

Small Business Matters

i Want more information and resources on this week's topics, ideas and events? Go to www.cose.org/smallbizmatters.

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ASK THE EXPERT

IT in the Sky: Is the Cloud Right for Your Business?

What is the "cloud" phenomenon all about? You hear it constantly, but what does it mean and how can it be used to help small business owners?

The cloud has been a buzzword for several years, and with good reason. The cloud is rapidly reducing costs and improving efficiencies for businesses globally. In its simplest form, the cloud consists of services and software that are accessed through the Internet instead of your local network. Cloud environments are housed in highly available, fully redundant and compliant third-party audited data centers and are built on enterprise hardware. It's safe to return to an old business axiom: When transformation occurs it brings new challenges; it also brings opportunity. Small and mid-size businesses must become comfortable understanding the cloud infrastructure and all they can gain from utilization. Careful due diligence will help businesses make confident decisions in finding the right providers to launch them into this space.

Reasons to move to a cloud platform are many. Perhaps you are facing a hardware refresh, new levels of compliance requirements, security and /or law, or your company may wish to move toward applications that can



Kevin Goodman,
Blue Bridge Networks

drive and grow your business. You may want to beef up your disaster recovery and business continuity strategies or be prepared to scale your IT to meet varying customer demands. Connecting your mission critical apps into facilities that have faster performance and higher security than your own makes good business sense.

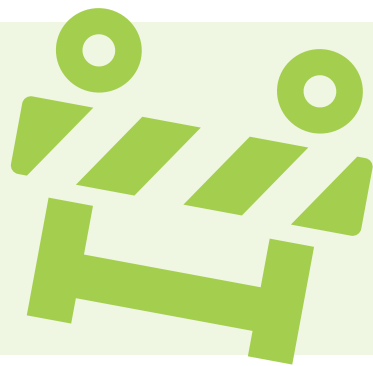
The idea that the cloud is only for larger companies is inaccurate. There are many budget-friendly cloud options for small and medium-sized businesses. Find a cloud company

that will work with you on a Proof of Concept (POC) and, in phases, fit you into the cloud. A POC will determine the feasibility of moving to the cloud; it can also be a useful tool to see how well you and the vendor work together.

Look for a cloud provider capable of moving you to a global economy. An important business consideration in today's fast-paced and ever-changing technology landscape is leveraging IT ecosystems. It's important to partner with groups that can understand your business and collaborate to meet and exceed your objectives.

By virtualizing your IT applications and infrastructure, your company can create opportunities to become more efficient and reduce your overall IT footprint. As you move toward the cloud, be sure to leverage the umbrella of your provider's audits and compliance to laws and best practices. By entering the cloud layers, you will reduce and eliminate single points of failure, and bring your company to the outside world in a highly reliable and secure way.

KEVIN GOODMAN is managing director and partner with Blue Bridge Networks, a cloud data center and managed services business headquartered in downtown Cleveland.



Owner Resources

Earn up to four percent off your workers' compensation premiums just by joining the Northeast Ohio Safety Council (NEOSC) and attending its monthly breakfast meetings. The NEOSC is a great resource for business owners looking to create and maintain a safe working environment. From pertinent safety information to qualified and experienced speakers, NEOSC can provide your organization with the tools and knowledge you need to improve the safety culture within your workplace. The deadline to enroll is July 31. Visit www.neosafetycouncil.com or call (216) 592-2340 for more information.

52 TIPS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

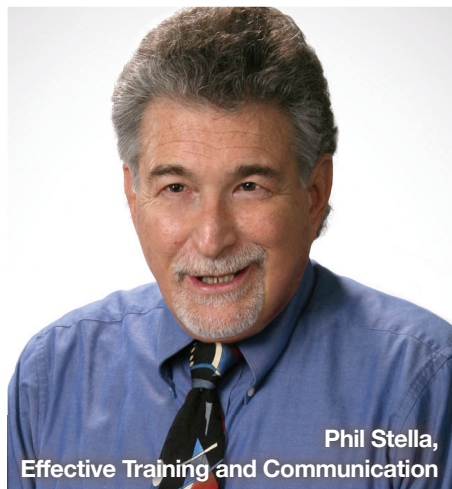
#25 – Always be Ready to Pitch

Quick, in 30 seconds or less tell us what your company does and wow us with your unique selling proposition. Can't do it? You're not alone. It can take some time to get your business pitch just right. You'll likely go through several drafts before finding one that is compelling, and that sounds natural in conversation.

