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Entrepreneurs must master on-line research



E-BIZ

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Some time ago, I came across a quote from futurist Lewis Perelman: "Learning is what most adults will do for a living in the 21st century."

It is a statement that should be adopted with a vengeance as the founding philosophy for any small-business owner. In fact, it provides guidance on the type of skill that we should be prepared to master to ensure our success, regardless of the nature of the business: on-line research.

Think about what is happening in the economy. It is characterized by an increasing reliance on small business. The latest recession has made many big organizations unwilling to hire full-time staff. They know that the severance packages for the next recession will be excessive.

Yet they have no reluctance to hire people on a part-time or contract basis. As a result, many of us find ourselves working as consultants, offering our knowledge and skills to a hungry corporate sector.

Any entrepreneurs involved in this type of relationship with a number of big-business clients have no doubt discovered that they are providing services in areas where they may never have dreamed they would be involved. The nature of the entrepreneur today means scrambling from situation to situation, project to project, contract to contract. In order to survive, they've learned how to learn — they have developed the capability to take any topic or issue, and become conversant with it as quickly as possible.

That's where the Internet comes in. I'm convinced that those who learn to harness its riches as a research tool will be the real entrepreneurial success stories of the next century, particularly as the economy and the world around us become more complex.

I've been involved in situations where in order to win or produce a client project, I've had to immediately immerse myself in an industry and the issues that surround it. I've had to learn, as quickly as possible, all I can about new technologies and new ways of doing business.

I've had to prepare myself to undertake "just-in-time knowledge," and have adopted a mindset that I'll use the Internet as a key ally. To do so, I've invested a lot of time learning how to do effective research on-line.

There are many people who complain that they can never find what they are looking for on the Internet. But they have little right to protest. Ask them about their methods, and they'll sheepishly admit they spend but a few minutes looking for something before giving up.

They'll say they never read the help screens on the search engines they use in order to learn how to do a more targeted search. They have never invested more than a few hours to learn how to effectively search on-line, and they dismiss the whole thing is a waste of time.

They have an astounding impatience with the wired world that will never allow them take true advantage of the bountiful resources on the Internet. The information is out there — those who know how to discover it and interpret it will excel in the new economy.

Research is paramount to everything the entrepreneur does, and that extends far beyond the Internet. Entrepreneurs should take the time to venture into the reference section of their local libraries, and discover the wealth of information that can used for marketing, business planning, market research or other purposes.

If learning is what many of us will do for a living in the next century, we had better take the time to truly learn how to learn.

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