and very small, quickly discover they can’t
do it all. Take stock of your strengths and
weaknesses as you read this collection of
essential knowledge. Make sure you be-
come aware of what you don’t know.
There’s more of it than you
might think.*



Web / Social Media Marketing

By Dave Meyer

Dave Meyer, president and owner of BizzyWeb, creates SEO-optimized websites that cross-publish to social media with a single click, saving businesses time and money. Dave frequently speaks on social media topics, and his “Buzz Builders” seminars have been attended by thousands. He can be reached at (612) 424-9990, sales@bizzyweb.com, facebook.com/bizzyweb, or twitter.com/bizzyweb.

Having a successful business requires great marketing. Every business needs an effective, mobile-ready website, an effective social media strategy and proactive email marketing. Answer these basic questions to get the most out of your marketing budget and drive leads to your business:

1) Who is your customer and what do they want? Think about your best, most profitable customers and write down why they buy from you, how they'll search to find you (what keywords would they type into Google) and what offer / next action would make them buy more.

2) What do you need to accomplish? Think about where you need to “move the needle” before you begin any marketing program. It doesn't matter how many Facebook fans, Twitter followers or website hits you get if you're not generating leads and making sales. Include a call to action to tell visitors what to do next... tell them how to subscribe to your newsletter, call today, or buy now.

3) What tools will you use?

• **Your website** is the hub where everything comes together, and can publish to social media

with a single click. Be sure to tie in your site your email marketing, and design for mobile devices.

• **Facebook Pages** let your customers and prospects “Like” you to receive updates, special offers or stay in touch. Use images, videos and surveys to engage your fans.

• **Twitter** lets businesses share small bits of interesting information with prospects and customers. Search for and follow your best customers and link to your website often.

• **LinkedIn** is great for branding and connecting with strategic partners and clients. Build your Company Page to tell your story and promote your services.

• **Google Plus Local** (formerly Google Places) levels the playing field with your local competitors. When someone searches for what you do and they're located close to you, you'll show up higher in results... especially if they're searching on mobile devices.

• **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** focuses on the key search terms your prospects will use to find you. Make sure you include these phrases in your metadata, page content and links. Don't

know how? Hire someone.

• **Paid advertising** via ads on Google, Facebook or LinkedIn let you target customers and get your messages to them at the moment they're searching for your product or service. Ads are incredibly affordable and easy to target your perfect prospect.

• **Email marketing** makes sure your content is “pushed” to your prospects inboxes at exactly the right time. Use descriptive subject lines and a dedicated email tool like Constant Contact to avoid getting marked as “spam.”

4) How will you measure results? Track everything so you know when you're successful. Free tools including Google Analytics and advanced searches on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook will give you plenty of data to work with. Keep working until you get the results you're looking for.

5) How will you keep it current? You MUST keep updating your website and social networks regularly or your fans and customers will lose interest. Keep listening to what they're saying. Set a schedule to check your accounts. Respond to customers and post something new at least weekly.

Online marketing doesn't need to be difficult. If you'd like BizzyWeb to review your marketing and give you free tips for better results, go to BizzyWeb.com/Buzz to get started.

Call To Action

Call BizzyWeb today to get their free online marketing Buzz Report. Our 20-page audit will outline your marketing strengths and challenges for your website, SEO, and social media marketing. Contact BizzyWeb at bizzyweb.com/buzz, or via phone at (612) 424-9990



Security

By Steven Emmer

Steve Emmer is in small business sales for ADT Security, which provides security solutions from alarms, intrusion protection, camera systems and remote systems for small and medium size businesses. He can be reached at (651) 724-8612 or semmer@adt.com. www.adt.com.

It wasn't that long ago that security for your business meant a burglar alarm to thwart break-ins. Because of the explosion in technology – internet, smartphones and more – security now means managing your work environment to protect your employees, your information, your inventory, your bottom line as well as keeping out the bad guys.

