

The Terminator: Small Business Guru - Who Knew?

As much as it pains me to admit this, I may have learned something from the Terminator. Well, to be clear . . . it was actually from the new Fox(R) spinoff series, "The Sarah Connor Chronicles." I have never been much of a fan of this series of movies, but after viewing them again recently with my husband, I must reluctantly admit that "Ah-nold" just might be on to something.

Those of you who may be die-hard fans will know the line I am referring to, but if not, just indulge me a moment. I promise there is a method to my madness.

In both the movie and the series, there is a (variation) of the line, "Come with me if you want to live." Direct, forceful, and certainly insightful on its own. But here's where it gets a little weird (and I will warn you up front to make a bit of a leap with me).

In both the movie and in the series, the characters look toward technology to help them. We need these pseudo-human beings to guide us, and ultimately, to save us. It got me to thinking about how it parallels so much of what is happening with technology today, and how important it is that we both embrace and trust the technology around us if we want our small business to survive.

There are literally dozens of advancements that have come on the scene, and, whether you follow these developments or not, they can, and will impact you. You have two options here: you can choose to ignore them and resist accepting them, or, you can embrace them, and leverage them to your advantage. History teaches us that no matter how hard we may try to resist change, it is inevitable. Those who resist change are often left behind.

What Can You Do to Make Technology Work For You?

There are many small changes that we can make to begin the process of embracing the technology around us. I know how it feels to be hesitant, or even downright resistant, to these changes. I wrote many of them off as nothing more than fads, then watched with surprise as many industry titans began implementing them. THAT got my attention. And, fair reader, it should get yours, too.

So, just how can you start making technology work for you? I am so glad you asked. I have worked up a short list that I think will help get the gears turning for you. From there, I encourage you to expand and revise the list to suit your needs.

Utilize Small automations. Setting up reminders in your email client (check out Outlook's Calendar feature, for example) can help keep you on track, and on schedule. I set reminders for everything from client conference calls to reminders to change out content on my various websites. I would be lost without it.

RSS News Feeders. Streamline your web-surfing by setting up feeds from your favorite news outlets, blogs, magazines, etc. This puts all the information in one place, and allows you to read them at your leisure.

Automatic Credit Card Processing. I used to waste several hours a week in processing orders for my various sites -- because I was doing all of this manually. Last fall, I had finally had enough. I switched over to 1ShoppingCart.com, and it was one of the best decisions I ever made. Not only are my orders processed automatically, but the cart system also handles my affiliate program, autoresponders, and can even handle delivery of digital products. It is a bit pricey at first glance, but if you take the time to price out all of these elements separately, you'll soon realize it is a valuable investment in your business.

AudioGenerator.com. This service is one that after you begin using it, you will wonder why you didn't start sooner. You can record (via phone, or upload your own file) short messages for your website -- welcome messages, product instructions, special announcements, etc. -- and upload a short line of code to add them to your site. Because the file is third-party hosted, it loads quickly and won't bog down your server. You can also give out a special phone number to your customers, and allow them to record product or service testimonials.

Productivity Tools. Embracing technology allows us to work smarter, rather than harder. That said, below are some time-saving resources, along with a short explanation of how they can serve you.

BizJournals: Search 41 business news journals at once.

<http://www.bizjournals.com>

TrackEngine: Set up alerts to monitor changes on frequently visited websites. <http://www.trackengine.com>

TinyURL: Shorten lengthy URLs for easy emailing. <http://www.tinyurl.com>

ZoomInfo: Don't Google someone, ZoomInfo them! <http://www.zoominfo.com>

DomainTools: Identify web sites owned by the competition. <http://www.domaintools.com>

Blinkx: Track the TV coverage of your competitors. <http://www.blinkx.com>

Jux2: Locate unique results between 3 search engines. <http://www.Jux2.com>

Wikipedia: Search and browse the ultimate online reference site. <http://www.wikipedia.com>

Ask: Answer who-is and what-is questions instantly. <http://www.ask.com>

TurboScout: Search across multiple search engines for comprehensive results. <http://www.turboscout.com>

Social Networks. I saved this as my last list item (although I could go on for quite a bit longer) simply because it is one that I personally resisted for far too long. The good news is, if you aren't using it, you haven't missed the boat on this. Follow these helpful tips, and start using these networks as another promotional method for your business:

Always provide valuable content. Nobody likes a spammer. Avoid hopping on these sites shouting from the rooftops about how great you are. Let folks come to that conclusion naturally by seeing all of the valuable knowledge and content you have to offer.

Go for quality, not quantity There are tons of social networks out there, and more springing up each day (trust me on this, I have a news alert set up to let me know). Select one or two and test the waters. Get a feel for the community, and then become a productive and respected member of it. You don't have to be a member of every social network in order to reap the benefits.

Be Prepared to Welcome the Leads. Do you have a lead-capture plan in place? If not, get one. Make sure you have a prominently placed opt-in area on your home page -- preferably "above the fold." Offer a free report, coupon, discount or other promotional offer to encourage conversions of that traffic.

These are really only the tip of the iceberg in terms of embracing the technology available to us as small business owners. The most important fact that I'd like to leave with you is that if you aren't using technology, you run the risk of being left behind. The Internet offers us the unique opportunity to enjoy a global marketplace; don't kid yourself into believing that your competition isn't going to be employing these exact same strategies to get the jump on you.

Little do they know that we have the Terminator on our side. "Hasta la vista, baby!"

About the Author

Traci Hayner Vanover, The Promo Diva(R), is the publisher of Create the Dream magazine <http://www.createthedream.com>, and the president of Market Outside the Box Trade Association <http://www.marketoutsidethebox.com>. She also works with private clients as a publicist, copywriter and consultant.

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