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by Jennifer Giarrantano

Internet users are the cowboys and cowgirls of today's Wild West according to Eric Klein. "You have to take care of yourself like they did back then; there is no one marshaling the traffic." An expert in Internet hosting and security, Klein calls the global highway a lawless frontier. "If someone from outside the United States does something to your Web site or system, there is no law enforcement to turn to. You have to protect yourself."

Klein is founder and managing partner of the web site design company, eAirCommunications, LLC and eDataCenter, LLC, which hosts corporate servers in northwest Atlanta. He has worked in various areas of information technology – storage technology, systems integration, project management, messaging platforms and business continuity planning – longer than the Internet has been in popular use.

When Klein needed help drawing up a pro forma to interest potential investors in his data center in 2005, he turned to Drew Tonsmeire at the Kennesaw State University SBDC for assistance. "The SBDC is a good corporate citizen," he says. "Their support and advice was invaluable."

Q: What IT questions do small businesses ask you most often?

A: Small businesses are most concerned about their ability to be online all the time: 24/7. When a storm knocks the power or a connection out, the business can lose its access to e-mail, the Internet and even to important files. Look for a remote data facility that offers secure tunneling, an encrypted line and an Internet connection that would allow a company to access its servers and continue its work. Point-to-point access is often requested by larger or more data-intensive companies, because they need speed. These companies need a secure, dedicated fiber optic cable between themselves and their data facility.

Q: What about online security?

A: E-mail spam is a major security concern. When your web site is hosted by a major hosting company – one that hosts hundreds of thousands of web sites – you have no idea who is sitting on the same piece of hardware your company is on. A hardware neighbor is already past the firewall and all of your security software. If this neighbor is a hacker, they can spam your company's site and capture its e-mail addresses. Look for a data center that is particular about the companies it hosts and will monitor them to make sure they're not doing anything improper.

Q: What about computer viruses?

A: Most viruses are picked up from often legitimate, yet unprotected web sites that contain drive-by viruses. These sites have been "violated" by a hacker who has dumped a virus onto the site, and the company hosting it may not know.

We wanted to see how quickly hackers work. Within 28 seconds of putting out a test server, a hacker from New Zealand was trying to get into it. Data centers that care will use virus, hacking and intrusion detection hardware and software that monitors the site to make sure no one is hacking in or out.

Q: Are there other high-priority IT concerns.

A: Secure offsite storage is the rule for many companies, yet many break the law and don't even know it. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act requires public companies to have secure offsite storage for all of their information. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, or HIPAA, has the same rules for health care and related firms.

Secure offsite storage does not mean putting the information on a CD, laptop or USB drive and taking it home at night, actions that end up in the news when thousands of identities

Business Plan Supports Major Expansion of Albany Nursery

by Jennifer Giarrantano

Sales at Richard Spencer's newly expanded garden center and landscape design business, Destinations in Gardening, are right on target. "We have seen some effect from the economy," he says, "but people may garden even more when the economy is bad."

Going green thumb is one way that many people are choosing to go back to the basics. Spencer had to master another basic – the business plan – when he found a partner and decided to move his 24-year-old Albany-based nursery and showroom, the Mossy Oak Garden Center – now known as DIG, from its quarter-acre lot to a 20-acre site in Leesburg, just outside the city.

"We were a micro business and were doing really well, but had bigger dreams than that," he says. "We wanted to expand the landscaping and retail lines we'd been experimenting in over the years and needed space that would allow it. We knew the market would support the improvements we wanted to make. We also wanted to own the property we were on."

Spencer says he knew it was the right time to expand about two years ago when he met Greg Fowler, who was extremely knowledgeable about plants and agrichemicals and was interested in becoming a partner. They began immediately to develop a business plan and search for a new location. Spencer's CPA and another friend who knew about the SBDC's Albany office suggested they contact SBDC consultant David Dunn for help writing their plan.

"I had never developed a formal plan and presented it to a bank before," says Spencer. "I understood what was needed, but also knew that we needed someone to guide us through this significant decision-making process and all of the paperwork. It was a lot easier to work with David, who helped us through the process."

"Richard and his team are good people to work with," says Dunn. "They're very knowledgeable about what they're doing and very competent in going from a very small retail



“The banks were impressed. They said it was one of the best plans they had seen...”

operation to a larger one.” He helped them work through the details of their plan – particularly the sales projections – and found it “a pretty big project in terms of numbers.”

When he researched garden center industry averages and turnover rates, Dunn found that the inventory DIG had planned to hold was not large enough to justify their projected sales levels. The final plan showed that the business would support an inventory three times larger than originally estimated and a loan amount up to two times larger. Spencer took the plan to the bank and successfully secured the financing his company needed to grow.

"The banks were impressed," says Spencer. "They said it was one of the best plans they had seen, that it made a lot of sense. This made a great difference in our bank relationship as we were putting things together. And the SBDC was absolutely wonderful. We couldn't have asked for better friends through that whole process." Information is available on the company's web site: www.destinationsingardening.com.

"People have a tendency not to want to do a business plan because it's a lot of work," says Dunn. "The plan is critical to start-up companies, so many people think that's all they're for – for banks and investors.

"However, existing companies that develop business plans will gain important insights into their operations. In fact, it wouldn't hurt to sit down and review your business plan every quarter to see if your company is on track with its projections," he says.

"It's important to go back to the basics."



