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Technology levels the playing field



E-BIZ

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I have been an entrepreneur since 1990. I left a large public accounting firm after a round of mergers, having determined not to trust my career and my fate to a group of anonymous executives in a boardroom somewhere. Instead of seeking another job, I decided to establish my own consulting firm, and haven't looked back since.

As business activities expanded in the early years, I soon found that I needed some help, so my wife quit her job and joined me in the home office. Today, the business consists of a lot of consulting, speaking and writing. We work out of perhaps the ultimate wired home — it even has a local area network. I am, I suppose, the only guy in the neighbourhood with a computer network jack on the patio.

When establishing this small business, one of the first decisions made was that technology would be a key method to ensure its survival. And my experience through the past eight years has left me with a deep appreciation that the effective use of technology by a small business can play an extremely significant role in its success.

When it comes right down to it, technology is levelling the playing field for small businesses in a way that is unprecedented. The combination of laser printers, fax machines, personal computers, the Internet, hand-held organizers, sophisticated telephone technology, cellphones and countless other innovations have provided small businesses an opportunity to act, think and look as professional as their larger counterparts.

Not only that, small businesses can as work with an efficiency and low costs on a global basis in a way that has never been seen before.

My own experience is bearing this out. I'm winning new clients through the Internet, and I generate my own colour brochures. I produce my own promotional videos and distribute them on CD-ROM and on-line. I've saved most of the electronic mail messages sent and received since 1984, thus building a powerful personal knowledge resource.

I've mastered the skill of "just-in-time knowledge," meaning I can learn about anything at any time. With the Internet, I've become global in such a way that would have been a dream just a few years ago. Just last weekend, a fellow in Japan bought one of my books from my on-line store.

Technology has not only been powerful, it has been extremely empowering. No longer do I have to waste hours in a traffic jam early in the morning or late in the day; that time is much better spent being productive in my home office. And the lifestyle implications are enormous — I probably get to spend more time with my two young children than most other fathers. My kids are growing up with me as an integral part of their life, a fact for which I credit technology.

I'm a wired entrepreneur, and I'm having a ball.

When asked to undertake a column about the use of technology within small business, I jumped at the chance. I am convinced that technology will help to make the 21st century the era of small business.

Through this column, I plan to take you on a voyage through some of the most effective technologies and tools to enhance your own small business activities. There will be practical guidance based on my own experience, as well as insight into the "big picture" so that you'll understand the opportunity before you.

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