

Small Business News & Notes

Using The Internet To Help Small Business Succeed

(NAPSA)—The nation's 25.5 million small businesses are making headlines as e-business entrepreneurs. Despite the dot-com downturn, small business e-commerce revenue is expected to grow to \$1.3 trillion by 2003, according to the Small Business Administration (SBA).

Creating a successful small business on the Internet takes work, just like any business success does. However, there are services for all levels of technological expertise. Even entrepreneurs with little or no computer experience have the potential to thrive online.

Here are some tips from the experts at Bigstep, an online service center for small business success:

Build it.

- Create a plan for the type of product or service you want to offer via the Internet.

- Determine your sales needs. Are you selling something? Do you need e-commerce capabilities? Do you need to create or update an online catalog? Do you need an easy way to track sales?

Get them to come.

- Consider marketing tools that drive traffic to a Web site, like registering with search engines or using auction sites as sales channels. For example, Bigstep's Search Engine Manager is an awareness creation marketing tool that gives members a broad reach as well as focused, targeted visibility—submitting members' sites to over 100 search engines.

- Promote yourself offline too. Reach out to community papers or cable TV shows. Bigstep member Debbie Patt of Clarendon Cheesecakes (www.clarendoncheesecakes.com) put her Web site on a magnetic sign on the



Online services offer useful tools to build and maintain valuable customer relationships.

side of her car. Once when Debbie was stuck in a two-hour traffic jam she came home to over 400 orders!

Keep them coming back.

Online success can be measured by the amount of "stickiness" your Web site has—the ability to keep a customer coming back again and again.

- Build online relationships by creating an e-mail newsletter, sending it out monthly or bi-weekly.

- Match up your e-mail address with your domain name—it presents a very professional appearance in communication with your customers, reinforcing their confidence in your business.

- Your Internet business can grow as quickly or as gradually as you would like it to.

- As your customer base increases, you can test various communication tools to see what works and what doesn't.

Services such as Bigstep offer members control over a variety of easy-to-use tools and services designed to enable small businesses to grow and succeed online.

For more information, visit www.bigstep.com.