

## PeopleFund

East Austin Economic Summit – October 13, 2007

### Making Technology Work for You – Strategic Planning for Modernizing Your Business

[Session Notes]

**Dr. Allen Johnson**, facilitator of session, introduced himself and the other two panelists. He is a professor of computer science at Huston-Tillotson for the past 5 years; prior to that ran own company an Inc 500 company in 1999, partner in that business is Carl Huntley, also here today; retired from IBM; perspective from corporation, owning own business, degree in electrical engineering;

**Sam Coronado**, has a background at Texas Instruments; he is a Chicano artist residing in Austin, involved in several businesses, both nonprofit and for-profit entities; teaches design, drawing and illustration at ACC; also taught drawing and painting at Daugherty Arts Center and Laguna Gloria; deals in a variety of media from freelance graphics; hosts exhibits from international artists, previously lived in Houston; one of the original board members for Mexic-Arte Museum; artist and owner of Coronado Studio and Serie print project.

**Carl Huntley**, graduate of UT in mathematics; background with Texas Instruments at Houston working with NASA and then in Houston; been an entrepreneur in real estate and many other endeavors; partner in Rainbow Analysis Systems which closed in 2003 and now at DataVice

Dr. Johnson asked the participating session attendees to introduce themselves:

Harriet Neely, owner of Triad Building Maintenance, has lots of questions about how to better involve technology in the business

Laura Culin, Austin Lumber Company, interested in technology and making business operations more secure, recently had a competitor hack into computer system.

\_\_\_\_\_ (name?); operate an online bookstore at Pedernales & 6<sup>th</sup>; take in donated books to build schools in Nicaragua; associated with Project Schoolhouse; trying to grow and not go broke; last couple of years push into more computers – handling multiple websites; growing online marketplace; keeping computers working and have questions about how to finance and manage technology growth – more sophisticated, how to afford it

Jill, Sam's wife, interested in finding out how to grow and market using technology; how do we help people who don't have technology help access our products; I work in public schools and run into the digital divide

Michelle Winsie (sp?), Frameworks Community Development Corp; financial literacy and homebuyer education; want to reach classrooms nationally, grow the business, mass communication, managing technology growth

Naaomi Harris, work for the State of Texas, came to this calls because church is in the middle of expanding; how to use technology to enhance the growth of my church

Jamie Noyola, director of Lending at PeopleFund, want to practice what we preach, learn a lot from technology, using excel spreadsheets when we should be using databases; how to make our life easier

Rachel Brewer, Greater Texas Federal Credit Union, in marketing dept, better understanding about how to reach people with technology

Robert Hill, architect, see what's happening in Austin, where people are in terms of thinking and interested in doing, looking for an opportunity to plug in

Questions/topics identified by the attendees in the session:

- Need everything answered
- New processes
- Selling online, multiple websites
- How do we grow, how do we market
- How do we help people who don't have technology access to our products, reach out
- How to take this to national level
- Security

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#### Dr. Johnson's presentation:

In terms of integrating technology into your business:

1. Figure out your goals
  - a. What are your strengths, weaknesses
  - b. Can't learn everything about computers for business to get along, but balance that with what you do need to learn, work on
2. Map out your business processes
  - a. How do you do business
  - b. How do you market
  - c. How do you get your service or commodity to customers
  - d. How do you take in money, what is your cash flow, invoicing and waiting for payment, accounting system like Quickbooks to track, it can run your business from inventory to everything else
    - i. Everyone using quickbooks
    - ii. 2 people comfortable using quickbooks
3. Communication
  - a. Everyone needs a website and email
4. Once processes mapped, figure out which technology is appropriate or most useful for your specific processes
  - a. Aside: my next system will be a Mac, like Sam, because Macs are more secure

#### Sam Coronado's presentation:

*[note: some bullets are points made by other presenters or attendees that were related to the conversation]*

Invited to talk about his website, the process of its development, and current issues related to conducting business online. The two websites are: [www.coronadostudio.com](http://www.coronadostudio.com) and [www.serieproject.org](http://www.serieproject.org)

- I do work with macs because I do a lot of graphics
- I've managed several different websites and some of the old ones were like old junkers where once piece breaks the whole thing breaks down;
- Finally we decided to redesign to the current website and bartered with a website designer - we told him what we needed, along with specific ways the site had to function; he mapped out the sites and then wrote all of the codes that made the different pieces of the site interact correctly; it's like a modern car where I know how to get in and drive it, but there are a lot of pieces behind the scenes that function smoothly that I have no idea how
- There is a button linked to both pages so you can go back and forth between them at any time
- We have 250 different fine art prints, and each print has to have some method of tracking where it goes, either to a museum or a collector; and right now the website directs you to call the studio or project for availability and pricing
- We're still working on how to integrate the inventory and different pricing levels technology directly with the website; probably we will use Quickbooks and maybe another **Point-of-Sale (POS) software** where each print will have a barcode that is tracked by the POS system; the problem is this software is a little too expensive and mostly designed for PCs
- A benefit of **Quickbooks** is that it doesn't have a problem of maintenance or needing to call a help desk to solve problems as you would with a POS system
- **Filemaker pro** is another program we invested in to help manage inventory
- We will definitely need something other than just Quickbooks because our prices vary depending on levels of inventory; once we get below 5 or 7 prints, need a technology software that can trigger a price increase for the remaining prints; and we have to figure out what is the cost of acquiring the software versus managing the inventory of the prints some other way
- Our goal is to fully integrate a secure online sales feature into our website rather than just direct people to email or call us and take the credit card info over the phone
- Security is a main issue with trying to communicate and send info
- we're looking into **Paypal**
- Perhaps also to start listing on websites that would actually manage the sales transaction of our prints so that we don't have to do upkeep and maintenance; so far **craigslist** looks like a good option;

