

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS



Cypress Gardens escapes from a dial-up connection



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Is it time for an upgrade? You can think about this question with respect to many areas of your business—from computer equipment to communications services to marketing methods. We all know that what worked yesterday may not work tomorrow, so it's important to regularly assess your needs and explore what new technology could do to help you meet them more successfully.

This November issue of *Business Connections* is filled with ideas for making upgrades. It begins on page 3 with a look at QR (Quick Response) codes and how they can take your marketing campaigns to a whole new level. On pages 4 and 5, you'll find a discussion of the different stages of social media maturity; this article provides "food for thought" about where your business currently is in this process and whether an upgrade in your social media activity is in order.

Upgrades were certainly needed at Cypress Gardens since the popular attraction had been struggling with a dial-up connection from another provider for many years. Home Telecom recently came to their rescue with services including high-speed Internet, phone, and security. You can read more about this upgrade project in our Business Spotlight on pages 6 and 7.

When you're ready to discuss a possible upgrade of your communications services, please contact Home Telecom. We can develop solutions to help your business increase its efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness.

Sincerely,

William S. Helmly
President & COO
Home Telecom



Crack the QR Code

Picture how these mysterious symbols could change your marketing promotions



TRY IT NOW!

This QR code will direct you to the Home Telecom Facebook page.

Don't have a QR code scanner for your smartphone yet? Try searching "QR Reader for iPhone" or "Barcode Scanner for Android."

They seem to be everywhere these days. QR (Quick Response) codes are those funny-looking symbols placed on ads, posters, business cards, mailers, websites, and TV commercials—practically anything that includes a visual component.

Viewers use their smartphone's camera function to scan the QR code—similar to how a grocery check-out clerk might use a handheld device to scan a UPC code—and the phone directs its browser to a URL embedded within the code. This leads viewers to special online promotions and other information.

To make the technology work on your smartphone, you need to download one of the QR code scanning apps. (See sidebar.) Once you've downloaded a QR code scanner for your smartphone, test it out on the QR code to the left, which points to Home Telecom's Facebook page. You'll be seeing QR codes on a variety of Home Telecom items including our fleet vehicles and mailers.

There are many examples of how businesses might use QR codes. A car dealer could place them on car window stickers and when customers walk around the lot, they'd use their smartphones to scan the codes and be instantly directed to a website with additional details about the cars. Similarly, a real estate agent might place a QR code on flyers outside a house for sale, so curious home shoppers could immediately see details about the house.

Think about how you could use QR codes to promote your business:

- **Special Offers** - Reward customers who take action (scanning the QR code) by giving them a discount or free merchandise or services.
- **Free Shipping** - Have your QR code point to a discount code customers can use to get free shipping.
- **Contact Information** - Have your QR code point to a virtual business card.
- **Access to Restricted Services** - Have your QR code point to a portion of your website that is normally reserved for members only.
- **Exclusive Invitations** - Allow details for a special event to be viewable only at a site accessible through a QR code.
- **Social Media** - Help build social media connections by having a QR code connect to your Facebook page.

Generating a QR code is easy. To do it, visit one of the many websites available such as the following:

- qrcode.kaywa.com
- qrcode.good-survey.com
- sparqcode.com/static/maestro

QR codes have been in use since the early 1990s, but have only recently gained popularity in the U.S. For best results, you may need to first educate your customers about QR codes, including how to use them and why they're convenient and beneficial. As QR codes become even more common, your business will undoubtedly find additional opportunities to use them for marketing purposes.



How Social Business is Your

Social media innovation falls into five stages of maturity

Social media has opened up incredible new opportunities for businesses to communicate with customers, employees, and other businesses. The use of social media, however, currently varies widely among businesses depending upon their size and the products and services they offer. No matter what type of business you have, there is probably some way you can use social media to your benefit. The first step is to identify how far your company has progressed in its use.

Social media in its current incarnation has been around less than a decade. Friendster and MySpace were launched in 2002. Facebook, currently the most popular social networking site, began in 2004. Twitter launched in 2006.

Tech Adoption Follows Curve

Social media techniques are adopted by individuals and businesses in much the same way as other new technologies. The process, called the Technology Adoption Lifecycle, is illustrated using a “bell curve” divided into five sections. A recent report by Forrester Research, an independent research company, suggests that you can identify your business’s social media maturity using this scheme.

