



Smart SMBs Use Networking Technologies to Gain Competitive Advantage

**Former Cisco 'Growing with Technology Award' Winners-Pearl Law Group, D.W. Morgan and Somerset Houseboats -Continue to Thrive.**

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*By Jenny Carless, News@Cisco*

Small and medium-sized businesses compete with much larger companies that have many more resources at their disposal. To succeed, the smaller firms must take advantage of every tool available to them - and networking technology is one of the most important.

Smart small businesses are using Internet Protocol (IP) communications, integrated network security and wireless and mobile technologies to lower capital and operating costs and sharpen their competitive edge against companies of any size.

"Technology steals time back for these businesses - so they can focus on running their business to the best of their abilities," says Mark Quinn, Northern California district director, U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). His organization aids, counsels and protects the interests of small businesses - providing a wealth of services that range from business and technology training to disaster relief.

"It levels the playing field, helping them reach a much broader audience than they'd be able to otherwise," Quinn explains.

Cisco Systems and the U.S. Small Business Alliance (SBA) have a history of collaborating to help small businesses. For example, the two were key collaborators in establishing the San Jose Entrepreneur Center, which opened in October 2000. The eCenter is a one-stop resource that provides small business owners with valuable training in the core skills necessary to run a business, both from the technological and management perspective.

"Across all levels of commerce, people are realizing that unless they can do business online, they won't be able to work with the customers they want," Quinn explains.

"Networking technology is simply the way business is transacted today."

## **Technology as the Foundation of Business Success**

For the past six years, Cisco Growing with Technology Awards have recognized organizations for their unique adoption of networking implementations to drive business success. Pearl Law Group, D.W. Morgan and Somerset Houseboats are all past winners - and technology continues to play a critical role in their success.

### *Pearl Law Group*

Pearl Law Group provides immigration law services for corporate clients with foreign national employees. From the outset, technology has been a critical foundation of the firm's international communications and innovative customer service. It continues to help the company adjust to an ever-changing global immigration situation.

"Our firm has adapted to the changing landscape and focus on homeland security over the past several years," explains Julie Pearl, managing partner. "We've become much more globally focused in our practices - and technology plays a big role in how we do this."

The firm provides impressive customer service with its proprietary software, 'Immigration Tracker' and 'Tracker Global.' These products help the company provide real-time case status reports, free of error, at a low cost to clients.

"Customer service is comprised of many things," says Pearl. "Of course, it's paying attention and treating each client well, but there's also a lot of accountability that can be communicated and demonstrated with computer tools."

"Our clients really value being able to go online and see the actual progress as each step in their immigration process is completed," she explains. "And our system goes further, to show them who is responsible for completing the next step. In fact, making those steps - and who is accountable for them - available to everyone involved in the process is a key factor in our effectiveness."

### *Somerset Houseboats*

A well-established manufacturer of custom luxury houseboats, Somerset Houseboats has also taken advantage of networking and the Internet to build strong, personalized relationships with its customers.

"One of the most popular ways we're able to serve our customers is to give them access to detailed, up-to-the-minute information about the status of a boat order," explains Steve Lochmueller, chief executive officer. "Our networking infrastructure allows us to collaborate much more effectively with clients, so they feel part of the process. You'd be surprised how much people appreciate being able to go online and see pictures of their boat as it moves through production."

Lochmueller believes the company's use of technology has made it more productive, also. "We recently opened a second plant and have easily incorporated the new production facility into the company," he says. "The second location is remotely connected to our main headquarters, which allows us to pool resources and helps employees share information and be more effective."

"Our network is the core of our customer service, allowing us to effectively meet - and exceed - our customers expectations, and at the end of the day, that's what it's about," Lochmueller points out. "Apart from the actual craftsmen in our plants, technology is the other key component that allows us to meet our customers' needs."

### *D.W. Morgan*

D.W. Morgan provides shipping, logistics and supply-chain management services. Real-time information analysis, data interoperability and inventory management tools are at the heart of the company's outstanding success.

"In a supply chain, you move two things," explains David Morgan, president and chief executive officer. "You move the goods, but the revelation we had is that you also move information. And when you do that, your business processes dictate your efficiency."

"Information can move much more efficiently across a network than it can with manual transfer, which is the way this business has typically been done," he adds. "By building our business on network-to-network computing, we've transformed the concept of whole-process management."

The company's technology infrastructure continues to serve it well: D.W. Morgan has doubled in size in the past two years, with revenues up about 250 percent.

"The technology exists now to make companies incredibly efficient," says Morgan. "They don't need more applications, they need to adopt available networking infrastructures and use them to help change their conventional business processes."

Pearl Law Group, Somerset Houseboats and D.W. Morgan are in completely different industries. Yet they are all run by savvy business leaders who have recognized how networking technology can give small businesses a competitive edge.

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