

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1 JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2008

Technology and the Small Business

In the past ten years thousands of new technology tools, software solutions, web solutions and products have emerged and changed the way people and business interact. Some of us have engaged these new technology marvels with bravado...others have simply chosen to utilize these technology advancements to enhance their current lifestyle. What does this all mean? As a person we can choose what technology products we want in our lives. Unless, the business you work for decides to use more technology products or tools in your work environment. As an employee, you are obligated to try and use a new technology solution. In a medium to large corporation employees are familiar with changes in their technology environments. For a small business and the people who like working in a small business environment, this type of change is not necessarily embraced. Sometimes, small business people are not even aware that products or solutions are available to them.

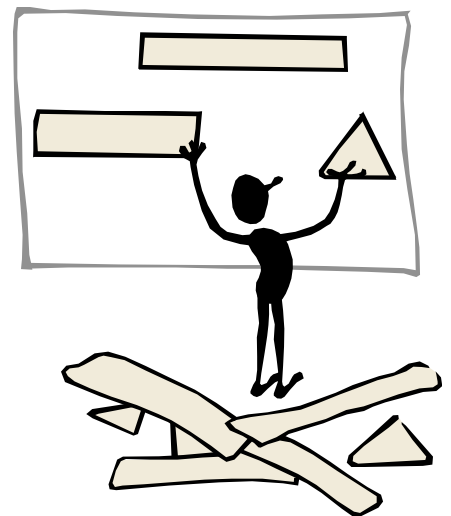
Recently, Ted Wendel and Karl Wondrak met with a two person company looking for a "better way" to manage their business operations. Ted suggested they investigate commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) tools or application solutions available in their industry. Both of them remarked that their industry is small and really there were no specific applications they had heard of for their type of busi-

ness. Ted smiled and asked if they had searched the web for any solutions. They both remarked that neither of them had even considered the web as a source for their specific needs.



In a few days Ted found several web based and server based solutions that definitely could offer solutions to manage any business operations more efficiently. One company, Starta Development (<http://www.startadevelopment.com>), provided a web based solution for a reasonable cost. This solution could be utilized by any company needing a better way to manage project based implementations with lots of documentation and interface also with multiple outside entities. The solution could effectively manage a lawyers office, as well as, residential, commercial or apartment developers. The more we studied the Starta Development solution, the more we began to realize how this web based solution could benefit a variety of small to medium size corporate environments.

The World Wide Web has changed the marketplace and made products and services available to everyone anywhere. All a person needs is access and a creative mind to think of different ways to manage their business operations. In a small or medium business environment, these new tools can be utilized without a need for new computers, software or extensive development requirements. At the same time, a company will benefit from enhancements without paying for additional maintenance fees. Once you select an online software company, the setup time and cost is usually minimal. All you really need is training on how to use the software. This type of online service provider has been referred to as an application service provider (ASP), Software as a Service (SaaS) or On Demand computing.



Continued on Page 2

CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

So, why are some small or medium size companies fearful of such solutions? The answer probably lies somewhere between acceptance of change and reluctance to adapt to a new technology environment. There is also a concern of working with a company who maybe out of state, or possibly, out of the country. People like working with people they can talk too, meet with and develop a relationship with on a one on one basis. When you work with another company in a different city or state, you are limited at first with using the telephone and email for communication. Several years ago, with the emergence of online shopping, people were at first reluctant to "buy" over the internet. Now, it has become quite acceptable especially if you purchase brand name products, or need a specialty product which is not available locally in stores.



As a business owner considering the need to enhance their operations, technology environment, sales market, or any functional entity in their business environment...the plethora of online business solutions is something to consider. This change could dramatically improve and change their business model for success which they never considered. For example, in 1997 a small sporting goods

company in Missouri decided to investigate the opportunity to develop an online catalogue of their products. They built a web site and advertised this new site in several outdoor magazines. Eleven years later, they have moved from the small retail outlet to a 150,000 square foot facility. They are now making sales and sending shipments all over the world. The tremendous increase in sales revenue dramatically changed their business model. Besides their online catalogue of products, they now own several companies which provide products for the sportsmen and sports-women around the world. This all started with a small business owner who wanted to improve their operations and sales market. I am sure they never envisioned the outcome which derived from their willingness to try a new technology.

As a business owner where should you begin? If you have the time, a web search is a good place to begin the exploration. If you do not have the time, you can have your staff perform the investigation. The next option is to hire a consultant you trust to begin the exploration and investigation of what is available. It does not matter which way you begin, the key to a successful investigation is dependent upon a clear strategy of *what* you want to accomplish. For example, if you're looking for ways to improve the processes in operations, you need to define and document business process first. There maybe simple changes in the process that could dramatically change both efficiency and provide cost savings. A qualified and experienced business process analyst can perform the analysis faster than usually expected. Then, when you review online applications and their functionality you can compare what you want, with what exists and how the application can support your strategy.

The idea that a small or medium size business could utilize new online technology solutions is not a new concept. For some it is simply their willing-

ness to embrace a new approach. If you are interested in learning more about how you can benefit from an online solution, please contact the MINCON Group for a free consultation.

Karl E. Wondrak
kwondrak@mincongroup.com

