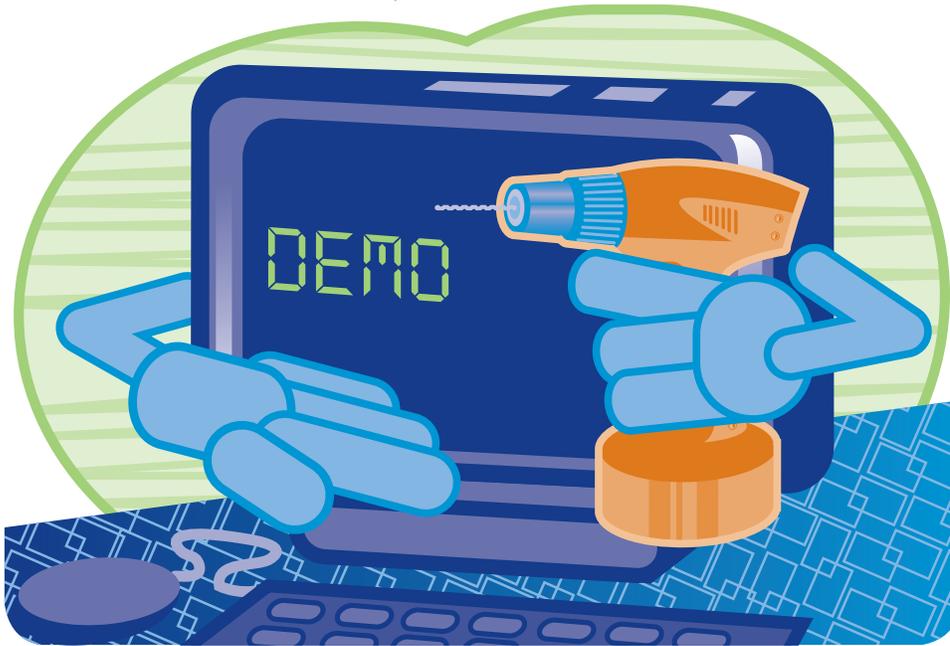


GROW your business



CONTENTS

08/2008

1 Recorded Product Demos
– Make Product Come Alive

2 Ask Not What You Can
Do For Your Accountant ...

3 Someone Stole ...
My Business!

4 Tips For Writing
An Employee Handbook

MEMORABLE QUOTATION

The reason why worry kills more people than work is that more people worry than work.

– ROBERT FROST

Recorded Product Demos – Make Product Come Alive

Turning website visitors into customers is more likely if they can get a feel for what your product looks like and offers. Recorded demos are a way of providing attention grabbing product display and demonstration 24/7 without you needing to leave the office.

New development software makes it possible to create DIY product demos relatively easily and inexpensively. These days most of the challenge lies in deciding the storyline, creating interesting graphics and developing navigation links through the demo so as to make it an easy-to-operate and enjoyable experience for the prospect. For the business that doesn't want to go it alone, an agency can be hired to design and create a recorded product demo.

Recorded product demos can be produced using a variety of software technologies ranging from the humble PPT presentation through to complete video+voice productions. Real estate firms make considerable use of the 'roving camera' technique to create virtual walk-throughs of their properties. DEWALT, a manufacturer of power tools, kept production costs down by using existing marketing copy and photos. In conjunction with Flash animations and the use of callouts to point out the exterior and interior features of their products, they developed simple yet informative and attractive recorded demos of 160 of their products. They also allow end-users to interact with the product via 360-degree rotation and zoom capabilities. Destination Lighting displays their range of residential lighting fixtures and home accessories by allowing visitors to take a virtual tour of a home online. Moving through the different rooms in their Open House you can visualize how different types of lighting fixtures provide light and atmosphere and check out their full product range.

New development software makes it possible to create DIY product demos relatively easily and inexpensively.