A business pitch or elevator speech is a brief, persuasive speech used to spark interest in you and your business. A good elevator pitch should take no longer than a short elevator ride of 20 to 30 seconds, hence the name. "Elevator speeches are shameless self-promotions," says Phil Stella, president of Effective Training and Communication in Cleveland. "We use these speeches every day at meetings and networking events, but most of us don't do them with enough focus or finesse."

We asked Stella to share some simple strategies for crafting a flawless elevator pitch.

Less Is Definitely More. Elevator speeches are supposed to *begin* a dialogue, not be a monologue. Provide enough focused information to engage your listeners in conversation, but keep it brief. With every word or fact you might mention, ask yourself "Who really cares?"



Phil Stella,
Effective Training and Communication

It's Not About You! It's about the people listening to you and why they should want to ask you more questions or get to know you better. A good elevator speech should generate four or five more specific questions if they're interested in you. If not, you've just saved them and yourself valuable networking time.

Let Go of the Ego. Titles are for business cards. Write out your typical elevator speech and count the number of "I" statements. The more you have, the more ego you need to let go.

Become Buyer-Driven. Typical elevator speech content includes a seller-driven menu of products, services or features. Stand out in a crowd by being more buyer-driven by focusing on what the listener might want or get when they work with you. Emphasize the benefits and value.

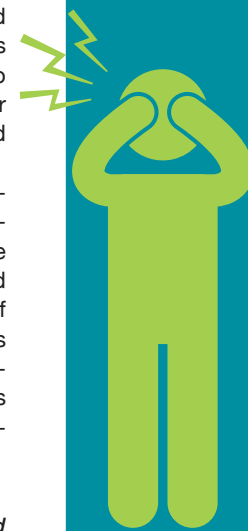
Practice Doesn't Make Perfect. Practice only makes permanent. Only perfect practice makes perfect. So, practice your succinct, buyer-driven speech until it's articulate and enthusiastic and don't forget to prepare similarly focused responses to obvious questions interested people might ask.

To elevate your elevator speech, Stella recommends starting out by writing out your typical response to the question, "So, what do you do?" Then edit it in the context of the strategies above and polish and practice it until it flows naturally. "Once you have perfected your elevator speech, you can enjoy the ride up to the top floor," says Stella.

i Want more expert advice? Check out *Linktunity* (www.linktunity.com), an online forum connecting business owners with creative solutions to the tough questions they face every day.

June 22

By The Numbers



40%

of business owners say bookkeeping & taxes are the worst part of owning a small business

Specifically...

47% dislike the financial cost

13% dislike administrative headaches & time

13% dislike the complexity of compliance

10% dislike changing regulations & confusion

8% dislike all the paperwork

8% dislike inequity of the tax code

SOURCE: SCORE

Connection Calendar

THINK SPOT KEYNOTE SERIES FEATURING FRANS JOHANSSON, AUTHOR OF THE MEDICI EFFECT

In today's fast-changing and unpredictable world, the rules are changing so fast that the tried-and-true formulas for success are disintegrating. Hear best practices for standing apart and developing a winning strategy.

JUNE 24

5:30 - 8 PM

Renaissance, Cleveland

Reserve your spot today!

Cost: Free

Reserve your seat at www.cose.org/thinkspot.

RNC FORUM

Find out how to get listed as a potential supplier to the 2016 Republican National Convention.

JUNE 24

3:30 - 4:30 PM

Renaissance, Cleveland

Cost: Free

Reserve your seat at www.cose.org/mc.

COSE EDUCATION SESSION: PEOPLE AND BOARDS

Experience the power of connecting to other business owners who have walked in your shoes. COSE's Strategic Planning Course (SPC) representatives will host this session on the importance of people and boards in your business and offer a sample of SPC course content.

JUNE 30

8 - 10 AM

COSE Offices, Cleveland

Cost: Free

Reserve your seat at www.cose.org/events.



Check out www.cose.org/events for all the latest happenings.