From left to right: Rodney Wilson, Dept. Manager; Richard Spencer, Owner; Janie Williams, Retail Manager; Ruth Miller, Bookkeeper; Tina Fowler, Owner; Greg Fowler, Owner. Not pictured: Pat Marley, Dept. Manager

Scott Manley Named "Consultant of the Year" by Georgia SBDC Network

Scott Manley, business consultant with the Valdosta State University SBDC, recently received the SBDC's "2008 Consultant of the Year" award. The award is based on a consultant's accomplishments during the year which includes his/her work with the business community, program development, publications, presentations, and professional development.

When presenting the award, Allan Adams, state director, said, "Since joining the SBDC in 1998, Scott has become highly respected, not only in the Valdosta area but across the state. He is also known for his enthusiasm and eagerness to try innovative consulting and teaching approaches to best meet the needs of the small business community. He is a visible leader in the Georgia SBDC Network and clearly represents the best we hope to offer in commitment and professionalism."

Other awards presented during the Georgia SBDC Network's "Consultant of the Year" banquet were:

2008 Best Continuing Education Program: This award is given to faculty for developing an outstanding continuing education program. The award went to Bob Erwin of the International Trade Center, for his work on Export-U.com,

an international business training web site. Export-U.com contains a user-friendly series of streaming webinars that target new or novice exporters and people who need quick 24/7 answers to practical trade questions.



Allan Adams and Scott Manley

2008 Outstanding Project of the Year: This award went to a group of people involved with the Portability Grant that was awarded by the U.S. Small Business Administration to the Georgia SBDC Network to provide assistance to those affected by the closings of Forts McPherson & Gillem and the Ford & GM auto assembly plants. The main focus of the grant was to provide training to at least 100 people pursuing entrepreneurship as a new career option. Receiving the award were: Lloyd Atkins, Erica Bracey, Bernie Meineke, and Peter Rassel of the Georgia State University SBDC; Sharon Macaluso and Bob Thiele of the DeKalb office; Susan Caldwell of the Gwinnett office; Kyle Hensel of the Clayton State University SBDC; Lydia Jones of the Kennesaw State University SBDC; and Beth Melnik of the state office.

Marketing in a 2.0 World

by Suzanne Barnett

It feels like marketing has been changing at the speed of light in the last couple of years. Technology has evolved and with it new tools have been developed that allow business owners to communicate better, faster and more intimately than ever with their target markets. This is a good thing for those who know how to use it to their advantage. It can be a bad thing for those who do not.

So what kind of tools are we talking about in a 2.0 world? That would be digital and social media. This includes things like Blogs, Wiki, Facebook, YouTube, Consumer Generated Media, Twitter, LinkedIn, PURLs (personalized urls), podcasts, and mobile marketing, to name but a few. And what we know about it today is going to change tomorrow. But the premise for using this type of media is the same as the old familiar kinds such as print ads, TV, radio and the like. Always match the media and the message to the strategy you are seeking to implement. And always, always match the strategy to the overarching goal for the business. If you stick to those two simple rules, you will have no trouble navigating the 2.0 world. For Baby Boomers like me, it is great to know that at least one thing hasn't changed!

When you begin planning your social media strategy, I recommend using a model developed by Forrester Research. The model is called **P.O.S.T.** and helps you remember to consider the important elements necessary for a successful digital-centered marketing strategy.

P is for People. Know the capabilities of your audience before launching a campaign. Don't start without thinking about this. Or better yet, do a bit of research and find out.

O is for Objectives. What do you want to accomplish? Are you starting an application to collaborate with customers, or to listen to them, or to energize them to market virally for you? Decide on the objective before picking a technology. Then figure out how you are going to measure it.

S is for Strategy. What is going to be different as a result of doing this? Imagine what the endpoint will be. When you do that, you will know where to begin.

T is for Technology. Choose the technology when you have made an honest effort with the above mentioned elements. You can choose with more confidence and less anxiety about wasting time and money.

Marketing in the 2.0 world can be fun, exciting and rewarding for you, your firm and your customers.

Scott Blackstock Named Georgia's Small Business Person of the Year



Terri Denison and Scott Blackstock

Scott Blackstock is a true entrepreneur with remarkable achievements in business development, product innovation and community service. After graduating from Georgia Tech in 1979, he operated several successful businesses for over 20 years in his hometown of Thomaston, Georgia. In 2003, Blackstock built his first Tidal Wave Auto Spa car wash in Riverdale. His car wash business, which started with two part-time employees and one location, has grown to almost 100 full and part-time employees and 11 car washes, with the 12th set to open in June. The company uses modern water-reclamation methods to minimize the impact on community water use. Scott Blackstock was nominated for this award by Lori Auten, area director of the Columbus office of the Georgia SBDC Network.

Other SBDC-nominated award recipients are: Zaheer Faruqi of Aventure Aviation, Regional Champion Award; Silah Williams, Secured Financial Group LLC, Financial Services Champion Award; Glenda Yvette Hicks, CPA, Women in Business Champion; and Jeff Noser, Jeff's Pool & Spa Service, Young Entrepreneur of the Year.

Redundancy, Speed and Security Top IT Concerns for All Businesses (continued from page 1)

are leaked. A good system will encrypt the information at its source on the business site, then send the files to an offsite vault where they're saved every night and archived.

Klein suggests a number of easy things small businesses can do to protect their companies from intruders. "First, invest in good antivirus software. It doesn't have to be expensive. We buy antivirus software that's free to the home user," he says. Second, keep up with all the software updates for your operating system. And most importantly, use your business computer for business and a personal computer for your personal use. "Many of the emails shared among friends and families have things attached to them that you wouldn't want to have associated with your business," he suggests.

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