MODULE THREE

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Title Slide

Business Technology Simplified

Module 3: Finding and Managing Customers

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Business Technology Simplified: Module III

Finding and Managing Customers

Welcome to "Business Technology Simplified – Finding and Managing Customers."

This is the third of three modules in the *Business Technology Simplified* series. In this module, we will cover tools and technologies that will enable you to reach new and existing customers and manage customer relationships more efficiently.

The *Business Technology Simplified* eLearning series is based on the book written in conjunction by Microsoft and the US Small Business Administration.

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Module Outline

This module consists of five main sections:
- Reaching More Customers by Extending Your Business Online
- Creating Your Own Marketing Materials
- Managing Your Sales Pipeline with a Contact Management Application
- Improving Sales Processes and Insight with Web-Based CRM
- Using Central Dashboards to Monitor Sales Performance

You can click the “Module Outline” slide in the navigation panel to the left, to return to this page at any time.

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Reaching More Customers by Extending Your Business Online

Do you know that you need a Web site but don’t know where to start? Do you want to find new ways to connect with your customers online? Are you worried that you don’t have the money or the skills to get your business online?

In this section, we will discuss ways that you can open up new opportunities, find new customers, and expand your clientele by taking your business online.

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Breaking Through Physical Constraints on Your Business

In the first module of this series (“Business Technology Simplified – Using Technology to Simplify the Day-to-Day”), we learned about Avenue You’s Lisa Esposito and her brother and business partner, Brian. They increased their store’s efficiency significantly using some basic desktop computing technology.

But Brian and Lisa soon noticed a glaring problem: the geographical limitations of a retail boutique severely restricted how much they could grow their business. Given the significant startup costs, adding more retail stores wasn’t the answer—getting their store online was.

Going online would enable them to extend their business beyond the limits of both store location and store hours.

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Getting Started with a Simple Web Site

With the ubiquity of the Internet today, you know the importance of building a Web site for your business. But do you have the skills, time, and resources to make this critical move?

The good news is that with today's technology tools, building a simple, professional site is remarkably straightforward. With a basic site, you can give potential customers information on your business and an easy way for them to contact you.

A variety of tools are available online today that will give you everything you need to quickly, easily, and affordably build a Web site that has these capabilities—without needing any technical expertise. The best services will provide you with:

•The option for a **custom domain name** for your business (such as www.*YourCompanyName*.com), plus e-mail addresses that use the same domain name (such as *YourName@YourCompanyName*.com), for a more professional image.
•**Professionally designed templates** so that you don't need to build your site from scratch.
•**Simple design tools** that let you change the colors and layout of your site and add your business logo, photos, and other personalized elements.
•The ability to add **e-commerce capabilities** so that you can easily sell products directly from your Web site.
•**Online support** in case you get stuck along the way.

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Connecting with Customers Online

Turn Visitors into Customers – Of course, getting potential customers to your site is important, but what will make them stay? What will convert curious visitors into actual customers? The personal experience that your business offers in a brick-and-mortar setting can have tremendous competitive advantage, but how do you transfer that to an online experience?

Engage Your Customers – Successful online strategies depend more and more on engaging with customers rather than simply delivering information. "Engaging" with your customers online doesn't need to be complicated or difficult. In fact, there are a variety of simple tools and methods that people use every day to connect with potential customers online:

•Take advantage of **social networking**. Featuring your business on popular social networking and microblogging sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter lets you interact with customers directly. Furthermore, your customers can share stories and tell you (and others) why they love your business. It's an honest, credible way to show potential customers a more personal side to your business and even engage with them directly. Sending regular updates will also help keep your business front and center in your customers' minds. If they choose to share your posts, you'll even get them doing some of your marketing for you.

•Add a personal touch to your site by **blogging**. A blog lets you add comments and news to your site in your own voice. It helps you keep your site fresh and current. Regularly updating a blog on your site is also great for SEO, since sites that change frequently rise in the search engine ranks. Blogging programs don't require any Web expertise to use, and there are several free blogging services. Even better, if you're using one of the online Web site services to manage your Web site, it may actually include built-in blogging capabilities. This lets you set up a blog with the same domain as your Web site.
•**Use video to liven things up.** Adding video—whether to your blog or elsewhere on your site—lets you put yourself and/or your products and services literally right in front of your customers. Making a fun, creative video is remarkably easy these days, since you can download basic movie-making tools online. Once you've got your video posted to your site, you might also want to post it to popular video-sharing sites, such as YouTube, to provide another way for your customers to find you.

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Creating Your Own Marketing Materials

Are you spending too much time and money designing materials to market your business? Or, do you feel stuck paying expensive agency fees because you don't have the skills to do it yourself? Do you want to have professional-looking marketing materials, even if you don't have a design budget?

For many small businesses, it can seem like the only way to get polished marketing materials is to hire a professional design firm. Unfortunately, these services aren't cheap. On a small business budget, hiring a graphic design or advertising agency can often mean making sacrifices somewhere else in the business.

