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The Monthly Resource Guide For Startup Businesses

NEW BUSINESS MINNESOTA

A photograph of three business professionals standing in front of a blue background with industrial elements. On the left is a woman with short red hair and glasses, wearing a patterned top. In the center is a man with grey hair, wearing a dark pinstripe suit and a tie. On the right is a woman with dark hair, wearing a white blazer over a black top. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

Projecting Your Image

Special Report

Your image 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 project an image that says you are up to any challenge: **Lori Spiess**, OffiCenters; **Larry Davis**, Fox Tracks Print and Marketing Solutions; and **Angel Fields**, thinkBIG Marketing.

Harness the Power of the Virtual Office

Project a Strong Image With Brand-Building Flexible Space that Offers Community, Collaborative Environment and New Opportunities.

By Lori Spiess
OffiCenters

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. And given a choice, wouldn't everyone want to work in an awesome environment.

Many large, successful companies have their fancy boardrooms, 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 one-person companies can burnish their brands with a showcase workspace like much larger companies, but at a fraction of the cost by joining a community of coworking professionals.

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

Many new businesses these days start off home-based, making a virtual office an attractive business model for the future. It is not just a low-cost means of projecting your brand image, but many of our members at OffiCenters say it has had a direct impact on their success.

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

WORK AWESOME Services

The backbone of our virtual office is the array of services that improves your productivity and enhances your image and brand. When your client calls you, we can have someone live answer the phone with your company name. People are impressed with your attention to personalization.

We have staff 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 coworking plans are catching fire is because they are very flexible. If you're looking at a 30-day commitment, you only pay for what you need. That equates to a great value!

Collaborative Community

The most significant benefit to emerge in the past few years for our 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, and Power Lunch, Wine Time, and educational seminar series for members that showcase their businesses.

We even have an app to keep members connected and up to date on events. Our holiday lunches are legendary. Our spaces are always 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 project your image and build your brand is to tell more people about what you do. We help our members do that with our B2B directory where every member gets a listing and, in return, commits to buying from their neighbors when possible. And it's on the app. A survey last year said 73 percent of our members increased their bottom line since joining OffiCenters. Now, that's impressive.

Through our monthly newsletter, we help tell



OffCenters *Continued from Previous Page*

member news by promoting what members 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 our community. We are now over 1,200 members strong!

Some members report sales increases from 40 percent to 50 percent just from being part of this community.

Two attorneys formed a partnership following a successful collaboration. And a web designer got more business after teaming up with IT and social media members to start a Google Hangout for live streaming our seminars to all six of our locations. Several speakers formed a collaborative and now share a double office. 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. Now that is how to Work Awesome.

Our coworking 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 benefits.

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. Studies show you are more productive when you are coworking with others.

Flex Space

We have a variety of spaces 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 workspace, 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. Coffee and wifi are included.

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 coworking 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 four 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 an intentional business and

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lifestyle choice.

With flexible workspace options, you won't have to work alone. 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 founder of OffCenters, has provided workspace solutions to the Twin Cities since 1981. She is an innovator, leader and motivator who provides a springboard for businesses to do their best work. Her company was awarded Global Workspace Association's Most Innovative Workspace. OffCenters recently opened a 6th location in Woodbury. Her motto: Life is short. Work someplace awesome! She can be reached at (651) 212-7111 or lori.spiess@offcenters.com www.offcenters.com

Call To Action

Stop at any of our six locations and mention this article to get a free day pass.