

# VENTURES

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOR SMALL, MINORITY- AND WOMAN-OWNED BUSINESSES

## Focusing on Fundamentals: How a Clear Focus Can Drive Success in Your Business

By Alice E. Wendt, Wendt Partners

One of the challenges many business owners face at the start of a new year is deciding how to achieve their growth goals. Choosing a course of action means assessing the prior year's performance, selecting key metrics and organizing your team to succeed. With all of the competing priorities calling for your attention there's one thing you can do that will have a direct impact on your results this year: focus on fundamentals.

Marketing guru Seth Godin identifies two critical skills that most CEOs lack, and which are essential to master to achieve greater growth. The two skills are focus and tenacity. Focus means deciding what you're going to give consistent, reliable, everyday attention to. Tenacity means maintaining that commitment regardless of what issues, priorities, crises and challenges may attempt to interfere with your focus.

**Focusing on the fundamentals—sales, marketing, strategy and leadership—will set your business on a clearer path and help you avoid careening from one challenge to the next.**

For most companies there are four fundamentals that rest at the core of sustained business success. The four fundamentals are sales, marketing, strategy and leadership. By focusing on the fundamentals you can avoid overstressing yourself and zero in on your strengths as a business owner and the strengths of your team. Remember that in business, reliable and consistent execution is what often wins the day.

How are you executing against the four fundamentals? Let's take a look.

### Sales

Sales is the lifeblood of any company. Whether you lead a business-to-consumer, business-to-business or business-to-government enterprise, you need a healthy and growing mix of new customers and repeat customers if you are to achieve your goals. So, how do you make sales a driver of your success? Consider these questions:

- Have you identified and mastered a range of reliable lead generation models that consistently bring in new, qualified and interested prospects?
- Is your sales team capturing information about these leads and consistently qualifying them through a well-structured sales process?
- Are you using customer relationship management (CRM) software that can help you build on your deals won, and learn from your deals lost?

### Marketing

Marketing is what tilts the playing field of your marketplace into a home team advantage. It's also a profession undergoing rapid and dramatic change. Some marketing questions to focus on include:

- Are you embracing a clearly defined marketing model that generates interest and grows awareness?
- How is your team educating, informing and engaging the marketplace to build loyalty and trust?
- What new technologies—mobile, social, web, video—are you harnessing to move where the market is headed?

### Strategy

The success of your sales and marketing efforts often begins with a clearly defined and well-honed strategy. Taking the time to answer these questions will help you define a clear position in the marketplace:

- Can you clearly articulate what sets you apart from your leading competitors?
- Have you defined and quantified the value proposition that you offer to customers?



- Are you investing in new innovations, technologies or concepts that can keep you ahead and position you for growth?

### Leadership

The strength and quality of your team ultimately determines how well the marketplace responds to your efforts. That means your team needs to be ready and equipped to execute. To help benchmark your team, consider:

- What critical skills do you need to help you run your business and does your core team possess them?
- Are you vulnerable to the loss of one or two key people because you haven't developed enough high-potential employees to become future leaders?
- How are you positioning your firm to attract the best employees both in terms of qualifications and cultural fit?

Focusing on the fundamentals—sales, marketing, strategy and leadership—will set your business on a clearer path and help you avoid careening from one challenge to the next without the strength you need to drive growth.

Ask yourself which focus area your team could master this year if you made it your primary focus and how you can connect each member of your core team to that focus. For example, marketing is just not a department. It is a vision that every employee should understand, embrace and embody. Sales is not a person. It is a philosophy that recognizes the role that every employee can play in finding, securing and supporting the next customer.

Companies with a CEO who focuses on fundamentals and commit to mastery of those priorities grow 30 percent faster, last two-three times longer in the marketplace, and ultimately become dominant forces in their industry. Make 2013 the year that you focus on the fundamentals of success for your business, and let your commitment help set the foundation for lasting growth in the years to come. ■

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# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

## What Motivates a Team When It Comes to Creating Healthier Employees?

By Emily York Richards, Sade Clarity

**W**e would like to think that sheer will and inner strength drives our motivation for whatever we wish to accomplish in life. Ultimately, one does have to find that personal strength to accomplish many types of goals. But the reality is that sometimes getting oneself or others to the place of tapping into their willpower requires a kick start to an individual's internal motivation.

So what does that mean, particularly as it pertains to workplace wellness? When it comes to achieving overall health and wellbeing, it requires a lifestyle change. This lifestyle change cannot occur if there is not an internal mind shift to support the change.

Take a layered approach to building wellness programs by incorporating fundamental components that help build a foundation for long term healthy lifestyles. At the same time create incentives that reward and applaud small changes that help individuals see their progress in working towards a goal. This will inspire employee self-assurance, which perpetuates their internal motivation that ultimately helps them to meet their wellness goals.