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Bringing Advanced Design Capabilities to Basic Desktop Publishing Programs

Everyone has seen "homemade" marketing brochures and flyers that practically yell "low budget," which doesn't exactly build confidence in the longevity of a business. With today's technology, however, basic desktop publishing programs rival the functionality provided by professional design software without the complexity. They make it possible to get a professional look without spending a lot of money—or getting a degree in graphic design. The best programs include features such as:

•**Customizable templates** that give you a jumpstart on building polished materials yourself. Imagine how quickly you could design a brochure if you could simply select a template, pick a color scheme, choose your fonts, point to your logo graphic file, and click "create." Ideally, you should have a selection of templates that spans every printed piece you might need in your business. This includes core marketing pieces such as brochures, newsletters, and e-mail, as well

as standard materials such as business cards, labels, envelopes, and letterheads. By applying the same color scheme, fonts, and graphics to a range of templates, you can make sure that every document your business produces has the same look and feel—making it appear professional and established.
•**Instant imagery and artistic effects.** Whether or not you start from a template, you may want to add more life to your marketing materials. Programs that include free clip art let you add visual punch without having to spend a lot of money. And with built-in tools that can add creative effects to your pictures and text—such as shadows, 3D treatments, frames, and color enhancements—you can give your copy a little more flare without needing to purchase additional graphics software.
•**Ability to reuse content in different formats**, which can save you a lot of time**.** For example, you may want to put the information from your latest brochure in a newsletter or on the Web.

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Managing Your Sales Pipeline with a Contact Management Application

Do you feel confident about how you are managing your sales leads and prospects? Do you worry that potential sales are slipping through the cracks because you don't have a reliable system for tracking them? Do you rely on a "gut feel" to determine which prospects to spend your time on?

In this section, we will discuss the benefits of using a contact management application to track prospects, manage leads, and gain better insight into your sales process.

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Using Contact Management Tools to Evaluate and Support Your Sales Process

A contact management application can be a powerful tool for small yet growing businesses. It provides you with a central place to store contact details. It can also give you the ability to record every interaction that you have with customers and prospects. Furthermore, some contact management applications include tools to help you actively support the sales process. The most valuable of these tools will let you:

•**Track prospects based on the sales stage.** Being able to assign prospects to sales stages that reflect how your business works can help you stay on top of opportunities and close sales as quickly as possible. For example, you might assign contacts to stages such as *qualifying*, *proposal/price quote*, and *closed/won* to match your specific sales process. Some contact management applications also let you track specific activities that you conduct at each stage, to ensure a consistent process for every prospect. Ideally, once a stage is complete, the system should automatically set reminders for the next stage to help you move prospects through the sales process methodically.

•**Use reports and/or dashboards to monitor your sales performance.** Being able to track the progress of one contact through the sales pipeline is valuable. Being able to get a view of those prospects collectively is just as valuable. For example, a dashboard could show you a chart of exactly how many accounts you have in the pipeline and at what stages. With reports, you could then dig more deeply into that information to figure out where you need to focus.
•**Connect sales information with financial information.** You can get even more insight into your sales process if your contact management application connects easily with your accounting system. For example, if you've set specific sales targets for the year, you could create a report that shows your target revenue versus your actual revenue and the value of opportunities that are currently in the sales pipeline. This will let you know before it's too late if you need to address any gaps.
•**Support marketing campaigns.** If you do identify gaps in your sales pipeline, with built-in marketing campaign tools you can run direct marketing campaigns right from within your contact management application. For example, you might want to reach out to inactive leads with a special offer. Using a single tool, you could set up the campaign, identify your target contacts, send a personalized offer by e-mail, and even track the results.

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Improving Sales Processes and Insight with Web-Based CRM

Has your business outgrown your contact management application? Are you struggling to keep track of what's happening in your sales pipeline? Are you thinking of implementing a customer relationship management (or CRM) system but you're worried that a full-fledged system will be too complicated to install and manage or that your employees won't actually use it?

Some businesses will find that a contact management application is not sufficient for managing their sales process. If this is the case for your business, you may find that a Web-based CRM system is the solution.

CRM systems can generally provide a more tailored fit for complex sales processes, yet implementing a Web-based CRM system need not be a complicated process. In this section, we will discuss the benefits your business can reap from using a Web-based CRM system.

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Gaining a More Complete View of Your Customers and Prospects

CRM systems help businesses manage every aspect of their relationships with prospective and existing customers. Like contact management applications, CRM systems let you record contact details and track all of your interactions with customers. But they go far beyond contact management applications by allowing you to connect your customer information with your sales and financial information, so that you have a complete view of your sales pipeline. They can also help you automate your customer processes and set up defined workflows—for everything from marketing to sales to customer service.

