

Small Business Technology Services

Authored By:

John F. Robinson
CEO – Concept Management Partners

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With different rules applying to larger size or more established businesses, we want to keep the focus of this article strictly on **"mom & pop"** or small business relations; even more so for startup companies trying to gain traction.

When we approach clients in this phase of business, there are several layers of services that we seek to deliver. The timing our services are critical as not to overwhelm a business owner. Our initial meeting is usually one of discovery, and to determine **if** we can or even should work together. It also gives us an opportunity to discuss previous attempts to provide the services we are offering. What we find has been consistent and quite frankly, astonishing. Many cases we see complete overkill of services both hardware and software.

One example of this is when we worked with a small Title Insurance company with six employees. We saw phone systems that would qualify for major call centers, along side of a \$7,000 backup tape library, attached to their \$10,000 file server.

Now there is a place and time for this hardware, but not there, and certainly not at the time when they needed cash flow the most. Technology services should fit the business, starting from the bare necessities and move into more advanced solutions once business resources or demands call for it. There is value in preparing for the future, but there is a fine line between what the "now" needs are, and what an unrealistic future is. Good IT firms are capable of managing this process to guide business owners through different phases.

A good approach is to first offer technology services that have the greatest impact to their business, potentially increasing revenue. This is the best way to gain more business as you help their company grow from the start. We call these **"impact-services"**, but it's vital to have a management team that understands the client's industry and what will have an impact. This separates IT firms from **"industry-specific"** IT firms. One thing to avoid is to advise a client against a certain IT service in replace of an "impact" service, and not deliver the desired outcome. It's critical to have an early success to gain the trust of the business owner. There is tremendous value to having worked within a field, and delivering a real competitive advantage to a client goes a long way in creating a long-term, profitable relationship, but make sure you have the industry experience onboard.