There are several components that must be considered when motivating employees—and what motivates one employee will be different from what motivates another. Employers need to have a process laid out on how rewards and incentives are earned, how they

are redeemed, how they are distributed and how they are tracked. A company must know, or be willing to learn, the different rewards and incentives that will motivate various segments within their employee population.

Let's say that Company ABC is a construction firm. Their controller puts in 16 hour days crunching numbers on a spreadsheet. Perhaps the controller's reward is a Starbucks gift certificate for coffee runs on late nights at the office. The motivation for Starbucks may vary greatly from a superintendent who would rather receive a gift certificate to REI to purchase an all-weather coat. Now take the 21-year-old first-year associate. He or she may be primarily driven by social interaction and simply need access to an online work community to find motivation. Regardless of what motivated the controller, the superintendent or the first-year associate, they improved their lifestyle habits in the process through engaging in components of their company's wellness program.

For every dollar invested in a workplace wellness program, a company can expect to see a \$5-\$10 return on every dollar invested. The challenge comes in communicating the message and engaging employees.

Your company's wellness program may be the first formal encounter of an organized health and wellness program that your employees have experienced. When you create a communication plan for your program, remember to be thorough, communicate clearly and communicate often. Be effective and efficient with each e-mail, newsletter, poster and forum you hold. Communication can make or break an effective workplace wellness program.

The greatest threat to motivating employees is a company's culture. A healthy culture breeds healthy employees who are happier and more productive. An unhealthy culture breeds unhealthy employees and stops a wellness program from making significant inroads with an organization. If your culture is toxic, take some time to clean the environment up before you encourage your employees to become healthier. A wellness program ultimately will motivate employees to create healthier choices and lifestyles for themselves. ■

Emily York Richards is CEO of Sade Clarity, a wellness solutions firm that helps individuals achieve balance in body, mind and spirit. For more information, contact Emily at 703-850-1785 or [info@sadeclarity.com](mailto:info@sadeclarity.com), or [www.sadeclarity.com](http://www.sadeclarity.com).

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The Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) promotes Fairfax County as a world-class center of commerce and trade and the technology hub of the east coast. The FCEDA assists businesses interested in locating, relocating or expanding their commercial office or industrial operations in Fairfax County. Services are available on a confidential, no-cost basis. As an independent authority created under state law, the FCEDA operates under the direction of seven Commissioners appointed by the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Its activities are funded by Fairfax County.

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## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

### Upcoming events presented by the Fairfax County EDA

#### Procurement Academy

The Procurement Academy is designed to help businesses navigate the government contracting process. The workshops are appropriate for procurement novices and those who are seasoned in the contracting arena and will emphasize practical strategies needed to land government contracts. Sessions are held from 7:30 AM–10:30 AM at Teqcorner, 1616 Anderson Road, Tysons Corner. Remaining 2013 dates and topics of sessions are: April 17: Small Business Legislative Update; May 15: Teaming, Joint Ventures and Strategic Alliances; June 12: Marketing to the Government—Best Practices, Market Intelligence, Tips and Techniques. For more information or to register, visit [www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/procurement-academy](http://www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/procurement-academy).

#### Entrepreneurship 101: Starting a Business in Fairfax County

In partnership with the Virginia Department of Business Assistance (DBA) and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), the workshop provides an overview of start-up basics (licenses and permits); DBA workforce service and training programs; and SBA resources, financing and certification programs. The workshop is held the first Tuesday of each month from 8:00 AM–10:30 AM at FCEDA headquarters at 8300 Boone Boulevard, Suite 450, Tysons Corner. There is no cost to attend, but pre-registration is required. Remaining 2013 dates are: April 2, May 7, June 4, September 10, October 1 and November 5. For more information or to register, visit [www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/starting-business-seminar](http://www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/starting-business-seminar), or call 703-790-0600.

#### Marketing Communications Essentials

This workshop series provides companies and entrepreneurs the tools to understand how to formulate and execute elements of a marketing communications plan. The series will emphasize a broad range of best practices and are appropriate for small and mid-sized companies. The final session, "Best Practices in B2B Marketing" will be held May 21 at FCEDA headquarters at 8300 Boone Boulevard, Suite 450, Tysons Corner. Sessions are free. For more information and to register, visit [www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/marketing-communications-essentials](http://www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/marketing-communications-essentials). ■

## In the Cloud, No One Can Tell You're Small

By Jason Bloomberg, ZapThink, a Dovèl Technologies Company

One are the days when any company, no matter the size, can launch a Web site and consider their online efforts complete. Today, even small firms require a social media strategy, and if your company offers any kind of computer technology-based offering, you also need a cloud strategy to go with it. In fact, if you have a software-based offering, any company, no matter how small, should be in the cloud.

