

NDSU Offers Tips for Operating Home-based Businesses

More people have a home-based business than you might think.

“On average, one of every 10 households is operating one or more home-based businesses,” says Glenn Muske, rural and agribusiness enterprise development specialist for the North Dakota State University Extension Service. “In rural areas, that number is often higher. These numbers typically do not take into account farm and ranch operations which, by most definitions, would be considered a home-based business.”

Home-based businesses are nothing new.

“If you think about it, our country’s economic system was based nearly entirely on home-based businesses in its early years and in the frontier areas of our country,” says (insert local name, title and county office).

Today the home-based business owner has a significant number of tools to help him or her operate the business. Many of these tools are based on technology, including the Internet. With such tools, the home-based business owner cannot be distinguished from any other business owner.

This is important to note because a common misconception is that people operating a business from their home are not as serious about business success, according to Muske.

“In reality, we find that home-based business owners are as serious about business success and interested in growth as any other business owner,” he says. “Even those owners who also have additional goals, such as maintaining a lifestyle or more family time, know that they must remain competitive in terms of price, product, packaging and service.”

Home-based business owners not only struggle with outside perceptions; they also have internal factors that may hinder business development.

“It is not surprising that many home-based business owners struggle with loneliness,” says (insert last name). “They feel that they have few or even no professional colleagues who can identify with their struggles. In some communities, these business owners find ways to meet on a regular basis. They form a network to discuss ideas and trends, and simply to share time with people in similar situations.”

Some other tips for the home-base business owner are:

* Take your laptop and spend time at the local coffee shop, library or even park bench where you can get free wireless Internet. This gives you a change of scenery, it may spark some new ideas and you have the chance to meet new people. It provides for that necessary social interaction all of us need.

* Get dressed in business casual clothing as opposed to clothing for a more relaxed situation. Working in your PJs sounds great but may not put you in the right frame of mind.

* Make plans to attend regular conferences. Don't forget to attend that monthly meeting of your Chamber of Commerce. If the Chamber is welcoming a new business, make sure you attend. It is a great chance to make new connections. Also, do not forget to ask the Chamber to do a welcome as you start your new business. It will be free publicity and is a way to start building awareness that you are open.

* Make contacts with local news media. Become the local expert in your subject area. Be the person the media turn to with questions. This helps you form important relationships and becomes a great marketing tool.

* Find a work buddy. You have others you know who are in the same situation you are. You perhaps can do some team work or just enjoy some office camaraderie. With the virtual world, you often can work from anywhere.

Some home-based businesses have grown into major corporations we all recognize. Others have remained small but are serving the needs of the individual and the community.

“Working at home can be satisfying and rewarding,” Muske says.

For more ideas and assistance, contact your local Extension Service office, go to NDSU's Small Business Support website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/smallbusiness or visit the national eXtension website for entrepreneurs at www.extension.org/entrepreneurship.