This combination of comprehensive customer information, automated processes, and formal workflows can help your sales team work as efficiently as possible. It can also make it easier to evaluate what's happening across your sales pipeline and identify where to make adjustments to keep things on track.

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The Benefits of Using a CRM System

CRM systems provide your business with many benefits, giving you insight into your sales process. Click on the topics to the left to learn more about each benefit.

It's also worth to note that, for a CRM system to help you get better insight into your sales pipeline, it needs to capture every step in the sales process, every customer interaction, and all related account and sales data.

A good tip when selecting your CRM tool is to choose one that closely integrates with your e-mail system, since most marketing staff, salespeople, and customer service reps spend their days working with e-mail. This is one of the best ways to get everyone to use your CRM system.

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Using Web-Based CRM to Get the Benefits of CRM without the Overhead and Complexity

Traditionally, to use a CRM system, you needed to buy a server, buy software licenses and, depending on the complexity of your processes, have a reasonable level of IT skill to manage the system. For many small businesses, the cost and complexity of CRM systems simply put them out of reach. However, Web-based services—that is, software that you subscribe to and access over the Internet—now give smaller businesses a more affordable, simpler option.

With Web-based services, you can get all the same tools and benefits of traditional CRM systems without the initial up-front investment and without needing to maintain the system (since your service provider takes care of this for you). In general, you can implement a Web-based system quickly, without spending months customizing and implementing it. What's more, since a Web-based system uses per-user subscriptions, you don't need to anticipate how quickly your business will grow over the coming months or years and pay for capacity that you don't yet need. You can simply add new users as required, and the system will scale with your needs.

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Using Central Dashboards to Monitor Sales Performance

Is your sales data spread among so many systems that you have a hard time getting consistent information? Do you get bogged down in the detail of your sales reports? Do you need a better way to gauge the bigger picture and share it with others in your business?

Scott Mitchell is the IT manager for Heel USA, a manufacturer of homeopathic medications. He captures a lot of data in his business and has to make sure that Heel USA's marketing and sales teams have access to that data, so they can monitor the business and make decisions that will help them sell more. Unfortunately, this was tricky.

Scott has several good systems for running the business, including a CRM system, a business management system that consolidates all financial data, and other online transaction processing (OLTP) systems. While these systems work well on their own, they are disconnected, leaving sales data spread across multiple systems. This made it difficult and time consuming to produce status reports.

In this section, we will see how Heel USA implemented a data warehouse to bring that data together and built central dashboards to streamline how they monitor and report on sales performance.

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Making Sense of Data from Across Your Business

The more a business grows, the more data it will need to capture. The more data captured, the harder it is to see the big picture. How can you pull together your business's data into a central location and make sense of it so that you don't struggle with "not being able to see the forest for the trees"?

Sales dashboards, delivered through a central portal are an effective answer. Dashboards are visual representations of data presented on a single screen. They're usually a collection of charts, graphs, and reports that let you monitor, at a high level, the status of specific factors that affect your business's performance.

Although individual applications (such as a contact management application) often include dashboards, a centralized dashboard pulls together information from multiple sources, giving you a much more comprehensive view of your business.

Ideally, you should be able to customize your sales dashboards by role, such as sales reps and sales managers. These dashboards can show everyone on your sales team exactly how they're doing against their own targets, plus how their performance affects the performance of the wider team. You may also want to create a sales dashboard for people not actually in sales roles, such as executives. Role-based sales dashboards give everyone the right level of detail for their role.

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Heel USA's Business Intelligence Solution

Scott decided to add a centralized business intelligence solution that includes a data warehouse and centralized dashboards. The data warehouse pulls together all of the data from across his business. Role-based dashboards, accessed through a central portal, give his sales teams an instant view into their sales performance. Everyone can get a clear, concise look at customer data, sales history, order history, returns, and the general trajectory of sales. They can even customize their own dashboards to see the information that's most important to them and use it to sell as effectively as possible. What's more, dashboards enable non-sales executives to quickly understand sales performance at a high level without wading through detailed reports.

The centralized business intelligence solution also frees the marketing and sales teams from manually building monthly reports, so they can spend more time analyzing sales data, planning their business, and forecasting growth.

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Conclusion

In this module, we discussed a variety of technologies that your business can use to:

- Take your business online and reach more customers.
- Generate professional-looking marketing materials while saving money and time.
- Manage your sales pipeline and track leads.
- Gain insight into the entirety of your sales process.
- Make sense of all the sales and customer data you capture for your business.

We also discussed how you can implement these tools simply, without breaking the bank and without having to take time and energy away from your main focus: growing your business.

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Congratulations!

Congratulations on completing "Business Technology Simplified – Finding and Managing Customers"!

Thank you for taking the time to view this course. We hope you find great satisfaction and added success in implementing technology to help your business reach its goals.

Please visit either of the course host website for additional small business resources. For a SBA mentor, please visit your local office to be paired with an expert business counselor.

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