For small businesses in particular, the cloud offers many value propositions, depending on the nature of your business. Cloud computing sports an extraordinarily low cost of entry so even unfunded startups can take advantage. If you play your cards right and your online offering catches fire with customers, the cloud is there to tackle the load. And if you want to pay-as-you-go for either development tooling or any number of business services, from email to customer relationship management to online training, the cloud has something for everyone.

Cloud computing is not without its risks. It still represents an emerging market full of nascent technologies, vaporware, and incessant cloudwashing—when a vendor calls something “cloud” even though it is not.

### The Service Model Morass

In spite of its catchy meteorological name, cloud computing is not just one thing—it's actually at least three. The first is Software-as-a-Service (SaaS). SaaS is the

delivery of software functionality over the Internet via a pay-as-you-go financial model. Familiar SaaS offerings are Google's Gmail and Salesforce.com, but there are thousands available today. Platform-as-a-Service (PaaS) is like SaaS, except you have access to include a combination of development tools, testing tools, or perhaps some middleware you can use to integrate different online software packages with one another. Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) is the market leader—and in reality, the market definer. With IaaS, you have access to a range of server infrastructure, all available via a pay-as-you-go, pay only for what you need basis.

### Solving Small Business Problems with the Cloud

Back to that Web site you want to build. True, you could host your site at a traditional Internet Service Provider (ISP). But if you leverage IaaS to put it in the cloud, you get the benefits of elasticity. If Taylor Swift picks up that latest knick-knack for sale on your site, suddenly sending your traffic through the roof, the cloud will automatically expand to handle the load. Your traditional ISP would likely crash and burn under such an onslaught, even though all of yesterday's ISPs are now calling themselves cloud providers. But if they don't offer elasticity, then all they're doing is cloudwashing.

If your online offering is more than just a Web site and has some real software perhaps for consumption

via smartphones and other mobile devices as well as traditional browsers you could buy your own server plus all the associated bells and whistles, but with the cloud, why bother? Virtually every software-based startup today is in the cloud not necessarily because they want to identify themselves as SaaS providers. The marketing value of being in the cloud is an important side benefit, but the big win for such startups is keeping initial costs down. You could have the most elaborate, multifaceted online offering in the world, but putting it in the cloud will cost you pennies.

So, is the cloud right for every business? If your Web site is basic, you are not likely to get the spikes in demand that the cloud can deal with, so a traditional ISP will probably fit the bill more cost-effectively. If you look to the Internet as nothing but a marketing channel, then social media—Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, etc.—will be more important than the cloud. But even if cloud isn't central to your strategy, you may still find that SaaS offerings are useful and cost-effective. You may actually be using the cloud already without even knowing it. ■

Jason Bloomberg is president of ZapThink, a Dovèl Technologies company, which provides public and private sector enterprises with advice and education to assist in creating an architecture that meets business needs. For more information, contact Jason at 703-288-5300 or [jbloomberg@zapthink.com](mailto:jbloomberg@zapthink.com), or [www.zapthink.com](http://www.zapthink.com).

## Defining Business Innovation

By Roy Luebke, GENEDGE ALLIANCE

First in a three-part series

One of the leading topics in business today is the focus on innovation. There are many reasons for this, including the global financial crisis, the emergence of China and India's economic powers, offshoring and outsourcing jobs, and cost-cutting. With federal budgets decreasing, Virginia businesses are becoming aware of the need to build a pipeline of new market offerings. Creating innovative business tools is key to business growth and is a critical capability separating organizations that will thrive from those that will disappear.

The increasing speed of global change is forcing business leaders to deliver new offerings quickly and in a more cost effective manner. In addition, new offerings must be highly relevant to customers and constantly deliver customer value. This evolution requires business leaders to build an internal capability to discover and meet customer needs. Companies that consistently deliver market innovations have greater revenue and profit growth.

To consistently identify “the next thing” takes a combination of focused strategic intent, structured and systemic processes, new staff skills, organizational readiness and leadership.

Most companies do not suffer from a shortage of ideas, but rather are directed by leaders who fear selecting the wrong idea. Company leaders often fear risk rather than focus on reducing uncertainty and managing risk. Using a structured approach to portfolio management and decision analysis can help business leaders reduce uncertainty, make more effective selections and increase the speed of bringing new offerings to market.

If creating ideas is not a barrier to innovation, what is? Business people often do not spend enough time and effort understanding a customer problem. Addressing the wrong problem not only produces an ineffective and undesirable solution, but it also is costly. A new concept must succinctly address a customer need or problem, have a clear benefit promise, and offer proof that the concept is sound. A feasible, viable and desirable concept is based on a technical and financial infrastructure that gives a customer a reason to believe in its value.