Forrester based its report on a survey of large businesses, which tend to have extensive marketing departments. This means the businesses surveyed were more likely to be using social media than smaller ones with less money devoted to marketing. Every business can benefit, however, by locating itself in the scheme and planning the next steps.

Stages of Social Media Maturity

Forrester identifies these five stages of social media adoption:

1. Laggards (The dormant stage)

Forrester estimates that about one in five businesses is currently not using any social media. There can be several reasons for this:

- The business may not sell goods and services that lend themselves easily to social media efforts.
- A business may have an entrenched approach to marketing and see no need for something new.
- The conversational nature of social media may go against a felt need to “control the message.”
- Managers may see social media as just one more thing that will take resources from other work.

Forrester suggests such a business start with an easily implemented social media strategy that leads to “small victories.”

2. Late Majority (The testing stage)

Businesses in this group have started social media efforts but there is a lack of coordination. These efforts often arise spontaneously in small groups. Forrester suggests in this case that a “senior interactive marketer” take over organization of the efforts. Small businesses without such resources can instead use a consultant or identify a knowledgeable employee who can bring the efforts together.

Business?



3. Early Majority (The coordinating stage)

At this stage the business has begun to see the risks and rewards of a coordinated social media effort. To take the next step, businesses in this group need to begin thinking in the long term in areas of policy, process, and budget.

4. Early adopters (The scaling and optimizing stage)

Businesses in this group have organized their social media efforts and are now optimizing it. They do so by using advanced metrics beyond simple page-visit counts and Facebook "Likes." Businesses in this group can progress by using social media to directly address customer problems and requests.

Benefits Not Yet Quantified

Social media is still relatively new and changing rapidly. Although all businesses should consider using social media, it's impossible at this time to get the kind of metrics that show a direct relationship between social media efforts and sales.

Car maker Audi, for example, ran an advertisement during the 2011 Super Bowl containing a Twitter hashtag (#ProgressIs). The company also purchased a Promoted Trend ad from Twitter and hired Klout, a social media consultant, to find influential people online to reach out to about the campaign. But despite creating a temporary buzz of tweets and online exposure, the company was unable to say whether its sales were affected.

You can't expect social media to perform miracles; the methods aren't there yet to measure its bottom-line impact. It's important to keep your options open, however, so that you don't miss an opportunity to grow your business.

SOCIAL MEDIA QUICKSTARTER OFFERS TIPS

If you're new to social media, Constant Contact can help you get started. The provider of email marketing and other services for small businesses has created a Social Media Quickstarter of information and tips. Located at www.socialquickstarter.com, the site contains a collection of simple guides including an introduction to social media and overviews of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Take a few minutes to check out this resource; it might make it easier for your business to be successful at building social media connections.

5. Innovators (Empowering of employees stage)

At this stage, all relevant employees in the business can use social media. The social media strategy is put to work with less reliance on a few experts and more on the majority of employees. Few businesses have reached this stage.



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Leisurely Pace of **Cypress Gardens** No Longer Applies to **Internet Speed**

Paddling along in a swamp boat to look for alligators, turtles, and lily pads makes for an enjoyable adventure. Paddling around the Web with a dial-up connection may be closer to a nightmare. That's what employees of Cypress Gardens discovered during their 14 years with a dial-up connection from their previous communications provider.

Dwight Williams, Director of Cypress Gardens, recalls, "That provider only offered dial-up Internet out here at Cypress Gardens. It was horrible. Each of our employees was allotted just one hour per day to go online, and it would take about 15 minutes to get to one website."

Escaping From Dial-Up

No longer willing to make do with a slow dial-up connection, Cypress Gardens looked into other Internet possibilities including satellite, cable, and cellphone access, but none panned out for their remote 175-acre site in Berkeley County. Williams explains, "The Internet services were always too expensive, too restrictive, or unable to provide enough coverage. Then we talked to Home Telecom. They installed our phone equipment years ago and provided maintenance on it, but had never supplied any of our phone or Internet services. Home Telecom agreed to run fiber out to us at Cypress Gardens, finally giving us access to high-speed

Internet. So as of September 2011, we switched all of our services—Internet, phone, and security—to Home Telecom."