The new technology that we're deploying at ADT Security Systems allows you to monitor 24/7 what is going on at your office, store or building. Using your smart-phone, you can control the whole system from anywhere you get 3g service!

Whether you have a home office or a large commercial space, you need to be aware of your security risks and options. Here is What Every New

Business Should Know about security systems:

1) Protect your investment. Insurance may replace whatever might be stolen or damaged by thieves and vandals, but the reality is you're better off if you can either stop or minimize the event in the first place. Features to consider: Monitoring for forced entry, hold-ups and duress events. You might even get a break on your insurance premiums as well.

3) Use smartphone technology to manage your security system. Receive real-time alerts on your smartphone about what is going on back at the office, when the first employee arrives to open up, if the last employee to leave activated the alarm or even if the coffee maker was left on (You can turn it off from your phone). Going to the office

on Saturday? Remotely turn up the heat two hours before you get there. If you just teed and a late delivery arrives at the office, you open the door for them and reactivate the alarm when the leave.

4) Keep more of the money you're already making. Just about any aspect of your operation can be monitored and controlled by this technology. When the alarm is set at night, we tie in lighting and temperature levels so that you reduce electricity and heating costs.

5) Work with experienced professionals. Resist the urge to pick up a do-it-yourself security kit that comes with a six-pack of mini-cameras. You want a solution that is right for your location, fits budget and is done right. Our years of experience have taught us where best to put cameras, motion detectors; whether to use key-pad entry, key fobs or ID cards; how to create extra protection zones that limit employee access to highly sensitive areas. And you want a system that is reliable and that provides real time reports you can respond to.

Call To Action

Call today for your free risk analysis at your site and a demonstration the Pulse System (651) 308-6769 and its amazing features.



Taxes

By Jonathan Wells

Jonathan Wells is a partner with Wells, Schluter, Hanson & Co., an accounting, business consulting and tax advisory firm that works with small and medium sized businesses to maintain profitability and capitalize on new opportunities. He can be reached at (952) 881-5343 or jonathan@wellstax.com www.wellstax.com

Taxes are an inescapable part of running any business. But if you plan and prepare for it, you can limit the impact, like rolling with a punch. The key is anticipation and preparation.

For some business owners, tax preparation means filing paperwork by a certain deadline. For tax professionals like myself, it means engaging with my clients to save more money than I charge while complying with all the IRS rules.

Because tax laws are ever changing, you need to review the potential impact on your business and plan corrective action if necessary and make sure to claim every eligible deduction.

Here is What Every Small Business Should Know about tax planning:

1) Work with a tax advisor when planning. If you want an accurate and efficient tax return, seek out an accountant who will have face-to-face meetings with you, not the ones where you drop

off your files and they mail you the results.

Your tax advisor should also be knowledgeable about investing and retirement planning because they are so intertwined with taxes.

Many new business owners need help in handling startup expenses and depreciable items. If they do their own returns, they won't know about their mistake until they get a letter from the IRS. You don't want that.

Tax planning has the greatest ROI you can get from accounting services. If you have any tax liability, you need to do it.

2) Think strategically. This means identifying opportunities that can exist in year-to-year tax differences. For example, in 2013 we knew the Bush tax cuts would expire in the next year, so we made a pure opportunity play to push write-offs into 2014 to soften the tax bite. By choosing to take the write-off later rather than sooner, they saved

nearly 10 percent.

In just about any tax season, there is always some new twist or challenge you need to respond to. This is the first year of the penalties under the Affordable Care Act. Do you know how you're going to deal with it? Will it impact you?

3) What business entity are you filing as? It's pretty common that small businesses choose the wrong business entity. There are three different types of income – earned, passive, and portfolio – and you need to know the proper entity type based on your type of income. A mistake in this error can hurt your pocketbook significantly.

Just because you have the wrong entity, doesn't mean you're stuck. You have to have this discussion with your tax accountant.

4) Write offs need attention. I have clients who are too conservative and some who are too aggressive in pursuing write offs. You want to be right in the middle. You need receipts – not credit card statements – to back up your claims.

