

**Starting Your Own Business**  
*A Series for Budding Entrepreneurs*  
**The Small Office**



## The Small Office

The small office is where we start our businesses. Whether it is downstairs at your house, or rented in a nice downtown location, there are a number of items that must be considered to make your office as efficient and professional as possible. Remember, the home office should not be considered for a tax deduction – unless you enjoy waving a red flag in front of the IRS. The small office in a separate location is a legitimate tax deduction for your business. We will cover a number of other items for consideration in your office in this section.

## Internet

With today's tools for developing web sites, domain names, email addresses, and all of those other things that we now take for granted, here are a few things for your consideration.

I have my own web site. As a one person small business, I believe that you should have a place to send potential clients to review your capabilities. Since I do not have a clue how to develop a web site, I went to a professional. My web designer focuses on small businesses, and for a reasonable fee, he developed my site (just go to [www.ironslad.com](http://www.ironslad.com) to see his work – or you can contact Jim Sanders at [james.sanders@netrage.net](mailto:james.sanders@netrage.net), or check his web page at [www.netrage.net](http://www.netrage.net)) and hosts it monthly. All changes have been done by him, and the new content is released after I have reviewed/approved the changes. He does excellent work, and I would recommend him highly.

One tool offered by Netrage is a tracking tool to monitor the number visitors who come to the web site. While I thought that I probably had 20-30 hits per month, I was very surprised to find out through Netrage that I get hundreds of hits each month. Not bad for a small business in Huntsville, Alabama.

## The Business Computer

I mentioned that I am a computer amateur, so for my business computer, I went to an expert, too. He built a computer with two extremely large hard drives and the fastest processor available (I realize that technology changes all of the time, so get the best product with the fastest processing time that is available when you buy your business computer). The two hard drives stay synchronized at all times constantly duplicating each other. I found this to be critical when one of the hard drives crashed, but my computer and all of its data was backed up 100% on the other hard drive. This is critical – to have your computer data safe. Not only do I have the two hard drives backing each other up, I also have an external hard drive that backs up the computer twice a week. I realize that I may be going a bit overboard here, but I do not want to have to recreate my completed work projects from the past 5 years – and building in a safety net in your computer is critical. How many of us know of friends, or family, who have lost their entire computer files due to a hard drive crash?

## The Business Office

In addition to my office computer, I have an office phone (I am assuming that everyone has an office cell phone), and a dedicated fax phone number (available from your phone provider). My office equipment includes a printer/scanner/fax machine as well as a desk and file cabinets for storage. It isn't sophisticated, but it works well for me.

There are a number of services where you can get a dedicated 800 number for faxes that are sent to you in an email as a .pdf. Again, I recommend looking around for what services make sense to you, but it is important that your clients reach you easily, and they should have no problems sending you faxes, or calling you on your office/cell phone. Sometimes responsiveness will be the key discriminator for your business model.

You must have a Blackberry and a cell phone, or the two combined as one tool. This is critical for your business. Your clients must be able to reach you at all times. With the advent of email at your fingertips, more clients are counting on reaching you via email rather than calling on your cell phone. Your cell phone and office phone must be backed up by an answering machine, or call forwarding to where your clients can reach you. If you are going to be unreachable for a period of time – leave that message on your office and cell voice messages, and make an autorule for your email with this message, too. It is always a good idea to let your clients know when you will be taking vacation before you go – this can easily be done by a client distribution list that you can create in an email address book. If you don't want your clients to know that you work for others, or with whom you work, just send the message to yourself and bcc your client group.

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