Home Telecom to the Rescue

With the recent upgrade to Velocity—Home Telecom's brand for its fiber technology—in the neighboring Pimlico subdivision, Home Telecom was able to extend the fiber infrastructure to Cypress Gardens and offer Velocity business services. The Home Telecom team that's helping Cypress Gardens achieve this long overdue upgrade is led by Rob Reimers, Business Services Sales; Rick Whited, Sales Engineer; and Wes Lance, Home Integration Sales.

It's a substantial project that will yield significant operational improvements for Cypress Gardens. Notes Rick Whited, "Home Telecom is providing Cypress Gardens with technology including Fiber-to-the-Business cabling, multi-mode fiber to connect the buildings on the property, new Cat-5 wiring in each of the buildings, and switches and firewalls. In particular, having access to high-speed Internet will benefit Cypress Gardens tremendously. Their staff is now connected to the Berkeley County intranet and able to research information as needed; they also don't have to schedule times for each person to use the Internet anymore."

Rob Reimers adds, "This was a much-needed upgrade which equips Cypress Gardens to truly become a first-class conference center, meeting place, and reception venue. Employees now have the Internet access they need to do their jobs, and visitors have what they need as well."



Nature Meets Technology

A wide variety of visitors come to Cypress Gardens. On any given day, you may see students studying the plants and wildlife on field trips, business professionals attending seminars and conferences, vacationers checking out the sights, and families celebrating weddings or other special events. Cypress Gardens has been a preferred group and family destination since 1931, and visitors from all over the country come to experience this vast garden landscape. It's been featured in numerous national magazines and was chosen as a location for scenes in the movies "The Patriot" and "The Notebook." Attractions include the Butterfly House, Swamparium, Walking Trails, and the Heritage Room featuring artifacts from the Dean Hall Plantation that once stood on the site.

Heather Graham, Manager of Cypress Gardens, is thrilled to be able to offer visitors both outdoor beauty and up-to-date communications services. "Before, we could not provide teleconferencing or Internet service to any of our rooms used for events. Now, we can offer Internet service as well as tablets and DVD players. This is obviously great for our business events. And it also helps with weddings since brides like to do things online such as communicate with our wedding coordinator."

What's ahead for Cypress Gardens? Dwight Williams answers, "Soon we'll have Wi-Fi capabilities. And we're also working with Wes Lance and the Home Integration Team to get a SMART board option called 'video mirroring' installed. Video mirroring takes whatever someone has on a tablet and displays it on a large screen TV. So visiting students could go on a tour, take photos of animals, then talk about them back in the classroom."

The enhanced communications services at Cypress Gardens seem to be making everyone happy. Says Williams, "We actually had one lady in tears when she heard about our improved Internet service." Despite the swamp location, we can assume they weren't crocodile tears.

Thinking about an upgrade at your business? Call a Home Telecom Business Sales Representative today at 888-571-5775.



L to R: Wes Lance, Rick Whited, and Rob Reimers

WHO'S MINDING YOUR BUSINESS?

This brave team from Home Telecom braved the swamp (and the outdated communications infrastructure) to guide Cypress Gardens into the use of more powerful and efficient solutions.

WES LANCE

Home Integration Sales
Wes.Lance@HomeTelco.com

"I came up with the SMART Board alternative of video mirroring, and presented it to Cypress Gardens. Our Home Integration Team is a unique and multi-faceted one; it was truly a team effort on this project. We'll install the TVs and wiring, and provide training on how to use video mirroring."

RICK WHITED

Sales Engineer
Rick.Whited@HomeTelco.com

"My primary role in this project will be to engineer the inside fiber connectivity to each building as well as the VoIP service if they choose to go that route. I'll also work with the IT department at Berkeley County to see that all switches, firewalls, and wireless devices are implemented properly, and coordinate with other Home Telecom departments to keep the tasks on schedule."

ROB REIMERS

Business Services Sales
Robert.Reimers@hometelco.com

"I basically serve as the Project Coordinator for Home Telecom's work at Cypress Gardens. I work directly with the staff there, and at Berkeley County, to make sure they have everything they need."

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