And don't forget the proper paper work and planning on all amortization and depreciation. DIY filers get this one wrong quite often.

Call To Action

Readers of New Business Minnesota can receive a free 30 minutes consultation through the end of September.



Telecommunications

By Kevin McGovern

Kevin McGovern is a Minnesota Acquisition Sales Manager for CenturyLink, the third largest telecommunications company in the United States and is recognized as a leader in the network services market by technology industry analyst firms. With regional headquarters in Minneapolis, CenturyLink is an S&P 500 company and is included among the Fortune 500 list of America's largest corporations. For more information contact

Kevin at (763) 795-1071 or kevin.mcgovern@CenturyLink.com

CenturyLink gives small business advanced tools that power growth and backs that up with local experts who understands your needs, know what solutions to recommend and are there to provide support every step of the way.

Here is What Every New Business Should Know about telecommunications:

There are a lot of buzzwords going around telecommunications these days: Cloud, Fiber, VoIP... the list goes on. The most important decision you will have to make is finding a provider that has the network, technology and support for your business now and in the future, even as new buzzwords are developed.

1) Internet – Fiber, Ethernet, GPON - these are really just different methods of transport to get to the Internet. Whether your business operates locally or across the nation, you rely on staying connected with your vendors, partners and customers. From simple, off-the-shelf solutions to cus-

tomized network architecture, configuration and management, the right provider offers a range of Internet and data networking solutions that work best for your business applications.

2) The Cloud – Ask three different people what the cloud is and you'll get three different answers. The Cloud, simply defined, performs IT functions (storage, server space, computing, etc.) in offsite data centers vs. having it on your premise. This will allow your company to eliminate the high capital investment, ongoing maintenance, and labor cost. It will also allow you to adapt for growth and have business continuity in monitored, secure environment.

3) Disaster Recovery – Now that you have your business, you want to protect it. It is not just hurricanes, tornadoes, fire and other disasters that can cripple your business. There are far more common events like viruses, mis-configured networks, and power outages. Ensure your data is safe and

sound with business data protection solutions. Partner with a provider that offers critical backup and high capacity off-site secure data storage, to cloud-based recovery and continuity service – and at much lower costs than conventional redundancy solutions.

4) Voice Service – What you really have to ask yourself is what part does voice play in your company? How do you communicate with your customers, how do your customers communicate with you, and how do you communicate with your employees. Flexible, scalable and reliable business phone service that you can count on. Whether you need IP-based or traditional business phone service, the right provider will go above and beyond to ensure that you get the right technology for your needs.

5) Equipment – Whether it is phone or data equipment you might need, right telecommunications equipment can help you get the most value out of your voice and data services. You want a provider that listens to all of your business needs before providing the perfect combination of business communications equipment, service and local support to help your business grow. And you'll get it all from one company with support that goes beyond installation.

Call To Action

If you are interested in finding out the best solutions to fit your business, CenturyLink is here to help. Contact Kevin at: (763) 795-1071 or go to CenturyLink.com/business



Marketing Strategy

By Ricardo Ortizcazarin

Ricardo Ortizcazarin is President and Marketing Visionary of Cazarin Interactive, which provides digital marketing solutions for companies of all sizes that are looking to grow revenue. He can be reached at (763) 400-4555 or info@cazarin.com www.cazarin.com

Marketing is one of those things that everybody thinks they know something about. After all, every day they are exposed to it through emails, phone calls, direct mail, web ads and more.

What they don't see is the strategic thinking that goes into designing campaigns that reach them with the right message, in the right medium, at the right time that stimulates their interest to act.

For over 15 years, I've worked with small business owners to create successful marketing campaigns to grow their businesses and educate them. Based on that experience, here is What Every New and Small Business Should Know about marketing strategy:

1) Establish your value proposition. What makes you different from your competitors? Why should anyone do business with you? What do you have to offer? What makes you stand out? Is it a specific niche; you're open Saturday and Sunday?

Most owners don't know.