FIVE TIPS FOR CREATING A COMPELLING RECORDED PRODUCT DEMONSTRATION

1. **Keep your audience and purpose in mind:** don't make the mistake of confusing a demo with a training session. Each recorded product demo should be created with one particular purpose and audience in mind. If the intent is to market to customers, then the message will be about how the product works and how it will meet their need. If you serve a diverse range of customers, each of which might be looking for particular features and benefits that would suit them, then create a demo for each by adding customized information to a generic version.
2. **Keep the design flexible:** if sufficient thought is put into the development of the script it



THE DASH GROUP

BUSINESS CONSULTING

RAN ONE – making business advisory simple

may be possible to re-purpose the demo for different audiences with only slight modifications to the text or graphics. In this way the basic customer oriented presentation could easily and cheaply be re-purposed to suit sales training, reseller information or a trade show display.

3. Keep it usable: be aware of the demands your demo is going to make on the technology employed by your target audience. Shockwave and other browser plug-ins can produce powerful multimedia effects, but computer novices are hesitant about downloading and configuring them. Some media are so bandwidth hungry they put hi-tech demos out of reach of Net users with older computers. New browsers or browser versions may not support an older downloadable demo, so it's critical to check how your demos behave by testing them across versions and as upgrades are introduced.

4. Capture prospect information: people who have taken the time to watch a recorded product demo presumably are in the market for the product. Don't let the opportunity slip away with the end of the demo. In the demo include an option for them to request further details, have you call them personally, or put them on your mailing list. If they take up any of these offers you have a hot prospect.

5. Don't demand too much of the prospect's time: regardless of how intrinsically interesting a product is or how engaging the demo, there is a definite limit to the demand on a prospect's time it should make. The demo sets the stage for a purchase — other information that might be of interest can be made available elsewhere on the site as fact sheets, white papers and case studies. For a generic product a presentation of 3 minutes or so is about right. If the product is complex or high cost, 10-15 minutes could be justified so as to adequately explain the product and build confidence in the prospect.

Engaging prospects with rich media and video pays off. Virtual product demos have been successful in improving conversion rates on those sites that use them.

Ask Not What You Can Do For Your Accountant ...

For many SME owners tax time represents the beginning and end of their contact with an accountant each year. Other SME owners have discovered that their accountant can offer much more. A good accountant is aware of the wider economic, legal and financial environment affecting their client's business, as well as being acquainted with its key drivers of revenues and costs. These businesses make extensive use of their accountant as a business advisor whose knowledge they can call on for counsel and recommendations that can help them grow their business. Seeking specialist business advice from an accountant can save the SME owner time and help to make their business more profitable.

A modern accounting practice is able to offer a range of assistance over and above recording transactions and passively generating financial statements and compliance documents.

These days an accountant can be a primary resource for a wide range of advice.

- **Tax planning:** preparing financials for tax purposes should be just the first stage of managing the tax obligations of a business. A number of other business decisions through the year will have tax implications, and advice on how to structure these issues can limit the tax liability involved. The key to minimizing overall tax liability is to seek advice on the tax angle of major day-to-day operational decisions as they arise.
- **Payroll management:** organizing payroll and payroll tax (both what the employer and employee pays) can be a full-time job on its own. Many business owners get buried in this kind of back-office activity when they should be doing value producing work. Having an accountant oversee payroll improves the accuracy of data, ensures returns are based on the latest version of the tax regulations and helps protect from unpleasant tax surprises down the road.
- **Advice to improve business operations:** the financial statements an accountant creates have more use than as just tax documents. Using a number of key performance ratios to analyze the figures in them can reveal a great deal of information about how different parts of the

business are performing, or underperforming. They can point out pending problems in areas such as cash flow and inventory. Financial statements only tell where the business has been. Ratio analysis can convert financial data into actionable business intelligence to help the business go somewhere. An accountant can take that one step further and offer specific solutions to specific operational problems — fraud proofing the business, risk management, lease versus buy decisions, managing inventory, depreciating equipment, pricing, and even marketing.

