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Announcing Courtesy Text™

Coping with the day-to-day strains of managing a business is a growing complexity. Suppliers and customers need simple bi-directional communications to be able to trigger timely notifications and confirmations so both have up-to-the-minute information.

Courtesy Text is an affordable, labor saving solution that improves customer service and operations efficiency. Save time making customer reminder calls and allow your staff to work smarter. Send a group text message via your PC to one or thousands of your customers directly to their cell phones in the lowest cost method possible. Courtesy Text may be used to relay:

- Appointment confirmations
- Inclement weather closings
- Delivery status and change requests
- Special sales

Visit www.AlternateAccess.com today to learn more about Courtesy Text. Or call Alternate Access at (919) 831-8288.

Telecommuting

A Source of Savings and Improved Communication

Careerbuilder.com recently listed “Flexible Work Arrangements” as the number two hiring trend for employers in 2009. The listing was based on the results of a survey conducted by Harris Interactive, which questioned more than 3,000 hiring managers and human resource professionals in private sector companies.

According to the survey, around 31 percent of employers plan to provide alternative work arrangements as a benefit to their employees, with 48 percent of those employers considering telecommuting as an option. Additional research from Gartner Dataquest in 2007 estimated that, by 2009, nearly 14 million employees would be telecommuting more than 8 hours a week.

Several factors are fueling this increase, including uncertain gas and real estate prices, a growing concern for the environment, and a greater acceptance by management and executives of the telecommuting concept. Improvements in the technology that supports telecommuting – also referred to as teleworking – are another contributing factor.

In the article “Home Warriors,” posted in July 2008 on the site www.Economist.com, the author points out that “the rapid penetration of broadband in the home, easier and cheaper forms of IP telephony, more robust VPN (virtual private network) software, plus a new generation of powerful laptops that are true desktop replacements” are helping to fuel the telecommuting movement.

Small businesses can create win-win solutions by outfitting employees with the right technology to enable them to work from home and still get the job done. Companies realize a win via cost savings and increased productivity. Connecting employees via a VoIP phone system can reduce communications costs by allowing employees to use their broadband connection to place phone calls, as well as for data transfer.

A robust VoIP phone system, such as TeleVantage, also allows a company to integrate each employee’s cell phone or home phone with the company phone system. By doing so, the company can create the impression of having one central office even though workers are disbursed in multiple locations – reducing the amount of office space needed and cutting overall operational costs.

Studies have shown that telecommuting employees can be 30 to 40 percent more productive than their in-office co-workers – potentially because telecommuters have a tendency to work longer hours. By implementing unified messaging into a communications infrastructure, small businesses can build on this increased productivity.

Telecommuting employees could check voicemail, e-mail and fax messages all directly from their desktop PC or laptop. Furthermore, these messages can be easily responded to from any remote location with an Internet connection. So, telecommuters can be accessible from any work site they chose – home office, satellite office, or even a favorite coffee shop.

Of course, employees can also realize a win from telecommuting with the correct technology to support them. A VoIP system like TeleVantage allows them to continue to feel connected to the “office” via presence management. When a telecommuting employee logs in to TeleVantage, he or she can see the status of each employee and quickly call or instant message co-workers using the ViewPoint or by dialing an extension.

Surviving During Tough Economic Times

Many businesses were happy to bid 2008 farewell. The economy blip turned slide for many companies has every business owner reevaluating plans for 2009. In down times, owners take stock of their operations and processes. It is a good time to reevaluate expenditures and seek increased savings or productivity boosts that make investments earn their keep.

On the communications front, that generally means reviewing monthly expenses related to phone service, long-distance and possibly Internet. Preparing for the end of phone system or service leases by evaluating newer, better and more cost effective technology, such as Voice over IP, is essential. Assessing how much time employees spend on routine communication tasks can also be an eye opener on where dollars are flowing out of the business.

Consider these quick examples for ways in which you may be able to reduce expenses in both the short and long term.

Implement Voice over IP. VoIP saves on overall infrastructure investment as well as on-going communication costs. If you are up-fitting a new location, moving, or expanding your current physical space, you will find savings in both parts and labor for cabling. Once a system is installed, savings can be realized in a variety of ways: via increased throughput in the usage of phone lines, coordination with Internet services, and in long distance charges.

For businesses that use personnel to make regular reminder calls for appointments, payments due or scheduled deliveries, employers are paying on average \$12 to \$20 per hour to complete this function. Yet, automated calls that accomplish the same task can be utilized for cents per hour, while freeing your human resources to do more complex tasks in your business.

Even more cost effective and in-tune with today's communication environment is the ability to quickly send short messages to one or many recipients via text messaging. Systems that enable the customer or patient to automatically reply back to the business reduce the staff communication requirement to handling exceptions only and provide added convenience and confidentiality for the customer.

Fax communication is still widely used in business, despite the growth of e-mail, but traditional fax machines can be an added drain on a company's overall operational costs. Paper and toner is often wasted on junk faxes, and employee time is needlessly spent sorting through piles of faxes. A fax server allows employees to send and receive faxes via the desktop PC and store them electronically as PDFs, which also reduces the need for filing cabinets.

Alternate Access provides products and tools to address each of these scenarios. Visit www.AlternateAccess.com to learn more about VoIP phone systems, Courtesy Call™, Courtesy Text™ and fax servers.

Or contact Alternate Access at products@AlternateAccess.com to learn how our evaluation of your company's communications needs can result in cost savings and increased productivity.

Taking connectivity a step further, call handling via TeleVantage allows employees to seamlessly reach each other. Your telecommuting employees can easily transfer or conference calls to one another or to a physical office location, using their home or cell phone, as if everyone was working under the same roof. They can feel like part of the office even though the work out of the office.

For the employee who is making or taking calls constantly, commercial headsets are a must to ensure quality sound and ergonomic comfort throughout the workday.

Backed by the right technology, telecommuting truly can be a win-win for small companies and their greatest assets – their employees. By reducing costs and increasing productivity and employee morale, the growing telecommuting trend has the potential to help small businesses gain a competitive edge in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

To learn more about the technology available to support telecommuting, or to discuss how communications is crucial to your plan to implement telecommuting in your business, contact Alternate Access today at products@AlternateAccess.com or 866-831-9270.



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