You find the answer by talking to your customers and listening. Don't look at the world solely from your point of view. You may think it's your great services, but if customers say it's the affordable rates, you had better make that part of your marketing message.

2) Identify which customers are best for your business. I like to describe customers as being rabbits, elks or elephants. For a detailed explanation go to www.cazarin.com/videos/

Rabbits are small budget and you need a lot of them to make a profit. Elks are the perfect customer with the highest profit with the least acquisition cost. Elephants are very large customers with large budgets that use up a lot of resources.

Know your ideal customer and focus on how many elks, rabbits and elephants you want in a month. Maybe your goal is one rabbit and three elks a month and one elephant a year. The important task is to know what you need.

3) Set goals and measure the results. Effective marketing is planning, measuring and fine tuning over time. It should be an ongoing effort, not a one shot deal.

You need a goal, like four to six new clients every month totaling a minimum of \$40,000, or a telemarketing campaign that must provide two qualified appointments monthly. This will help you set your budget.

4) Understand "Concentric Marketing." That means your website is the central pillar of your marketing. It is where you can talk in detail to your elk, elephants and rabbits about how you can meet their needs. The goal of your postcards, radio or TV spots, print ads and any additional marketing tactics is to send your prospects to the web site.

5) Work with marketing professionals. Small business owners who do it themselves often find marketing pushed aside for other pressing matters. They have no time to execute a campaign. They lose momentum and the sales pipeline shrinks.

They are better served working with a full-service marketing company that will handle all of it, from research to design, to print and implementation. Ask if they can spread costs out over time to avoid heavy upfront costs and make it more affordable and predictable. My clients appreciate that.

Call To Action

Readers of New Business Minnesota are invited to receive a one-hour free marketing consultation. To learn more call (763) 400-4555 or go to www.cazarin.com.



Merchant Services

By Carlos Monteiro

Carlos Monteiro is Regional Director of Clear Pay Financial Solutions, which provides businesses of all sizes with merchant services, including credit card, gift card processing, loyalty debit, EBT checks and ACH. To learn more about how merchant services can help your new business, call the local office at (612) 605-6453 or carlosm@clearpayfs.com

Often businesses think they're too new or too small to take credit cards. In today's marketplace, as soon as you have a customer, you'll be asked: Do you take credit cards? There are several ways your merchant account can be setup. You should have a good overall view of what is possible with pricing and technology so you'll know how to respond as you grow. Do you have the right fit for your business needs?

Here is What Every Small Business Should Know about merchant services:

1) Your customers expect you to accept electronic payments. Whether it's a credit card, debit card, EFT (Electronic File Transfer) or ACH (Automated Clearing House - or e-check), you have to be prepared to do business the way your customers want.

In fact, you should be aware that there is a gen-

eration change taking place in how people want to pay for things. If you're marketing to Generation X and Ys and Millennials; they barely know anything about checks and hardly ever carry cash. The common theme now is compliance and ability to accept Chip and Pin cards and Mobile payments (Apple Pay).

2) Your company is never too small to use merchant services. Many entrepreneurs are scared away when they hear about monthly fees, minimum volume requirements or contracts. I spend a lot of time explaining to clients that the key is to find what works best for their present needs and that may not include contracts or leases. If your business volume is up and down then ask for no monthly minimum, it is possible! Find a provider who will help you sort it all out and set your account the best way for you and maybe even

allow you flexibility if you need to change how you may need to accommodate your customers.

3) Know your terminology. To get the best rates, you need to know the difference between wholesale/interchange and bundled/tiered rates. ClearPay offers wholesale rates to all of our clients regardless of size and have access to multiple networks allowing us to pick the best options out there for you. The recommendation is often determined by your business needs. Please remember your overall fees can vary depending on whether a transaction is key entered or physically swiped.

4) Understand your statement or your quote. Ask for explanations for all discounts, surcharges or additional fees that will appear on your statement. Most people struggle with this because of the jargon and technical detail. Ask your rep for a review. You should be reviewing your account annually, so you are always getting the best value based on your changing needs. We are always open to helping you understand your current situation even if you are not one of our clients.

