



“Insider Tips To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier, And More Profitably”



The Smarter Path

CUSTOMERS EXPECT MORE



“As a business owner, I know you don’t have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That’s where we *shine!* Call us and put an end to your IT problems finally and forever!”

- Willie Kerns, SmartPath Technologies

What’s Inside:

Password Familiarity

Page 2

The Lighter Side

Page 2

Improving Your Linked In Profile

Page 3

Shiny New Gadget

Page 3

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SmartPath Employee Spotlight



Lea Ann Pirtle is our Office Administrator, so she handles service contracts, inventory, billing, and purchasing. In other words she stays really busy and is the glue that holds the office together. In Lea Ann’s previous life, she served as a successful banker

at a locally owned bank. At SmartPath Technologies, Lea Ann handles IT Works Managed Services contract management and is the go-to with any billing inquiries. Lea Ann is an invaluable resource of knowledge – but more importantly she makes sure our most valuable assets – our clients – are well served and properly taken care of. She also carries the nickname of “Willie’s work wife”, she helps him with everything from straightening his collar to producing large proposals. Lea Ann has two great kids, Annie and Dalton and is very active in her church family.

In today’s market, as in none before, it is crucial that we learn selling savvy. The sales environment has changed radically in four distinct ways: Many of you have known me for a long time. I grew up being a “computer technician” and have owned my own business since 2000. I was hands-on in your offices for years grooming and maintaining your network. I was also fortunate to have fortitude to see how my industry was changing and grow a business that supports between 15 and 20 families with above average wages in a tiny west Kentucky town (Calvert City). I never have been a sales person – my brain is that of an engineer. However, about three years ago, I had to evaluate how my time was most profitably spent. It alarmed and shocked me how much more valuable I was in a business development and growth position. Consequently, I’ve more aligned myself with providing high level IT consulting and oversight of your technology for you, and also introducing new business to our service model. In doing so, I’ve learned some key facts about customers that are not only true for my clients (you!) but for YOUR clients.



1. Customers are better-educated, more sophisticated and more value-conscious. In other words, they are harder to please; they want more for their money. Think about your own demands as a consumer. You insist on quality goods and efficient service. You don’t want some slick con artist trying to trick you into buying a product or service you don’t want or need. If something goes wrong, you want to know that the company and all of it’s employees are going to stand behind you. In IT, we understand and it’s important our clients understand **problems will happen!** We work to keep these to a minimum, but the value is handling the problems when they arise. An issue may take two or three days to get totally resolved, but customers want the confidence to know the problem will be thoroughly addressed and don’t want to waste time on worrying about follow through. I tell people that we may not be the cheapest IT firm, but I can confidently say we’re the best. My dad told me it’s better to explain why your price is different one time than constantly having to explain why your services and your client’s networks are always completely down. I live by that motto.

2. Competition is stiffer. Customers now have so many options that price will always be the deciding factor—unless you can offer a strong differential VALUE advantage. That means you have to offer value that sets you apart from all the other salespeople who are trying to get your customers to buy from them. You have to provide quicker service, more up-to-date product knowledge and better follow-up. Moreover, your customers must acknowledge the superiority of your products and services, and the object of your presentation should be to lead them toward that recognition and acknowledgment.

3. Technology is rapidly replacing peddlers. People are buying more through direct mail. The Internet is making it possible to buy almost anything you want at the click of a mouse. Companies are no longer looking for peddlers to handle items that are much easier to sell online or through the mail. In many cases, they’re setting up self-service systems that can be operated by clerks. Of course, there are plenty of very good opportunities for really sharp salespeople who can sell with power and skill, especially in the industrial field.

To be successful as a salesperson, you must find ways to distinguish yourself from the inexpensive clerks and the commonplace peddlers. You must rise to the challenge with proficient skills, depth of knowledge and a positive attitude. You must also be constantly aware and abreast of the changes in the business world.

4. Time has become a priceless commodity. Prospects don’t want salespeople wasting their time. And if you’re serious about becoming successful, you don’t have time to wander around showing your products or services to anyone who will look at them.

To survive in today’s volatile marketplace, you need a clear and effective strategy. You need the skills to implement that strategy. And you need the know-how to make that strategy work for you. When you acquire and apply these things, you’re demonstrating selling savvy. I’m always happy to sit down with you and discuss things other than IT, including marketing and sales strategy. I won’t claim I have the magic pill to make everything better but I have made lots of mistakes that I’m willing to share so you don’t fall into the same holes.

