


# JUNE '11 NEWSWIRE

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**GardnerSteward**   
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS  
Charwell House  
Wilsom Road  
Alton  
Hampshire  
GU34 2PP

Welcome to our monthly newswire designed to provide you with some marketing tips for your business.

We hope you enjoy reading it and remember, we are here to help you so please contact us if you need further information on any of the topics covered.

## PROTECTING EMPLOYEE DATA

**Access** to employee records should be restricted. Managers should only be given access to job-related information, such as attendance records and employee performance reviews. Medical records or other sensitive information should only be accessible to the HR Manager. A log should be kept recording which details, when and who accessed the files. If the employee records are stored electronically, the relevant files and folders should be password protected. Regular audits should be carried out in order to ensure that the paper and electronic logs are kept up to date. In instances where an individual accesses employee records without proper authorisation, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the incident should be reported and investigated promptly. Following the investigation, a determination should be made as to whether improvements are needed to and whether disciplinary action is appropriate. Employees should be directed to inform the company as soon as possible if they suspect someone has gained unauthorised access to their information.

**Security** - Administrative, technical, and physical controls should be implemented to properly secure employee records. Records in electronic form should be encrypted, protected by passwords (which should be changed frequently), and maintained on a secure server. Electronic systems should be evaluated regularly to ensure new technology and viruses do not compromise the security of employee records. Records in paper form should be stored in a locked central location, with access limited to one individual who is chiefly responsible for maintaining the files. Identity theft is becoming an issue in modern times and as such PPS / Social Security / National Insurance numbers should never be printed.

**Provide proper training** - Employees and supervisors should be trained on the company's privacy and record protection policies. In addition, employees who have access to sensitive information should be trained on how to prevent unauthorised access to confidential information, how to respond to security breaches, and how to properly dispose of employee records. Employers have an obligation to ensure all employee records are disposed of properly so that they cannot be read or reconstructed. A proper cross-cut shredder is a good way of ensuring that any such records are disposed of in a confidential manner.

## WINNING BUSINESS REFERRALS

Any business with the goal of growing larger wants current clients to refer their friends. Professional services firms depend on people vouching for their expertise and talent. So how do you get your customers to talk about you in a positive light and refer some new business to you? It all begins with the service. Your firm must offer great service that cannot be matched by your competitors. Doing so helps create loyal customers who appreciate your firm's passion for excellence. They will talk about this among friends and colleagues. Social media sites like Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook offer your customers a great opportunity to endorse your product or service by "liking" it – i.e. book-marking your businesses site.

**Ask for a referral:** When you interact with a client to close a deal or complete a piece of work ask them if the experience was positive and would they refer a friend. Chances are they will give you a referral – because you asked.

**Let your customers know that you care:** Soon after a business transaction completes – ask the customer for some feedback. This shows the customer that you appreciated their business and that you care about their needs as a customer. This "feel good" factor can and should result in the customer referring a friend to your business.

**Spread the word:** Ask customers for some testimonials. Put these in a word document and add in details of any awards, socially responsible activity undertaken by your firm, etc and make a pdf flyer detailing the positive attributes of your business. Now spread the good word by emailing this flyer to your contacts. Telling existing customers and potential future clients positive stories about your business can encourage them to refer a client to you in the future.

**Say thank you:** When a customer concludes their business with your firm, ensure to thank them. You can send them a card shortly after their purchase or simply email them thanking them for their business. This creates a positive image of your business in the mind of your customer and should result in a referral soon after.

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## SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH STRATEGY TIPS

Here are some small business growth strategies that you can use to expand your business.

**Joint Ventures** - This is essentially an agreement between two businesses to provide a specific product or service as a single offering. Joining forces with another business in this manner gives you access to their expertise, capacity and their client base. This is a great way to enable your business to reach new customers – however make sure to choose the right partner.

**Extend Your Market Reach** - The idea of expanding into new markets may sound daunting; however, it may be easier (and more successful) than you think. Extending your market reach simply means using your existing products or services to expand into new markets. Rather than develop a new product or service offering you can simply employ different marketing approaches. This may entail exploring new geographical areas that need your products or services, or perhaps targeting a new demographic.

**Develop a New Product or Service** - Although this may not be the most cost effective way to expand your business, developing a new product or service allows you to explore new market opportunities. In addition, your firm can sell the new product or service to existing clients. On top of this, the new clients won by your new product or service offering may now purchase your original offering too. In developing a new offering you should consider products or services that complement your current ones, allowing you to generate more sales from your existing customer base and keeping your product range synonymous with your company brand.

**Enhance Productivity** - Enhancing productivity in your firm simply means getting more done in the same amount of time. Whether this means doing more tax returns per day or building more products per week depends on the type of business you run. Bear in mind that increasing output in this manner may require additional financial resources in order to hire more people or buy extra raw materials, etc. Be sure to have a solid marketing plan as part of your growth strategy in order to sell your additional products or services.

The growth strategies you employ depend on the type of business that you run and the resources available to you. Whichever way you choose to grow your business, remember that proper planning is essential - "fail to plan then plan to fail".

## RISK MANAGEMENT – WEBSITE RECOVERY

Your website is like a shop window for your business. It must therefore be up to date and available at all times. It is important to have a suitable disaster recovery plan. The first part of your plan should include a complete written overview of your website detailing your web address(es), hosting provider, logon and passwords. This plan should also include details of where backup files for the site itself are located.

The next part of your plan should detail how your business would deal with the complete and permanent loss of the infrastructure that hosts your website. In most cases the hosting is outsourced to a hosting provider; however, some firms host their website on their own in-house server. As a backup, the business should have a written procedure for switching the hosting account to a new hosting provider in the case of a disaster. This written procedure should include all relevant details including the name of the designated hosting account holder in your business, logon and password details for the existing hosting account. It should also include contact details for key staff, suppliers and other relevant people.

For smaller websites the procedure may be as simple as buying a new hosting package and putting the site onto this. For larger sites your business might require a temporary solution using rented systems / server capacity whilst new permanent solutions can be purchased and set up.

Now that you have a detailed written disaster recovery plan, it is worth making a digital copy of the plan and storing it on a CD or USB key in a fireproof safe (preferably off the company premises) in case of fire. Finally, you should review the disaster recovery plan periodically and keep it up to date.

Your business environment is dynamic and constantly changing - your disaster recovery plan needs to reflect this. Once a year, you should test the disaster recovery plan to ensure everything works and nothing has been omitted. It will not be necessary to switch off the live site, but testing the plan in terms of allowing your team to practice their role in getting a site back up and running will pay off in the case of an actual disaster.

