

AdvanceMe's Small Business Tip: October 20, 2008

Making a Small Business Seem Not So Small

When Jodi Auerbach wanted to start [The Well Planned Traveler](#) as a self-run business from her home, she knew that first impressions in her niche mattered. Auerbach's business conducts interviews and uses detailed questionnaires to provide travelers unique New York itineraries based on their own preferences. As she says, "We offer visitors to the Big Apple a unique chance to see New York as a true New Yorker would."



Like many small business owners, Auerbach's challenges included making a home-based business appear to be on par and competitive with any other business or service provider. Auerbach's approach to solving this puzzle offers an illustration of the entrepreneurial spirit in action.

Identify the Need

Auerbach's clients are often International, planning trips to New York from anywhere in the world. "My phone could ring at any time of the day or night," says Auerbach, "and if I am not ready to answer with the right first impression, I will lose business--guaranteed." This made the right communications system a key aspect to *The Well Planned Traveler's* business model. Auerbach identified her phone system and answering services as a necessary cost, but one worth researching and exploring.

Realistically Assess Your Options

As a bootstrapped new business venture, Auerbach let her budget and needs guide her research. "For me, the decision was mostly financial," says Auerbach. "I needed to have a pretty complex phone system, and I knew what I wanted it to do. But I was just starting out on my own, so buying thousands of dollars worth of equipment was not realistic. Once I specifically outlined what the business needed, I started investigating other ways to get what I wanted."

Be Willing to Try Alternatives

During her research, Auerbach evaluated and compared a variety of vendor offers. She eventually decided to try [GotVMail](#), a Massachusetts-based company offering unique Virtual Phone services. The services GotVMail offered were in line with what Auerbach's business needed. The initial costs were very low compared to buying. The results of choosing this solution included better management of her initial investments, and ultimately, starting her business on the right foot by creating the right first impression.

"GotVMail was unique in that they really answered my needs with an affordable all-in-one solution," says Auerbach. "I didn't have to lose functionality or my ability to customize options to keep it on or under budget. In fact, there were actually more services (like pre-recorded messaging and on-hold voice-overs) than I had expected—and my new clients and I love some of these added features!"

Like many good entrepreneurs, Auerbach allowed an articulated need to guide her to an appropriate alternative option. By doing so, she was able to reduce the money needed to get started and went to market quicker. Most importantly, by searching for and finding a vendor that matched her needs, she has been available 24/7 since the business launched.

The End Result: Room to Grow

When new clients call *The Well Planned Traveler* today, thanks to GotVMail, they might reach Auerbach immediately, or they might navigate through a tree of pre-recorded messages offering more information. There is music playing behind some of the messages, and professional voice talent detailing services available through *The Well Planned Traveler*. New clients continue to come to Auerbach from all over the world. Her first impression is slick, professional, appropriate and unique. Business continues to grow.

And there is nothing small about that business direction.

Use This Thinking

In the way that Auerbach approached and solved her challenges, entrepreneurs can find a problem solving method applicable for many situations. For example, let's say your challenge is getting business capital.

- **Identify the Need.** Do you need money for inventory, balancing payroll, expansion, equipment, remodeling, marketing or something else?
- **Realistically assess your options.** Approach your bank and/or any potential investors. Be familiar with your credit score, your available collateral, the amount you have as a down payment, and current operational costs. Look at what you can afford as an obligation, and know very clearly how the money will show a return. A detailed business plan is a good idea, and often necessary if you are talking to banks and investors.
- **Be willing to try alternatives.** Before making a decision, make sure to examine all possible options for your situation. You might be able to use an alternative for the money you need and find benefits not offered by the most common paths. Consider leases, Merchant Cash Advances, angel investors, bank loans and more. You might also benefit by seeking help from special interest or trade groups within your niche.