5) Use the technology to best fits your needs. Retail locations may need a Point of Sale system or a terminal on a high-speed connection. A service based business may only need a mobile application or a virtual terminal for flexibility. A B2B may need automated recurring billing or have the need for a customer data base for repeat business. Know what your end goal is when choosing the right product. This might be the deciding factor on how your process will be for you and your customers.



Better Business Bureau

By Dana Badgerow

Dana Badgerow is President/CEO of the Better Business Bureau of Minnesota and North Dakota, which has helped local businesses advance marketplace trust since 1912, to resolve customer complaints, promote ethical business practices, and capitalize on the trustworthy reputations they have earned from their customers. For more information, call (651) 699-1111 or visit www.thefirstbbb.org

One of the most valuable assets every business has is its reputation. All new businesses start out with a perfect one. Then customers enter the equation, and that's when the process of building trust truly begins. In today's marketplace, however, it's no longer enough to simply build your reputation. You have to constantly protect and maintain it. This is just one of the things Better Business Bureau can help you with. We offer a wide variety of programs and services that can help you with marketing, networking and building your brand. Here is What Every Small Business Should Know about BBB:

1) We are not a government agency. Founded in 1912 in Minneapolis, BBB is a nonprofit organization funded by dues-paying businesses that support our mission of advancing marketplace trust. We receive no government funding, nor are we an enforcement agency. We promote the highest standards of business ethics and conduct by encouraging self-regulation.

2) BBB connects consumers with trustworthy businesses. BBB may be known for handling

complaints (Last year we processed nearly 24,000 complaints with a 90% satisfaction rate), but the majority of our interactions with the public involve pre-purchase research. In 2014, more than 4 million BBB Business Reviews were accessed through our local website to find local, trustworthy businesses. BBB Business Reviews and online directories for local Accredited Businesses are search engine optimized, helping customers to find your company's information online with all major search engines. We provide BBB Accredited Businesses with helpful statistics on how many times (and from which ZIP codes) their BBB Business Review and online directory listings have been accessed.

3) Meeting our high standards builds trust. To earn BBB Accreditation, you must be in business at least one year and agree to several principles: advertise honestly, make good faith efforts to resolve consumer complaints, be transparent in how you do business, safeguard privacy, as well as embody integrity, truth, and trust. BBB Accreditation is an honor, and must be earned.

All businesses that apply for accreditation are thoroughly vetted.

4) BBB is a risk management tool. A century-plus worth of experience has shown us that many typical business-related issues can be avoided or successfully managed if action is taken early. We have helpful tips for businesses regarding: ethical decision making; data security; customer privacy; and alerts about fraud targeting area businesses. In addition, we offer pre-complaint assistance and mediation services to our Accredited Businesses to head off potential problems with customers.

5) Co-brand, learn and network with BBB. Accredited Businesses can use the BBB seal on their websites, vehicles and marketing materials. Our online Dynamic Seal also links directly to your BBB Business Review, as well as with our special Accredited Business Online Directory to help potential clients find you online and through BBB. To keep our Accredited Businesses informed and connected, we host monthly Focus Luncheon seminars, networking breakfast orientations, mixers, and other educational events designed to bring business leaders together to share insights, ideas and best practices.

Call To Action

Start With Trust. Start building your business's reputation and trust in our marketplace today by registering with BBB at bbb.org. To learn more about BBB and Accreditation, visit thefirstbbb.org or call (651) 699-1111.



Business Banking

By Paul Flood

Paul Flood is a Senior Vice President and Regional SBA Manager with Bremer Bank. He can be reached at: (612) 782-2822 pwflood@bremer.com Additional information regarding Bremer's business banking offerings and SBA services can be found online at Bremer.com

Business banking involves a closer relationship than you're used to with consumer banking. Outside of family, your business is one of the more important things in your life. You should bank with people you trust to care for it.

