



State business with online help 06-01-06

ERIC SPELLMANN Spellmann and Associates, From the Plainview Daily Herald 06/01/2006

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Have you ever wanted to run your own business? Do you have a surefire idea, but no idea how to proceed? Let the Web help.

About a year and a half ago, I started contemplating starting my own company. Having never attempted such a project before, I had little idea where to start. Luckily, I had some great Web resources to get me going.

Step One . . .

I first surfed to the Small Business Administration's Small Business Startup Kit (<http://www.sba.gov/starting/>). This site offers an impressive "beginning-to-end" checklist of critical decisions you must make during this process.

In the middle column, locate the main title, "Startup Basics." Find the link labeled, "Free Small Business Startup Guide" below it and click it. The page that appears will list a myriad of small business resource links in the form of a guide. Make sure you have enough printer ink. You'll find yourself printing out many of its sections.

Another great site is the Entrepreneur section of About.com (<http://entrepreneurs.about.com>). Here, you'll find hundreds of opinions and expert advice from people who've "been there and done that." I found so many useful articles and links, I made this site a favorite. To this day, I still check in to read about the latest trends.

Need Money?

A great idea without money is just a "great idea." If you're looking for potential investors, go no further than vFinance (<http://www.vfinance.com>). This site matches entrepreneurs and investors through a unique networking resource. Another great site to check out is Raising Money (<http://www.raisingmoney.com>). While offering a paid investor/entrepreneur matching service, they also have numerous articles on: business plans, proposals and what investors are looking for.

On the Cheap

Once you get your business going, finding the services and products you'll need to operate can be an expensive search. However, the Web can help here, too.

Why Buy Software?

You can easily spend a lot of money in equipping your new office . . . especially in the software arena. After all, you'll need an accounting package, contact management, lead tracking, inventory control, and a host of other expensive tools.

However, many small businesses are now turning to outsourced solutions. Two players dominate this market: Microsoft and Oracle.

SalesBoom (<http://www.salesboom.com>) is an excellent choice for customer management and lead tracking. Their various modules integrate well, allowing the user to enter information once and have it available in a variety of forms. Pricing starts at \$249/year.

Salesboom shines the brightest in customer management and collaboration resources. However, it lacks any type of accounting package. Instead, consider QuickBooks Online (<http://www.qboe.com>). It has all the features of its CD-based cousin with none of the setup headaches. You no longer have to worry about updates or backing up. It's done for you! Pricing for QuickBooks Online runs \$19.95/month to \$39.95/month depending on how many modules you choose.

The Oracle NetSuite program (<http://www.netsuite.com>) is a bit more comprehensive in its offerings. While not as powerful in the customer management aspect as Salesboom, Oracle offers an ample accounting module. In addition, the Oracle solution includes extensive human resource tools not found in Salesboom, further enhancing the product. Pricing starts at \$99/month.

Both Microsoft's bCentral and Oracle's NetSuite are known as ASPs (Application Service Providers). In other words, the actual software is located on the Internet and not your computer. This scenario presents various advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, you don't have to worry about upgrades or system maintenance. The only detractor I've seen, however, is the Internet access necessity. If your Internet connection goes down, you lose access to your data.

So, what are you waiting for? Make the jump! "Lack of information" is no longer an excuse.

I'll see you in Cyberspace!

(Eric Spellmann is the owner of Spellmann & Associates, a corporate technology training facility in Amarillo. Besides his weekly column, he produces technology segments for his local ABC television affiliate and speaks at numerous conferences. For information, visit his website at <http://www.EricSpellmann.com>.)

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- Plainview: Explore the possibilities
- Yellow Pages

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- ERA Roberts & Wilkins
- Morgan Eaves Real Estate
- Street Real Estate

Key Agencies

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- Plainview Area United Way
- City of Plainview
- Industrial Foundation
- Texas Highground
- Central Plains Center
- Plainview Habitat for Humanity

Civic Clubs

- Rotary Club
- Hunger Plus

Schools

- Plainview Schools
- Plainview High School
- Plainview Christian Academy
- Lockney Schools
- Wayland Baptist University
- Kress Schools

Churches

- Baptist Student Ministry
- College Heights Baptist Church
- Family Harvest Church
- First Baptist Church
- First Presbyterian
- First United Methodist Church
- Garland Street Church of Christ
- Glad Tidings
- Harvest Christian Fellowship
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