The Lighter Side...

A Pleasant Drive With The Queen Of England



In 2003, the recently deceased King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia paid a visit to the UK. During the trip, he met with Queen Elizabeth II at Balmoral, the royal family's castle and estate in Scotland. The queen asked then-Crown Prince Abdullah if he would enjoy a tour of the estate. The prince wasn't initially keen on a tour, but he decided it would be polite to accept as a guest of the queen. He agreed.

When their transportation arrived—two regal Land Rovers—the prince stepped into the front passenger seat. It allowed him an exquisite view of the estate and the surrounding countryside. What happened next, he was not fully prepared for. The queen opened the driver's-side door and climbed in. She swiftly turned the ignition, threw it into gear and hit the accelerator.

Keep in mind, women in Saudi Arabia are prohibited from driving.

Also keep in mind, the queen is a *very* experienced driver.

While giving the prince the royal tour, she did not hold back. It was pedal to the metal. As she blasted down the narrow country roads, she remained attentive to her guest and kept the conversation lively. It was an attentiveness the prince felt was misdirected. He pled with the queen to focus on the road. She did not.

Following Abdullah's death in January, Queen Elizabeth takes the throne as the world's oldest reigning monarch at a spry 88. Abdullah was 90.



How often does he go online?"

Does This Password Sound Familiar?

You know the difference between a good password and a bad one. Many of us do like the convenience of a simple, easy-to-remember password that requires no effort to recall and type when we connect to our WiFi network, buy from our favorite e-tailer or use for online bill pay. But many of us also appreciate an added layer of security so we **don't** use an effortless password when sensitive data is on the line.

In a recent study conducted by SplashData, they looked at a sampling of over 3 million passwords (all of which were leaked during a data breach last year). They compiled a list of the most common passwords—and the results weren't all that surprising. **123456** was the No. 1 password used last year, followed by the classic **password**.



While these passwords may have the IT and security crowds shaking their heads in dismay, it's not all bad news. These popular passwords may offer next to no practical security, but according to the study, the 25 most common passwords only represent about 2% of the overall total.

This means most people don't use these passwords—or **qwerty**, or **111111**, or **iloveyou**. The study found more variation among the most popular passwords versus the 2013 study. Is it a possible trend? Are people turning to more imaginative or secure passwords? Maybe, but only time will tell. Even if the study suggests most of us don't rely on overly simple passwords, SplashData's list serves as a reminder to use more secure passwords and to change them regularly.

It's also important you don't use the same password on multiple online sites. Why? You hear of the TJ Maxx breach, or the HomeDepot hack – this week's target was Walmart Pharmacy. What those attacks often do is put everyone who has an account with a company out in the open public domain. If you had an account from purchasing something at homedepot.com, I can likely easily find your account name and password from their breach. With that information, someone can easily assume that you use the same password on Amazon, eBay, and other vendors. I find your HomeDepot password, use that password to login to your Amazon account, and order thousands of dollars of stuff with your stored credit card. I get the stuff shipped out of the country, and you're stuck with the bill. Passwords to online sites can be similar, but should never be identical!

Sorting Through All that Spam Email Gotcha Down?

Email has become the main way to communicate with business contacts and employees. Sadly, email doesn't come without a little (ok, a lot) of baggage. You know, all those random ads for hair growth medications, pills, fake watches not to mention malicious emails trying to get you to click a strange link to win this or that and infect your computer.

Email has also become a huge target for SPAM, viruses, phishing and other malware. SmartPath provides e-mail hosting and spam filtering services – and if you aren't using us for e-mail services, it's VITAL that you reach out to us. Not only does it look unprofessional to use an @gmail or @yahoo.com account for business, you are throwing yourselves to the wolves when it comes to productivity and security.

Studies have shown, on average, people spend 28% of their work day using email. **If 15% of that work day is dedicated to e-mail management and spam, and you have six employees making \$30,000 a year, spam is costing you \$71,820 a year or \$2494 a month in payroll costs alone.** Contact us today and the savings will likely pay for your IT costs for the year!