When done right, your business banker will become a trusted advisor that you consult before making major purchases, big decisions or change in strategy or tactics. In general, expect much more customer service than you are used to as a consumer banking customer.

Here's what every new business should know about banking:

1) Know what you need from your banker. Not all banks offer the same services. Do you

need deposit accounts, credit, international services, payroll processing? Do you need someone to help you make decisions on what you need or just a transactional relationship? Use a bank that best fits your needs.

2) Know what the bank needs from you. It's a two-way street. You need to provide reliable information on a timely basis so your banker can be up to speed with your business. Your banker will benefit from regularly scheduled meetings with you. Keep in mind that the bank needs appropriate lead time for many activities, such as processing a loan.

3) How well does your banker know your industry? It's important to have a banker who un-

derstands your industry and is actively involved with trade organizations and is current on the issues a particular industry is facing. By being actively involved, your banker should be able to anticipate your needs and make referrals to other professionals who focus on your industry.

4) Speed up cash flow with remote deposit and merchant services. Cash is king. Preserve it and protect it. Using remote deposit gets money into your account faster and with less hassle. With merchant services, you can accelerate collections and avoid becoming a financing source for your customers. Understanding your cash flow and cash flow requirements is critical to your success. Your banker should also be available to work with your CPA or bookkeeper to map out your cash flow needs.

5) Be open to hearing new ideas on how you can do things. Bankers generally deal with a cross section of businesses. Many businesses suffer from similar problems that have similar solutions. We are able to share ideas and solutions that have worked for others. We see a lot of transactions, problems and challenges. As a result, we've gained valuable insights. You don't have to take our advice, but staying open to new ideas increases your chances of being successful.



HR /Employee Benefits

By Susan Ellingson

Susan Ellingson, founder of Above & Beyond Benefits, is an independent licensed insurance agent with diversified certifications who works with small and medium sized business owners who need help managing their employee benefits and human resources. She can be reached at (952) 935-1133 or Susan@AboveBeyondBenefits.com www.AboveBeyondBenefits.com

Whether you're hiring for the very first time or have managed employees for years, the idea of a benefits package is simple: find a good plan that is cost effective and is attractive to employees.

The reality, however, is a lot more complex.

With increased costs for benefit plans plus the new HealthCare Reform rules and regulations, navigating the minutiae of benefit packages and compliance has become very complex and time consuming.

For a small business, efforts to grow the business could take a backseat to facing the complexity of navigating potential packages and compliance.

Using a benefits advisor to serve as a professional guide will help a small business avoid potential

roadblocks, find ways to save money, and educate employees.

Regardless of where you are in the process of employee benefits and human resources, here are some items that every small business should know:

1) Competing for/ Retaining Employees Offer attractive benefits packages that include wellness plans, rewards and incentives. That can give business owners an edge in hiring and make employees feel valued. My goal is to put together a benefits package to meet their budget and keep them competitive. You can hire better people with better packages.

2) Customized Benefits. One-size-fits-all has been replaced by customization: individual plans for employees or defined contribution plans to

cover health, dental, disability anything you want to offer. It could include a bucket of money to spend on the programs you set up. Young employees may want options that are different from more mature workers. Employers I counsel are surprised that they can afford to offer more options than they thought possible.

3) Employee Handbooks. Every business with employees should have one even if it's just a basic outline. It should establish guidelines so employees know what is expected and you could hold them accountable. Its value becomes most clear during critical events, such as employee termination or an employment-related lawsuit.

The handbook should be accompanied by thorough job descriptions for each position. If a new hire says they can do the job description and it turns out they can't, that's grounds for termination.

4) Use a Professional Guide. An advisor searches the market for products that meet the needs of your business at no additional cost. Consultants like me will help employees find the right solution. I do group presentations, phone counseling and face-to-face sessions. This is especially valuable when it comes to the ever-changing health insurance plans under the Affordable Care Act.

