



Save time and money with VoIP

When it comes to business communication, VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) has become an invaluable and popular tool for businesses around the world. With impressive features including video conferencing, file-sharing, screen-sharing and call forwarding, businesses are able to communicate both internally and externally for much less than they were paying for their old, traditional services.

With the extremely low costs and now wide-spread availability, more businesses are using internet telephony and are encouraging their clients and stakeholders to do the same so they can take advantage of world-wide, user-to-user, free call options.

One of the most popular VoIP clients is Skype, which now has over 660 million registered users and, in latest findings, accounted for 12% of the world's international calls. One-third of Skype's users use it primarily for business.

The benefit of using VoIP for communication is that employers can easily employ people to work from home or from anywhere in the world. It is useful for teams of employees to communicate with each other in the office and to record conferences or meetings for later use. Some of other popular programs for VoIP include ViaTalk, Packet8, Yahoo Chat, Lingo and Verizon.

For those businesses already using these programs, or for those considering setting up an account, here are some tips to help you better utilise their features and to help you get the most out of VoIP for your small business:

- Use the Manager tools to create and manage employee accounts and selectively enable or disable different features for each account.
- Enable Group Video to video conference with multiple clients and colleagues at once.

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- Set up Call Forwarding to forward any incoming VoIP calls to your mobile phone, even if your computer is turned off.
- Screen Share your desktop with people on the other end of a video call. This is an ideal way to give presentations, give program tutorials and show users what is currently in your browser.
- Download plug-ins which allow Call Recording, Voicemail and Outlook Integration.
- Turn your VoIP into a customer service tool by linking a Button to your website to automatically initiate a call to you. You can then make it known to customers that you're available on your VoIP without having to distribute your username to the world.
- Check in on the house and pets while you're away for business by enabling Auto-Answer on incoming video calls. Just set up a second account and leave it logged in on your home computer, then any call you make to this account will automatically give you a live view of your living room from your location anywhere in the world.

It is important to consider, before switching to VoIP, that internet telephony still suffers more downtime than Plain Old Telephone Services (POTS) and that computer and network problems can interfere with your calls. We recommend setting up your account but keeping a landline option for back up, just in case!

How happy are your employees?



As long as employees turn up to work and complete tasks, that's all that matters right? Wrong!

Smart employers will consider the emotional well-being of their employees and implement strategies to ensure that company morale is high. Happy workers are more likely to produce results, take fewer days off, and stay loyal to the company. They generally do things more effectively and with greater interest and

if they are at ease at work, they are likely to be more alert and less stressed.

To measure employee satisfaction, many companies will conduct surveys or face-to-face meetings with employees to gain information. A useful guide in measuring job satisfaction and setting up company induction programs is Dr. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid (as shown below). According to Maslow you should be aiming to get your people to a 'self-actualised' position, this way they are in the best position to add great value to your organisation.

Events

Many experts believe that one of the best ways to maintain employee satisfaction is to make workers feel like part of a family or team. Organise office parties and group outings so that workers can develop friendships with the other employees. Events like paintball wars and backpacking or camping trips can also be an excellent team-building strategy to strengthen working relationships.

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Applying the pyramid to your business

Maslow's Hierarchy of needs is a framework of human motivation based on his own clinical experiences as a psychiatrist. It is used by modern leaders and executive managers around the world to find means of motivation for employee and workforce management.

The basis of this theory is that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and that certain lower factors need to be satisfied before higher needs can. As long as we are motivated to satisfy these cravings, we are moving towards growth and self-actualisation. Satisfying needs is healthy, while preventing gratification makes us sick and causes us to act evilly.

For adequate workplace motivation, leaders need to understand the active needs for their employees and help to satisfy them as best they can. The Hierarchy of Needs, as set out in the given pyramid is explained under five categories.

Physiological

Physiological needs are those needs required to sustain life – air, water, food and sleep.

⇒ Provide employees

with breaks for lunch and recuperation and pay salaries that allow workers to buy life's essentials.

Safety

Once physiological needs are met, one focuses their attention on ensuring safety and security to free themselves of the threat of physical and emotional harm.

⇒ Provide employees with a safe working environment, relative job security and freedom from threats. Medical insurance and financial reserves are also factors which could be taken into consideration when working out remuneration packages.

Social

The next stage of motivators is the social needs related to interaction with others.

⇒ Reinforce team dynamics in the workplace to generate a feeling of acceptance, belonging and friendship.

Esteem

After a person feels



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Environment

Is your workplace an enjoyable place to be? Design features, certain staff amenities and a clean environment can make the world of difference in employee satisfaction. Although professionalism is necessary, allowing employees to keep family photos or small trinkets on their desk can make them feel more comfortable at their work station and can also contribute to improving morale.