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possibly **ebay**; though there may be some cheaper services out there than paypal; each one has its advantages and disadvantages

- One **alternative to Paypal** is to work it out with your bank directly; most banks will offer that service where the bank creates a secure site for you to conduct financial transactions; everyone should be on speaking terms with their banker and find out if their bank will help them with secure online sales
- In terms of marketing, one of our challenges is how to navigate the language of selling a fine art print, a one-of-a kind work of art versus a digital print, which can be scanned in and printed sometimes with great results and colors; but how do you convince people that there is a difference between the original or the digital version; have to address that sophisticated distinction on our website and in our marketing
- **Google sketchup**, <http://sketchup.google.com>, is a free program that can do some amazing things; with a small amount of experimenting; now can do three-dimensional drawing online and easy to use
- As a small business, software is can be an expensive investment; the new **Adobe Illustrator CS3** retails for \$2500; though my instructor discount means I can purchase it for about \$1200; eventually these programs may be online so you can rent them for a certain amount of time and use them
- There is open source software that does everything adobe does, however the issue is that Adobe is the standard
- About websites and design: **colors** have a psychological impact; need to pay attention to that and unless you're a web designer; hire a good one to work with you; and have a good idea about the **market or audience** you are trying to reach so that they can design colors and images that are appropriate
- Good web designers will also add certain codes so that when someone is looking for a particular search, your website will come up right away; not necessarily driven by the number of hits you get; if you don't word the "tags" for your website right, you may wind up too far down the search result menu
- As a small business owner you can also have whoever is hosting your domain name for you insert the tags you want
- Your ISP address can also help screen out a lot of spam

#### Carl Huntley's presentation:

Most of my technology work has been in speech technology and artificial intelligence – if that's all you got, artificial is better than none

From a small business standpoint, it is much easier to apply the technology to specific processes, so per Dr. Johnson's recommendation: do map out the processes or areas of your business to figure out where technology will really have an impact.

Your **website** will have a great deal to do with communication and sales and marketing your business; in some ways it is easier when you have a product like prints that you can have pictures of, and much more difficult when you have a service you are offering to get your message across visually

Example: one of the things my business does is network analysis; we look for throughputs and since it's difficult to explain it through the website, we usually take a call or some kind of conversation with the client to make sure they understand what that service is

Financial management, **Quickbooks, use it for forecasting**; the key thing you want to forecast is **income**; how much money do you expect to receive in a month. You can also use it to forecast materials, costs, how much do I have to spend to reach that revenue and to forecast the expenses of your human resources. Quickbooks can also do some analysis of areas of business where old inventory or other waste could use attention.

Don't need technology for the sake of using technology!! Apply it in an area where you can measure the benefit of using the technology, either as more efficient operation or more efficient cost of doing business.

Austin Free-net, <http://www.austinfreenet.net>

- Was originally established to provide computer access to people who didn't have it
- First effort to do that was to install computers in the libraries, now the city of Austin has taken over that function
- Continue to provide training and if specific issues in your business that you need help with

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- One of the issues was security – desire to get some help without having to pay; this organization can help in that regard

#### After presentations, general question and discussion:

Q: what other kind of programs and software is out there that might help?

- Google analytics, pretty sure its free; enter a bunch of info about your websites and it will tell you which pages people are going to and how long they are spending there
- Google has a lot of free programs

Q: what about security of computer systems and networks?

- Be careful who you hire to do your website; trust the people who do your technology work
- Some software programs can monitor who comes to your site, e.g. **Easy Armor**, can be somewhat irritating, seems to overly sensitive, but you can see which people trying to hack in and being blocked
- Security will slow you down on your operation, so there is a tradeoff with time, efficiency
- Using programs like **Zone Alarm** at work may have the unintended consequence of preventing some emails from some big companies and clients from coming in and reaching you
- One way around that is what PeopleFund did for its newsletter, just started using a program called **Constant Contact** for email distribution because they maintain or get through some of the firewalls
- Need to de-frag your computer regularly to improve functionality: go to the menu of: “Accessories, system tools, disk defragmenter” and run that overnight
- In case of computer crashes, still need to backup the data regularly
- Leaving the computer on all the time; it’s normal for a reliability standpoint; actual usable life of a computer is short – will be obsolete before it drops dead

Q: do you have thoughts about remote backup and database versus onsite?

- Dr. Johnson: More of a control person and I like to control over my own stuff. Do buy the golden CD disks that last 50-100 years to use for backing up like artwork, pictures or use a standalone hard drive.

Q: what is the best way of being able to access your info or files remotely, such as when you are with a client?

- Google has **gmail** which can allow you to also store documents, including word docs and spreadsheets, gives you 3 GB of storage which is significant, will take you awhile to use that up
- VPN is a virtual private network – way to access your system securely remotely
- When you’re sending communication, just remember that everything you send is public, every email is available to being monitored.