- **Personal finance advice:** a business owner's personal finances are integrally linked to their business finances. To manage them best they need to be managed together. An accountant can advise on how to structure business and tax commitments to ultimately get the best retirement benefit and estate arrangement. They can investigate different methods of disposing of the business to get the best price and help you create a succession plan that will ensure trouble-free transfer of management when the time comes.
- **Technology innovation:** inexpensive computer technology and business application software can be used to dramatically improve a small business' capabilities. But how many business owners are familiar with the range of applications, the jargon, the security issues and the technology to make the best decisions about what to buy and how to use it? Many accountants are proficient in applying information technology solutions to the SME context.

Using an advisor provides the business owner with an opportunity to lift their head from the grind of daily operations, look at the bigger picture and get an independent assessment of their situation and some expert business advice. Consider the value of receiving real, balanced evidence and practical advice that will point out the pros and cons of any proposed strategy — before implementation makes it an irreversible commitment. An SME owner who isn't using their accountant for more than just tax preparation is missing out on a great opportunity to access sound business advice.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR NEWSLETTER

Be sure to read each article with the mindset "How could this apply to our business?"

Thinking of it that way will guarantee that you get value. Better yet, take notes as you read and commit to having the ideas implemented by the time the next edition arrives. Also, make copies for each team member. To really make sure something positive happens, work with your business development specialist to talk your team through the ideas and how to set a schedule for getting them implemented. We're here to help you get started.

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE

While every effort has been made to provide valuable, useful information in this publication, this firm and any related suppliers or associated companies accept no responsibility or any form of liability from reliance upon or use of its contents. Any suggestions should be considered carefully within your own particular circumstances, as they are intended as general information only.

Someone Stole ... My Business!

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the world and it doesn't happen to only private individuals, businesses can have their identity hijacked as well. One of the common tactics used by identity theft fraudsters is phishing.

Phishing occurs when a fraudster sends a fake email purporting to come from a legitimate business (banks, credit card companies, government departments, PayPal, and eBay are popular choices) that includes a request for personal identity details. The explanation will sound very plausible, such as to verify your identity with the organization. It usually includes a threat to prompt you to take action – "We will have no choice but to suspend your account" or similar. When you follow the link it takes you to a site that looks like the genuine one, but is in fact a copy created by the fraudster. As you put your details in it logs them and allows the fraudster to use them to access your account on the genuine site or use your details for fraudulent transactions elsewhere.

Business owners, or their employees, who fall for one of these scams and supply business related identity data (a business registration number or business credit card details, etc) have supplied the fraudster with valuable information. The phisher has, in effect, stolen their identity.

For a business, that can be very bad news. Fraudsters can use this information to open bogus accounts in the name of the business or even, in extreme cases, set up a clone of the company and run up debts in its name. Business identity theft often damages or destroys the victim's credit rating and, in the process, the business itself. Not only does it face problems with creditors and vendors, it could also find itself unable to fill orders and conduct business normally, potentially losing customers along the way. If the business has allowed customer information to be stolen then they must be notified and that admission won't make for good publicity or do anything for customer loyalty.

Some things you can do to prevent phishers landing you:

DON'T FALL FOR A PHISHING EMAIL

Even if you think a request for information may be legitimate, don't click the links in the email to visit a website in case it leads to a phishing site. Instead, type the website's address by hand to ensure that you go to the organization's real site. If you do have an existing relationship with the supposed originator of the email then call the organization to confirm that the email is legitimate before responding.

CREATE STRONG PASSWORDS

A strong password includes a combination of numbers, capitalized letters and symbols. It should NEVER include whole or partial pieces of identity data such as driver's license number, name or birth date. Having created strong passwords, get into the habit of changing them periodically.

DON'T USE UNSECURED COMPUTERS

The computers you find at Internet cafés, libraries, in hotel rooms and the like should automatically be assumed as unsafe for the transfer of identity data. Wi-Fi

networks present even more opportunities for identity thieves. The easiest way to protect a Wi-Fi network at home is to not broadcast the Service Set Identifier. Sending identity data over a public Wi-Fi connection is simply a no-no.