270-238-8999 or via email at klassiter@smartpathtech.com



Shiny New Gadget of the Month



The Way Tools TextBlade

When we are surrounded by touch-screen mobile devices, sometimes we can get a little nostalgic for a good old-fashioned keyboard. Sure, there are a number of apps that make typing on a touch-screen easier, but tactile feedback is non-existent. Or we want to type something more substantial than a text message or quick email, and we don't want to go through the chore of typing it all out on a small screen. And then it's often hard to find a wireless keyboard that is both practical and truly portable.

The WayTools TextBlade aims to solve these problems. The TextBlade offers a fully-featured and responsive solution—while maximizing portability. Through a Bluetooth connection, you can sync it up to your favorite smartphone or tablet. The lithium polymer battery lasts upwards of a month with average use, and it's quickly recharged via USB. Small but powerful magnets keep it held in place when you're using it and when it's tucked away in your pocket.

It's priced at \$99 and you can find it online at www.waytools.com.

Six Easy Ways To Improve Your LinkedIn Profile

LinkedIn is a great social media platform for entrepreneurs, business owners and professionals. Unfortunately, your LinkedIn profile may not be helping you to create those connections.

So let's tune yours up with six simple steps:

Step 1. Revisit your goals. At its most basic level, LinkedIn is about marketing: marketing your company or marketing yourself. Think about your goals and convert your goals into keywords, because keywords are how people find you on LinkedIn.

But don't just whip out a keyword tool to identify popular keywords. Go a step further and think about words that have meaning in your industry. Use a keyword tool to find general terms that could attract a broader audience, and then dig deeper to target your niche by identifying keywords industry insiders might search for.

Step 2. Layer in your keywords. The headline is a key factor in search results, so pick your most important keyword and make sure it appears in your headline. Then work through the rest of your profile and replace some of the vague descriptions of skills, experience and educational background with keywords.

Step 3. Strip out the clutter. The average person has changed jobs six to eight times before they reach age 30. Sift through your profile and weed out or streamline anything that doesn't support your business or professional goals. If you're currently a Web designer but once worked in accounting, a comprehensive listing of your accounting background is distracting.

Step 4. Add in some personality. Focusing on keywords and eliminating clutter is important, but in the process your individuality probably got lost. Now add enthusiasm and flair. Share why you love what you do in your profile. Describe what you hope to accomplish. Remember, no one connects with keywords. People connect with people.

Step 5. Take a good look at your profile photo. A photo is a little like a logo. On its own an awesome photo won't win business, but a bad photo can definitely lose business.

A good photo flatters but doesn't mislead. The goal is for your photo to reflect how you will look when you meet a customer, not how you looked at some killer party. The best photo strikes a balance between professionalism and approachability, making you look good but also real.

Step 6. Get recommendations. Most of us can't resist reading testimonials, even when we know those testimonials were probably solicited. So ask for recommendations, and offer to provide recommendations before you're asked. The best way to build great connections is to always be the one who gives first.

Willie Kerns, SmartPath Technologies CEO, attributes LinkedIn to getting a ton of business generated and ideas/plans finalized with people whom are very hard to reach via conventional methods. He explained there was one prospect interested in a server replacement project whom he tried for four months to reach via in person visits, phone calls, and e-mails but never could connect with. He sent the prospect a message on LinkedIn and got a response within a half hour! Keep LinkedIn in your arsenal for all business communication needs.





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Could someone in your office use an extra \$500 this month? Here's how!

Our business is built off of referrals – it's the best “atta boy” we can get, and it lets us know our clients see enough value in what we do to recommend us to someone else who is suffering from IT and technology woes. The best part is – we'll pay for your referrals, no strings attached. Not only will we pay for them – we'll pay ANYONE in your office who refers us...it doesn't matter if it's an assistant, receptionist, or janitor. They can all get free money just from telling other businesses about SmartPath! Here's how...

Refer another business with at least five computers to us. We'll immediately send the referrer a \$25 gift card AND we'll provide the business they refer to us with a free network audit and two hours of free service, a combined value of almost \$500. We'll then analyze and review the audit with the business. It get's better...

If the business you refer ultimately decides to retain us and signs a service agreement, we'll pay \$25 for each computer at the business. If they have 5 computers, you get \$125. If they have 15 computers, you get \$375, and if they have 20 computers you get \$500 in CASH. There is no limit to the amount of money you can make from a single referral AND you can make as many referrals as possible every month.

Please make sure all members of your staff are aware of our referral program! It's been a great way to provide some much needed extra \$\$\$ to staff members whom can really use it. Most office staff aren't aware they can have this opportunity, so please make sure they are informed.