

Everyday Technology Can Increase Business Revenue

Every day, businesses are looking for that secret weapon to give them an edge against their competition. Some look for short-term boosts from special marketing programs, promotions or pricing strategies while others will place a strong emphasis on the quality of their work and value-added services for building long-term customer loyalty. Whichever path the owner or manager chooses, there are many business technologies that can be deployed to accommodate their strategy.

To begin, we need to recognize that each business is unique and the industry that it occupies has its own established practices upon which everyone seeks to create and exploit any competitive advantage at their disposal. As such, any company serious about succeeding should have a complete business plan that details the basics about the following areas of their company:

- 1) The description of the company itself
- 2) The market it competes in
- 3) The products or services it will offer
- 4) Sales and promotion methods to be used
- 5) How the internal business operations will function
- 6) Overall company financials, both current and future

Now for some basic business technology applications that can play a role to help you accomplish those tasks.

Websites

It goes without saying that websites have become a necessity for any new or existing business today. This is your storefront to the world and a "great equalizer" because even the most basic of website templates can provide you a look that can make you seem to be a much larger and more professional organization than you really are. I'm not talking about deceiving the public but instead offering you an opportunity to present yourself on your own terms, to compete against the big boys on a more even playing field.

Websites should be informative but simple, offering the potential customer or client a feel for what they can expect from your company. They can also take their time to investigate your offerings possibly leading to a deeper understanding and shortening the sales cycle to closing the deal. Initial monthly costs for hosting a website range as low as \$8-\$10 and with all the available ready-made templates for sale, you can have a professional, functional site up and running in days!

To take it one step further with some professional help, you can create more advanced websites to include shopping carts with automated payment services, showcase new product uses or options with video replays and even handle simple account management functions like answering common billing questions or online billing. All these activities can generate more revenue, ease the sales effort, cut customer servicing costs and even create more customer loyalty. Costs do increase with the additional complexity but always remember that the return in the long-run will definitely pay back multiples on your initial investment.

Email

You cannot mention websites without also mentioning email. Email is still the number one traffic activity on the Internet today and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. Email addresses are composed of a user name and a domain name, i.e. *username@yourdomainname.com*. The email address is another equalizer in that a customized domain name adds a sense of business professionalism to any presentation of your company to the public whether it's on a business card, website or advertisement. Think of your email address as just one more marketing tool in your business arsenal and it's so simple that there is no excuse for not having your own custom business email address.

Today, if you create a website, you normally also choose a custom domain name like *www.yourdomainname.com* in which you can point customers to your site. As a part of that web hosting company's offering, almost all will offer some sort of email accounts/boxes included with the website in which you can create, send and read emails using that same domain name. Email provides that very important communications link with your customers as well as your own vendors and suppliers. It's an "I'm open for business 7 days, 24 hours a day" sign that increases your responsiveness to clients and can actually increase your productivity if managed correctly.

CRM and POS Systems

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Point of Sale (POS) systems can be a very important component of any plan to grow your business. CRM systems are designed to capture information about your customers and provides you feedback to tailor a marketing plan that can specifically address their special needs. Remember the purpose of the CRM is to build customer loyalty by knowing what that customer wants and reminding them of why they bought from you in the first place!

CRM's range from "off-the-shelf" versions to those that are literally built specifically to your company's requirements. Some of the more common CRM packages that people might recognize include ACT, Goldmine or Microsoft's upcoming CRM v3.0, but there are literally hundreds to choose from on the market today. CRM's can be customized to analyze buying patterns based on quantity, price, or product type and compared those to your industry specific standards while even the most basic CRM should at minimum notify you to call, mail or email a customer once a preset event (i.e. a birthday or anniversary) has been triggered.

POS systems on the other hand are much more than cash registers today; many can now tie directly into a CRM or financial accounting packages like Quicken

and Peachtree. They are the means by which you can enter customer information for CRM purposes, tracking your business's inventory for financials reports, as well as showing valuable marketing and purchasing trends for specific items sold by time of day, week, month/season and year.

Both the CRM and POS systems have various software and hardware component requirements. They can be as elaborate as the information you want to collect and the cost will definitely increase with complexity so careful planning is very important with any CRM/POS decision.

Handheld Computers and Mobile Phones

This last item seems to be a fast growing area with today's mobile workers becoming more informational-based, requiring access to documents, email and the web while out of the office. For those that are on the front-lines today, it has become a recognized necessity to always be able to connect to the office in one form or another.