GUARD YOUR DATA

To be protected across the board a computer must have good anti-virus software, as well as anti-spyware and firewall protection. Keep them updated — scammers are constantly devising new attack methods and constant vigilance is necessary to stay safe.

ONLY TRANSFER INFORMATION OVER A SECURE SERVER

Ensure that websites you transfer identity data to are utilizing an encryption system. Look for the 'lock' icon on the status bar at the bottom of your browser window. In addition, check the beginning of the URL or web address — if it starts with 'https://,' rather than just 'http://,' you're on a secure server. Data is then encrypted as it is being transmitted so that, even if it is intercepted, it can't be read.

THINK YOU'VE BEEN HOOKED – HERE'S WHAT TO DO

The best way to prevent identity theft is to stay active and aware. Review your bank accounts and credit card statements each month for any suspicious activity and immediately investigate anything that seems odd. If you believe you have been the victim of phishing then alert your local law enforcement officials, bank, and credit card agency immediately so they can investigate the incident. It's important that the compromised accounts are watched or closed to prevent further fraudulent



Tips For Writing An Employee Handbook

Writing up an employee manual is usually way down the bottom of the to-do list for an SME owner — usually just above writing up their policies and procedures manual!

But in the long run you can save yourself a lot of time by getting your HR procedures down in print once, instead of having to explain them numberless times. There are other decisions, such as whether to offer severance pay or not, where you won't want to be making off-the-cuff decisions each time someone terminates employment. That's the wrong time to make serious decisions like this and can lead to inconsistent, and possibly illegal, treatment of people. Employment procedures should be developed before you have to follow them so you don't have to make up policy in a situation of urgency. Finally, there are some employment issues about which the law absolutely requires you to provide information to your employees in writing, such as the rules on sexual harassment and equal opportunity.

All in all, time spent putting together a set of guidelines on core employment issues is time well spent to keep you in compliance with the law and protect you from the consequences of litigation by unhappy employees. Keep these tips in mind when developing your employment manual.

1. Don't reinvent the wheel: there are plenty of employee handbook templates around that will provide an outline of what should

be included. Some include written versions of policies that can be modified to suit your particular business and situation. If you decide to buy an off-the-shelf manual, check that the supplier guarantees it has been developed by HR professionals, complies with employment law and is up to date. If you have standard forms already for things like leave requests, then include a copy of each form with the relevant policy.

2. Ensure employees know about it and use it: creating an employee handbook for yourself is a waste of time. If you are to get any payback on the time and effort you invested in creating it, you need to promote it. Let all employees know that it exists, where to find a copy, what is in it and how to use it.

3. Cover yourself: include a disclaimer stating clearly that the manual is in no way a legal contract. Hold sessions with employees to explain how it works and request them to take time to read it by a certain date. Then ask each one for written confirmation saying they have read it.

4. Keep it manageable: an employee handbook is not a safety manual, or a job

description, or a procedures guide. There's a place in a well-run business for each of those but they are separate to an employee manual. Restrict your employee manual to information about employment conditions, work rules and disciplinary procedures.

5. Use it to train employees: the manual will prove a useful reference for employees, particularly new employees, to look up information for themselves rather than always having to interrupt you to inquire about how things work. It will help new employees understand expectations — 'how we do things around here' — and fit in faster.

6. Keep it current: out of date employment information is dangerous information. Failure to keep your information current on topics such as penalties for harassment and leave entitlement can be the basis for big payouts if a dispute with an employee ends up in litigation. Apart from adding new legislative information as it becomes available, review the whole document every couple of years to weed out anything that has become irrelevant.



The Dash Group
5301 - 50th Street
Stony Plain, AB T7Z 1W3
Phone: 780-963-5783 Fax: 780-963-5806

TERMS OF USE

All rights to the content in this publication are reserved by Bullseye Business Solutions. Any use of the content outside of this format must acknowledge Bullseye Business Solutions or its licensee RAN ONE as the original source.