A benefits advisor becomes the HR face for your company and fields all benefits questions. Working with a benefits advisor ensures that you spend less time dealing with time consuming problems and more time focusing growing your business.



Virtual Office Space

By Lori Spiess

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 Minnesota Real Power 50 list 2015. Spiess, a recent cancer survivor, has a new motto: Life is short. Work someplace awesome!

She can be reached at (612) 349-2712 or lspiess@officenters.com www.virtualofficenters.com

Office is not just a place to work; it is how you choose to work. People tell me "I office out of my home" and I love to hear how that works for them. There are a lot of great reasons to office out of home: the commute is great, the dress code rocks, proximity to lunch and coffee rooms are usually just steps away, and also the economics work.

But what are some of the downsides? Separation of home and office can be challenging as well as fluctuating productivity levels. You need to be very disciplined to find the good balance of home and work in the same environment. And, I do not know about you, but there aren't a lot of people hanging around in my kitchen that can provide an inspired work atmosphere.

Over the last 30 years, I have worked with thousands of small and home based businesses

looking to maximize efficiency and minimize capital expenditures. I would like to share some of my advice with all of you:

1) Image matters. What the client sees will determine their trust level and how they will work with you long term. A solid company has a solid identity. Build your foundation with care.

2) Be safe. Remember, there are security issues when using your home address and your personal cell number. Put a layer between you by setting up a separate address and a dedicated work phone number.

3) Stay flexible. If you don't know what your new company will look like at any time down the road, do not make multi-year commitments on office space or equipment.

4) Be realistic. Some people can work virtually anywhere under the sun. For others, it's a struggle. If you need structure to be productive

or if distractions pull your focus, find options that work for you. If officing at home works, don't apologize for choosing that lifestyle. Enhance the home experience with coworking space and productive work environments. The coffee shop just does not cut it!

5) Sharing is good. Why make commitments to office equipment and long term leases? You can buy as you go and use space, furnishings and equipment as needed. It really works.

6) Never apologize. Remove the phrases "I'm just" or "We're only..." Be proud of what you do. Small businesses are the backbone of America.

7) Be successful. Get out of the house and surround yourself with successful and productive people. I know that success is contagious. Look for ways to enhance creative collaboration! Community and access help you reach your goals. Community is the difference between success and failure.

At VirtualOffiCenters we have plans as basic as a mailbox to help you get started. We offer networking, educational opportunities and collaboration to enhance your businesses. Choose a workspace solution that will work today and has the flexibility to help you grow into the future.

Call To Action

Be Inspired to Work Awesome! Stop in for a Day Pass to any of our five CoWorking Spaces. Walk-Ins welcome!



Managing Payroll

By Bernie Schwab

Bernie Schwab is a Partner, President of Spruce Valley Payroll & Services, which provides payroll services to small and medium-sized businesses. The company provides high-level and high-touch customer service for its clients. He can be reached at (952) 894-6282 or bernie@svpayroll.com www.svpayroll.com

It's not uncommon for harried new business owners to make errant assumptions. There's so much to do and so little time. Instead of finding out what something actually costs, they just assume they can't afford it.

That's especially true of payroll services. When I tell prospective clients about payroll, they say, "That's it? That's all it costs?" Once we get past that obstacle, they find there is much more to payroll than they imagined.

Here is What Every New Business Should Know about payroll:

1) Tax compliance is critical and complex. Over the decades, multiple layers of state and federal rules have sprouted up. There are continual changes in state and IRS reporting requirements.

Changes may affect things like pre-tax adjustments for retirement plans, insurance benefits, health savings accounts, garnishments and child support. One mistake will cost a lot in penalties. Some businesses fail because they don't pay their taxes on time. We have seen a small business working with another payroll provider have a \$128 tax payment balloon into over \$2,000 in penalties and interest over a nine month period. Having the right payroll partner that understands the rules and regulations is critical in paying and filing your payroll taxes correctly and on time.

