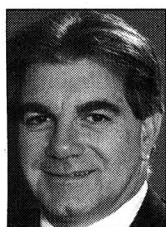


B A L T I M O R E BUSINESS JOURNAL

Vol. 24 No. 50 © 56 Pages

Tech lowers barriers to entry, and small businesses think big

Ten years ago, few technology experts could have predicted what the Internet has become today. Few could have imagined the vast dependence on e-mail, the thought of the Web becoming a worldwide auction house, or that cell phones would access tiny versions of the online world.



GROWTH STRATEGIES

JOSEPH R.
CARDAMONE

Now, a minor disruption in our communication devices and platforms makes us wonder how we ever worked without them.

Technology also makes this a great time to be in a small business. Accessibility and rapid advances of technology, coupled with changes in the traditional corporate career ladder, have spurred a change in the small business community.

We hear more and more of small business owners who compete with the "big boys" on a newly leveled playing field. From hosting their own Web sites, to accessing hardware and software that can cut down on office overhead, small businesses can operate nimbly but effectively.

A new generation of American businesses, the so-called "Web-Driven Entrepreneurs," make up 25 percent of all U.S. small businesses, according to a recent study by Warrillow and Co. These businesses are twice as likely to say that their customer base is national in scope, and, not surprisingly, twice as likely to read or publish a blog.

As consumers embrace technology, so too must small businesses to be successful. In 2005, a study by Harris Interactive found that more than a quarter of consumers say that they have become "much more accepting" of technology

over the past year. More and more are going to the Web for product information, special limited time offers and "how-to" instructions.

In many small businesses, many hats are worn — we are both the CEO and administrative assistant, and other roles in between. The goal is to spend as much time as possible being the CEO.

Efficiency is a key to success, no matter how small or ordinary the task may be. This used to come at a higher price — either in time or money. But there are plenty of examples of technology reducing that margin.

For example, small- and home-based business owners do not have to choose between buying an expensive postal meter system and standing in line at the Post Office. DYMO — a company that has long provided great solutions to small business — earlier recently introduced DYMO Stamps, which enables printing of U.S. Postal Service approved postage without a monthly fee or contract.

Additionally, advances in accounting software have made small businesses able to build and track inventory assemblies, customize their pricing levels, track job costs, create and customize business plans, create sales and expense forecasts and assess company performance trends.

It is an exciting time for small businesses. Never before has there been a greater opportunity for expansion and growth. And most of this is accomplished by the tremendous advances in Web technology.

The time is now to seize this opportunity, but always remember the little things that can make the transition and change better for you, your employees, and, most of all, the consumer.

JOSEPH R. CARDAMONE is president of the United States Federation of Small Businesses. He can be reached at 800-637-3331.