Mobile phones today cannot just be simply used for voice service, but must be multifunctional, carrying a camera, your calendar, contact list and means to browse the Web. Technology products like Microsoft's Windows Mobile Pocket PC/Smartphone platform and RIM's Blackberry devices have made it possible to be away from the office and still keep connected to work.

Mobile service providers and software/hardware developers are continuing to develop products and service plans to accommodate these new mobile office users. Coming later this year, Microsoft is launching an update to their Exchange 2003 Server software and Windows Mobile platform for both Pocket PCs and Smartphones that will add even more security and connectivity with office than ever before. You can expect more innovation and fierce competition in this industry segment for many years to come.

Closing

It is important to point out that the purpose of this article was not to be an "end-all, be-all" on business technologies. My purpose was to help you begin considering some of the basics and building on them. There are many Chamber members, including accountants, computer networking companies and marketing/advertising firms with the necessary skills to help you chart the course that's right for you and your business.

Remember, it doesn't matter if you own the business or you're a manager in the department of a much larger company, the items we've discussed are applicable to any business operation. It is important to develop your own business plan, devise a strategy in which you can be competitive and then successfully implementing it. Business technologies are another tool in your competitive arsenal that you need to consider!



Article written by:
Kent Lanum,
with KentCo
Consulting,
LLC

**For information on becoming a member of the
Southern Indiana Chamber
contact Angel at 945-0266 or angel@sicc.org.**

Ribbon Cutting Held

The Southern Indiana Chamber assisted its member Webster University with a ceremonial ribbon cutting for the Grand Opening of their new location at 1031 Zorn Avenue in Louisville. Webster University is a private, nonprofit, accredited University that offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs in many fields including business, computer science, psychology, communications, international relations, science, education, fine and performing arts, and liberal arts. The Zorn Avenue location serves the Southern Indiana and Louisville region.



Pictured L to R: Front row: George Billings, Regional Alumni Dev. Officer; Dr. Jim Moore Student Advisor; Kim Romines Representative; Randy Wright, Associate VP; John Feiock, Senior Director; Bob Hess, Faculty Coordinator; Barbara McCreight, and Marlyn Roach Secretaries. Back row: Ron Hess, Faculty Coordinator; Tammy Burke, Community Relations Coordinator; and Brian Daly, Instructor.

Necessary Information

- Prizes:
1st, 2nd, & 12th - Gross & Net
- Challenges:
Longest Drive & Closest to the Pin (Men & Women)
Longest Putt
- Added Opportunities
"in Vegas"**
- Mulligans: \$5/each, limit 4 - may not be used on Hole-In-One
- Poker Golf - "Best Hand" wins a great prize sponsored by Champion Sports Tours - \$20 a game
- Golf Scratch-off - Lowest score wins! \$5/card \$100 cash

Sponsors

- Koetter Construction
 - AML
- Clark Memorial Hospital
- Deming, Malone, Livesay & Ostroff, CPA's
 - Hughes Group
 - Caesars Indiana
- K M Stemler Company, Inc.
- Heartland Payment Systems
 - McCauley Nicolas & Co., CPA's
- Wooded Glen Retreat & Conference Center
- Southern Indiana Rehab Hospital

12th Annual Chamber Golf Scramble

Golf - Vegas Style!!

It will be like no other year. . . .

Friday, August 26, 2005

**Covered Bridge Golf Course
Sellersburg, Indiana**

Hole Sponsorships Available \$250

Hole-In-One Sponsored by

SLONE SUZUKI

Registration Fee: \$150 per person (Green Fees * Cart Fee * 2 Drink Tickets * Lunch * Gifts)

Choose Flight:

Morning
Registration 7:15 a.m.
Shotgun Start: 8 a.m.

Afternoon
Registration 12:15 p.m.
Shotgun Start: 1 p.m.

I'd like to sponsor a hole

Company	Phone:
Player Name	Handicap
Player Name	Handicap
Player Name	Handicap
Player Name	Handicap

- Feel free to make copies and pass along
- Make check payable to SICC and return with registration to: Southern Indiana Chamber, 4100 Charlestown Rd., New Albany, IN 47150, Attn: Tonya Fischer
- Fax to SICC at 812-948-4664: Questions, call 812-945-0266
- REGISTER ON-LINE and pay with PayPal at www.sicc.org

Charge my: VISA Mastercard
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Card# _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____