2) Manage your cash flow. It's a fairly common practice for most payroll companies to impound/collect your tax monies prior to them being due to the government agencies. Depending on your

company's required deposit frequency, they may hold onto your tax money up to 90 days. Holding your tax money allows them to earn the interest on it before making the payment to the government on the actual due dates. Spruce Valley does not impound/collect your money in advance – you earn the interest on your money. Instead, we notify you when the tax is actually due and we initiate the transfer directly from your bank account to the appropriate government agencies. That gives you control of your cash flow.

3) Don't overlook quality of service. When you have payroll questions, you want immediate answers. Who picks up the phone? Is it someone at a central call center providing answers off a FAQ sheet? Do they understand your issues? Most business owners don't know what they don't know. You shouldn't have to be your own advocate. The team at Spruce Valley Payroll & Service acts as a personal advocate for our clients – we lead and guide them through every step of the payroll process.

4) Focus on your business. Ultimately, the main benefit of outsourcing payroll is to help startups focus on their core business. There is a cost of opportunity involved when you invest your time doing payroll when you could be working the phone to drive in more revenue for the growth of your business.



Choosing a CPA

By Carolyn LaViolette

Carolyn LaViolette is the Communications Manager for the Minnesota Society of Certified Public Accountants, which has more than 9,000 members. MNCPA has a referral service to help business owners and others find accounting help by ZIP code, specialty, industry and language preference. She can be reached at (800) 331-4288 or claviolette@mncpa.org www.mncpa.org

As a new business owner, you may consider hiring a professional to manage your small-business taxes. There are many options out there, from tax preparers to bookkeepers to CPAs. You may wonder, "What is the difference?" Before you send your records to someone, be sure to arm yourself with the necessary information to make a wise choice about who will handle your taxes and finances.

1) Tax preparers. "Tax preparer" is a term that some apply to anyone who does tax preparation. Paid tax preparers need to obtain a Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN) in order to complete and file someone else's taxes. There is no requirement to be a trained accountant or bookkeeper to obtain a PTIN.

Careful research and scrutiny is advised with this option. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recently launched an online directory of tax professionals with valid PTINs. This is a start, but you'll want to also verify the preparer's education and experience with the individual. The Better

Business Bureau and the Minnesota Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division are additional resources you can use to review tax preparers. More importantly, before contracting with someone, verify that the preparer plans to sign the tax return as a paid preparer.

2) Enrolled agents (EAs). EAs are licensed practitioners who specialize in taxation only. To earn their certification, EAs must pass an exam or work at the IRS for at least five years in a position that deals with the tax code. In addition, EAs must complete 72 hours of continuing education every three years. EAs also have the ability to represent a taxpayer before the IRS should an issue arise.

3) Certified public accountants (CPAs). In addition to passing a rigorous 14-hour exam, CPAs must complete 150 college credit hours (30 more than a standard bachelor's degree), earn one year of accounting experience and pass an ethics exam. Once they earn the credential, CPAs must complete 120 hours of continuing education ev-

ery three years to maintain an active certificate. CPAs are regulated by the Minnesota Board of Accountancy (BOA).

CPAs are also qualified to handle other matters of importance to small businesses, including performing audits, preparing financial statements, and setting financial goals for your business to help mitigate risk beyond tax season.

If you have a complicated tax return or ongoing financial needs, your best bet is to hire a CPA. However, if you're looking for general financial support on an as-needed basis, a tax professional/accountant supervised by a CPA may be a better value for your budget.

4) Bookkeepers. If you need someone to handle your accounts payable and accounts receivable while keeping your business checkbook balanced, then a bookkeeper may be the best fit for you. This person manages the day-to-day organization of finances. Bookkeepers generally do not know tax law, but are usually responsible for records of purchase, sales, receipts and payments.

What are your needs?

When deciding between a CPA and another tax practitioner, consider your level of need and how you plan to consult this adviser. Finding the right professional for your situation means you spend less time on taxes, and more time focusing on your growing business.

Call To Action

Looking for a CPA? To locate a professional based on specialty, industry and zip visit www.CPAMEASAP.com code