Bonuses

Of course, money cannot solve all morale issues but raises and bonuses can seriously affect employee satisfaction and should be given when possible. They also give staff something to work towards and can be a large factor in improving workability.

Respect

These things aside, the real component in high company morale and the backbone of employee



satisfaction is respect for workers and the job they perform. In every interaction with management, employees should be treated with courtesy and interest. Employers should always be open to discussing problems with their staff and, even if meeting their demands is not possible, showing them that they are being heard and considered fairly will often improve morale.



that they belong, the urge to attain a degree of importance emerges. Motivating esteem needs include self-esteem, accomplishment, self-respect, reputation and recognition.

⇒ Recognise your employee's achievements, assign them with important tasks and projects and provide status in the workplace to make them feel valued and appreciated. Awards and promotions are an excellent way of achieving this.

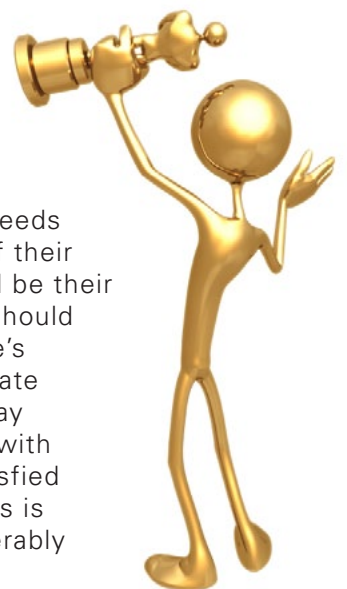
Self-actualisation

Self-actualisation is the summit of Maslow's motivation theory and is the quest of reaching one's full potential. Unlike other needs, this one is

never fully satisfied; as one grows psychologically there are always new opportunities to continue to grow. Motivators include truth, justice, wisdom and meaning. Self-actualised people have frequent moments of profound happiness and harmony. According to Maslow however, only a small percentage of people reach this level of self-actualisation.

⇒ Offer challenging and meaningful work assignments which enable innovation, creativity and progress according to long-term goals.

Not everyone is motivated by the same needs and at different stages of their lives, different needs will be their biggest motivators. You should recognise each employee's needs and work to motivate them individually. This may seem like a big task but with a team of happy and satisfied employees, your business is likely to succeed considerably more.



Developing a PR strategy



Marketing a small business can be tough without large amounts of cash to throw around. But this doesn't mean that you can't get your brand known! Generating media interest and having a good PR strategy is an excellent way of promoting your business and can be an equal, if not more, successful method to placing an ad in the newspaper.

Some news stories can happen as a result of organic events in your business and become naturally occurring public relations opportunities. Others must be created.

It is first important to remember that the media will only pick up and publish a story if they consider it to be newsworthy and will not just run a sales-focused story about how great your product or service is, because you say so in your media release. You need to ensure that your story concepts are of genuine public interest and have readership value to the publication's target audience.

Some primary business activities that are of interest to the media could include...

- The launch of a new product, service or branch of your company, where people would benefit from knowing its location and offerings;
- Industry recognition whereby you or your business wins an award or gains the attention of your peers;
- Notable changes in staff, spokespersons or volunteers. If the person or people you have hired are prominent in the community and are of a high profile, you will generate more media interest;
- International business dealings and high-profile partnerships and mergers can create major news stories;
- Community involvement that is making a considerable difference through either donation or support;
- Business interest where your product, service or changes taking place are new or unique to the industry;
- Key people responsible for your business success may have endured hard times or difficult circumstances but fought through to achieve something great. These stories are often favourable to the media as they have human interest appeal.

If you don't have a newsworthy story to pitch to the media, make one! Create a fun event or quirky stunt in a public place, position yourself as an expert and comment on industry developments and trends – make sure your customers and stakeholders will agree with what you are saying though, otherwise there will be no benefit. Offer free advice on a news story that is relevant to your occupation or relate large-scale industry topics to your local area and explain their impact in a helpful and relevant manner. One of the best things you can do is create photo opportunities. The media love great visuals and will be attracted to your story if you can create one for them. Include lots of colour, young and attractive people, celebrities, children or animals. Creativity is the key!

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Taking you forward

Taggart & Partners is a highly skilled business consultancy firm specialising in Business Restructuring, Taxation Planning & Management, Asset Protection Strategies and Superannuation Advice. Taggart & Partners are uniquely qualified to cater to a range of businesses from small to large through our expertise and comprehensive approach also providing our clients with a centralised business solutions network.

Our goal is to exceed the expectations of every client by offering outstanding customer service and flexibility with the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. Our experienced and professional team ensures our clients receive the most effective, invaluable and timely accounting, taxation and management solutions.

Our philosophy is to 'think outside the box' and be proactive in providing timely solutions to clients business and individual needs.



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