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Riding the Wave: Going To Market

By T.C. Doyle and Rich Cirillo, VARBusiness

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With generally less money to spend on advertising, many small-business solution providers approach promoting their businesses in a rather unique way. Some, like MikesHardware.com, simply drive around in white-paneled vans with their logo emblazoned on the side. MikesHardware.com vans are familiar sights in the San Francisco Bay area.

Other companies, meanwhile, depend on references. QA Computer Consulting of Springfield, Mass., for example, lists its references right on its home page. It's so confident of its reputation that it even includes the phone numbers of current clients. Vitus Computer Consulting, a small-business networking and applications consulting company in Minneapolis, offers a signed testimonial from one of its customers on its site.

No matter what the approach, small-business experts generally agree that establishing a personal relationship with a client is critical for success. Not surprisingly, many owners of companies that cater to the SMB market are willing to share personal experiences, both good and bad, with customers in order to create a bond with them.

Michael Chukov, founder and owner of MikesHardware.com, for example, includes in his personal biography on the company's Web site the story of how he one day walked out of his then-employer, NEC Technologies, to begin life anew. While perhaps off-putting to some in the more conservative corporate environment, Chukov believes his personal decision to quit a bureaucracy rather than put up with "corporate games and politics hockey" resonates with many small-business customers, many of whom themselves are refugees from bigger companies.

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