Customers should be involved in reviewing new concepts as part of the decision process. Company's decisions that are too insulated from the outside world can lead to investing in the development of solutions that customers do not want or need. Conversely, good concepts can be eliminated prematurely if there isn't enough customer insight.

Innovation is not just about products or services. It can include the creation of novel and useful ideas for business models, processes, product and service platforms, brands, channels, and customer experiences. Additionally, in order to successfully identify, build and launch anything a business needs the appropriate culture, people and processes that support the strategy.

Business leaders need to select the right types of people to execute their innovation efforts as well. Innovation teams need to be balanced with both right-brain and left-brain thinkers, with business and design employees, idea generators and idea implementers. Employees need to work in a culture that supports and rewards their efforts, and gives them the opportunity to push boundaries.

These efforts can deliver higher revenue streams, increased profit, and stronger competitive positioning. The effective combination of people, processes, and culture together will produce the growth every business requires to remain healthy over the long term. ■

Roy Luebke is an innovation and growth consultant with GENEDGE ALLIANCE, a nonprofit agency that helps create and maintain jobs in industry and manufacturing. For more information, contact Donna Moran at [dmoran@genedge.org](mailto:dmoran@genedge.org) or 540-722-3405, or visit [www.genedge.org](http://www.genedge.org).

# FYI . . .

. . . **The FCEDA provides business counseling services through an arrangement with SCORE**, a U.S. Small Business Administration initiative dedicated to entrepreneur education and the formation, growth and success of small business nationwide. More than 11,200 volunteer counselors provide individual mentoring and business workshops for aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners. A SCORE counselor is available every Wednesday at FCEDA headquarters in Tysons Corner, Virginia, by appointment only. Sessions are one hour in length. To schedule an appointment, contact the FCEDA at 703-790-0600 or visit [www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/score](http://www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/score).

. . . **The Fairfax County Department of Purchasing and Supply Management Agency, Office of Small Business** sponsors a free monthly workshop, "Selling to Fairfax County." The workshops are held the third Wednesday of each month. You will have an opportunity to meet staff from the county's Purchasing Department and discuss upcoming contracting opportunities. All workshops are free of charge, but registration is recommended as seating is limited. Workshops are held at the Fairfax County Government Center, 12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, Va., from 9:00 AM-11:00 AM. For more information or to register, call 703 324-3201 or visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpsm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dpsm).

. . . **The 23rd Annual Office of Disadvantaged Small Business Utilization (OSDBU) Government Procurement Conference** is scheduled for April 25, 2013, at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. The conference fosters business partnerships between the federal government, its prime contractors, and small, minority, service-disabled veteran-owned, veteran-owned, HUBZone and women-owned businesses. Visit [www.fbcinc.com/e/procurement](http://www.fbcinc.com/e/procurement) for more information and to register.

. . . **The National Minority Supplier Development Council annual conference** is scheduled for October 27- 30, 2013, at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio, Tex. The conference theme for this year is "Connect for Growth - Minority Business and Corporate America." Visit [www.nmsdcus.org](http://www.nmsdcus.org) for more information and to register.

. . . The **Virginia Employment Through Entrepreneurship Consortium (VETEC)** is a program funded by the U.S. Department of Labor that provides job seekers from northern Virginia, Richmond and the Norfolk/Virginia Beach areas with training and technical assistance to start their own businesses. Participants are randomly selected and receive training in areas such as the basics for starting a business, accounting, finance and credit, and sales and marketing. They also receive one-on-one counseling services, mentoring and networking opportunities.

Employing Northern Virginia Through Entrepreneurship (ENOVATE), operating under the VETEC program, offers eligible job seekers entrepreneurship training and technical assistance. Along with the SkillSource Group, Inc., the other consortium partner organizations include Northern Virginia Community College, the Business Development Assistance Group and the Fairfax County Department of Family Services. For information on the VETEC program, contact Rebecca Bennett, project director, VETEC, at [rebecca.bennett@myskillsource.org](mailto:rebecca.bennett@myskillsource.org). For information on the ENOVATE program, contact Weyni Ghebremedhin at [wghebr@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:wghebr@fairfaxcounty.gov) or Jessica Cadima at [jessica.cadima@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:jessica.cadima@fairfaxcounty.gov).

## Looking for a Business Event or Class in Fairfax County?

The FCEDA's Small Business Datebook lists upcoming classes, workshops, conferences and other events of special interest to small, woman-, minority-, and veteran-owned businesses and entrepreneurs. Visit the online calendar at [www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/small-business-datebook](http://www.fairfaxcountyyeda.org/small-business-datebook).

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