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# OnSite

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## MANAGEMENT ISSUES

### Mistakes that can torpedo small businesses

Running a business is part art and part science. Consultant Jonathan Goldhill of Agoura Hills, Calif., recently focused on the science part (the science of decision-making) when discussing mistakes contractors make in running their businesses.

Do any of these sound familiar?

**1** Running an owner-dependant business. If your business cannot run without your presence, then you have inadequate or weak systems in place. Goldhill estimates that 90 percent of small businesses suffer from weak operating systems so that the owners cannot step away from the office.

**2** Doing too much low-value work. Business owners need to spend the majority of their time making the hard decisions instead of getting involved in the production. Spending 20 to 40 percent of your time on production activities means that you are stealing money from your company according to Goldhill.



**3** Firing slowly and hiring quickly. Candidates who look great on paper may also be your competitor's rejects. Business owners should put as much thought into who they hire as they do in letting someone go.

**4** Not investing in training. Employees want to be challenged and appreciated. They also want to know what is expected of them. Managers should motivate their

employees by giving them the authority to take action and holding them accountable for their choices.

**5** Hogging all the information. Business owners should let employees know their company's vision. Employees who know about company information, financial data and long-term goals feel more vested in the company.

**6** Focusing on sales rather than marketing. Sales is converting leads into customers; marketing generates those qualified leads. Marketing is PR obtained through speaking engagements, referrals and getting coverage in the media.

**7** Over-servicing the bottom 10 percent of customers. Many business owners spend too much time with the dogs and not enough time with the gems according to Goldhill who defines the "dogs" as those clients who cause the most headaches. Trying to placate the dogs eats away at profit margins.

**8** Failure to get outside help. Many CEOs experience the "lonely at the top" syndrome. Business owners need networking and coaching to avoid the isolation that can lead to tunnel vision.

## MARKETING MATTERS

### Does your website have these features?

People who want to check out a company turn to its website first. If your website is not attractive or is littered with outdated information, you could be losing clients before

you ever know of their interest.

A website not only gives information about your company but also establishes credibility. Below are some elements you should consider to make your website attractive to potential clients:



**A good navigation system** – Be sure that it is easy to get around your site. Consistency on every page is important. While drop-down menus are popular, they can pile on top of each other, leading to confusion.

**Profiles** – Your website should include information about the company leaders and their accomplishments along with a small photo.

**Testimonials** – You should get their permission first, but if you have a good client list, share it with the world. Great testimonials or case studies also add value. Get in the habit of soliciting comments from satisfied customers so you can develop a collection of good references on the web.

**Graphics** – Slick graphics are attractive but they sometimes confuse search engines. The most important part of getting traffic to your website is to have search engines index your site so people can locate it. To maximize your search engine hits, web designers advise you to use graphics sparingly and be sure the ones you have are of top quality.

**Search Engine Optimization (SEO)** – This buzzword in web design stands for the practice of writing copy on the website that appeals to the search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Select 50 to 100 keywords most relevant to your business and work them into the copy on your website.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Nuts & bolts
- Working smarter

### NIR helps you boost your business

From networking to education to marketing assistance, the NIR supports restoration specialists. **434.973.4200**

Check out Google AdWords, a free service that allows you to type in a word and get a list of keywords and phrases most commonly searched in that category.

**Google Maps** – To get placement on Google's free local business center, click on "Maps" on the Google home page and click on "Put your business on Google Maps."

**Include Meta Tags** – These tags will insert words into your source code that will help draw the attention of search engines. Include any keywords in your meta tags that also appear in your text on a given page.

## Working Smarter

### The power of being responsive



Being unresponsive is undoubtedly a career-killer. Most people don't realize that they are building their reputations one response at a time.

With the volume of emails and text messages vying for our attention daily, it is hard to give every message attention and get any other work done. However, you should get into the habit of at least acknowledging that you have received the individual's message.

Include in your message back a promise that you will give the message a full response soon. Better yet, give the person a time by which you will get back with an answer.

## NUTS AND BOLTS

### Construction forecasts mirror other economic predictions

There's not much to celebrate in the way of economic news these days. While the construction industry is better off than the financial industry, the tightening of credit and rising costs of materials will continue to squeeze contractors.

According to Ken Simonson, the chief economist for the Associated General Contractors of America, home building which is down 40 percent this year will remain low through at least next year.

The construction sectors that should do relatively well include those major projects in health care, higher education and military construction. Demand in India, the Middle East and other emerging economies will continue to drive up the prices for raw materials such as steel, copper and other basic construction materials.



Contractors and builders are also plagued by a tightening of credit. However Simonson notes that we are better able to weather an economic crisis than was the case in the Great Depression. Safeguards such as deposit insurance offer a safety net that did not exist 80 years ago.

### Job discrimination bill widens coverage

An expansion of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that took effect in September expands protection from job discrimination. The new group covered includes

Americans with a variety of common diseases. The provision, which was debated for five years, passed Congress last month.

When the ADA first passed in 1990, it protected only those with physical or mental impairments that substantially limited them.

The new protection expands protection to cover workers with epilepsy, diabetes, heart disease, carpal tunnel syndrome and other common diseases. Employers must make reasonable accommodations for employees who suffer from these conditions.

### Shifts in media habits

People are changing the way they pay attention to the media – a fact that has major implications for your advertising budget. According to a study by the

Nielsen Company people spent four percent more time watching television and nine percent more time on the internet in May 2008 than they did the previous year.

The study suggested that people are also beginning to spend a noticeable amount of time watching video on the internet and on their mobile phone.



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### Wall of Wind allows testing for construction hardiness

In an effort to learn more about ways to mitigate hurricane damage, Florida International University has unveiled a new, improved Wall of Wind that can blow down actual-size homes, power poles and other structures.

The new equipment can produce Category-5 winds blowing up to 160 mph. The Wall of Wind includes a giant turntable to rotate houses and other structures, mimicking the changing direction of a major storm. Located in western Miami-Dade County, the facility will help engineers, architects and contractors to develop construction materials and techniques that will improve a building's hardiness.



The control panel on the Wall of Wind uses six NASCAR-style Chevy engines. The winds produced will be tested on homes, traffic lights, power poles and other outdoor fixtures.

### The ideal break room contains:

- A large refrigerator
- Coffee maker and coffee
- Water and other beverages
- A TV and magazines
- Napkins, plastic ware and paper supplies
- A clock (so folks won't lose track of time.)