Technology Tips Help Small And Midsize Companies Gain Greater Productivity With Fewer Resources

(NAPSA)—Ten years ago, Coffee Bean International Inc., a small gourmet coffee business with 70 employees, struggled to compete with larger coffee manufacturers, such as Starbucks Corp. CBI was ready to grow, but didn't have the resources. By investing in new technologies and effectively utilizing existing systems, CBI increased annual revenue by $10 million, while adding only 15 employees.

"In order to grow, we needed to be able to serve large businesses," said Bob Sharp, president of CBI. "Technology helped put us on equal footing with sophisticated, high-technology companies. As a result, we successfully secured Nordstrom and Chevron as customers."

To handle increased orders, CBI implemented Microsoft Windows 2000 Server, enabling it to consolidate hardware and fulfill orders more quickly and efficiently. Similarly, CBI used Microsoft Windows XP for critical systems including accounting, scheduling and database development, which improved the speed and efficiency of applications and made customer information more easily and quickly accessible.

Like CBI, many companies are challenged to increase revenue without spending much money. Executives are often tempted to cut spending to control costs, but experts believe they should seek technology to boost productivity, which saves money. When evaluating how to maximize current resources, you should consider the following:

• **Set a technology plan.** Form a technology committee including employees from all levels in the company to research, evaluate and recommend technology solutions each quarter. Use their feedback to evaluate short- and long-term needs and create a timeline for training, upgrades and new equipment. Employee participation will better align technology and business needs, which can increase sales and productivity.

• **Enhance existing systems.** Understand the capabilities of your current technologies. For

Like Coffee Bean International, small and medium businesses can use technology to compete with large companies.

example, many copiers can print, fax, and scan documents, streamlining processes and increasing efficiency. Jim Snodgrass, president of technology solutions provider Phoenix PC Networking, knows that smaller companies benefit from multifunction technology. "My customer used the Microsoft Small Business Server to create a Web site on which clients could enter sensitive information, access account data and e-mail personnel directly," Snodgrass said. "Accuracy of information and employee efficiency improved."

• **Use available resources.** Consider hiring a technology provider to manage software and computer systems, just as you would hire an attorney or accountant. Experts provide personalized service, from planning and deployment to customization and ongoing support. Another option is to attend a seminar specifically designed for small businesses. For example, Microsoft Corp. offers more than 780 free technology seminars nationwide to small and medium-sized businesses, which provide opportunities to learn how technology increases productivity while saving money. Visit http://www.msbigday.com/ or call (877) 435-7638 for information.