

The background of the entire page is a large, dense crowd of people, rendered in a blue-tinted, hazy, and slightly blurred style. In the foreground, three individuals are clearly visible: a man on the left in a dark suit and light blue tie, a woman in the center with short brown hair wearing a purple shirt under a dark blazer, and a woman on the right with long dark hair wearing sunglasses and a striped shirt. The overall mood is one of a vast, anonymous population.

Is SELF- EMPLOYMENT *for* YOU?

ANYONE *can start a business...*
only FEW *can SUSTAIN a business.*

PAUL E. CASEY

(1,021 words)

Are you thinking about taking the plunge into the world of self-employment? The following excerpt on “Technology” is from the book, “Is Self-Employment for You?” This book goes beyond the ABC’s of how to write a business plan but examines the potential entrepreneur’s emotional readiness and personality traits that ultimately make the difference between success and failure. “Is Self-Employment for You?” Author Paul Casey has been successfully sustaining his business for over fifteen years. The book costs \$15.95 and can be purchased by visiting Amazon.com and inputting “Is Self-Employment for You?”

TECHNOLOGY: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

By Paul Casey

The Good: In the past twenty years, nothing has allowed more businesses to succeed—or to fail—than advancements in technology. The technology explosion of the past two decades has made it possible for more people to start their own businesses than ever before. There is no way, practically or financially, that I ever could have published a newspaper if it were not for the incredible leaps made in desktop publishing and other technologies around the time I started my business in 1988.

Affordable computers, pagers, and cell phones have allowed people to become instantly accessible to anyone. With home office equipment and voice mail, we no longer have to pay for a receptionist or an answering service to organize our business, schedule appointments, and take calls as we did in the old days. Thanks to technology, we can now conduct our business anytime, anywhere.

The Bad: But like anything else, too much of a good thing can be a curse. There is

a difference between technology use and technology abuse. I have seen people fail in business because they didn't know how to use technology properly. No matter how far it advances, technology is still only a tool for delivering products or services. *Technology starts to fail us when the technology itself becomes the master of the business, and the product or service becomes secondary.* Webvan.com and Homegrocer.com are a good example of the "tail wagging the dog" syndrome. Both companies hoped to revolutionize the American grocery industry by doing away with the traditional "brick and mortar" supermarket. Webvan.com eventually bought out homegrocer.com but in 2001, Webvan.com shut down its operations and over \$800 million in debt!

The Ugly: What happened? There were so many fatal flaws that a whole series of books could be written about the debacle. The major reason the concept didn't work is that it relied on one technology but the customers were not able or willing to change a life time of habits to suit and the timetable of investors. Many of the dot-coms or should I say "dot-gones" suffered from the same syndrome. (*For more reading on the dotcom crash, go to the Is Self Employment for You? web site at employmentforyou.net.)*

Before you purchase any type of technology for your business, ask yourself, "Will this technology really make my business run more smoothly? Or will it actually make things more complicated?" Do you *really* need a cell phone that can access the Internet and send e-mails? Or will this techno-toy distract you from making sales calls and getting projects completed for your clients? Should you really use an accounting program like Quickbooks to keep track of your income and expenses? Or would it be more cost-effective to find a bookkeeper or an accountant to watch over your money? Be very discriminating with technology. In many cases, technology is a distraction, and is

responsible for entrepreneurs doing a lot of unnecessary and unproductive work.

READY, AIM, SEND!

Another downside of technology is the explosion in e-mails. Every day, we can receive hundreds of e-mails, mostly from people we don't know. The worst of it, of course, is known as "Spam" (named after a Monty Python song in which the word "Spam" is repeated over and over). Most Spam e-mail messages contain advertisements for products, services, or web sites that nobody in their right mind would even *think about* using or looking at in a million years. Most of us simply delete Spam from our Inbox without even looking at the attached message.

But Spam aside, e-mail is like any other technology tool. It can make conducting our business easier, but it can also hurt us if we don't use it correctly. I know a number of people who use e-mail as a substitute for doing their job. They spend their days sending out e-mails and responding to messages from friends and business associates. They measure their job performance by the number of e-mails they send or respond to. It makes them feel important, when in fact they are just wasting time. If you wish to be a successful business owner, you can't spend four hours a day on your e-mail.

One of the most effective uses for e-mail is as a means to send your potential clients a summary of your products or services. You can attach a resume and samples of your work, and even include a link to your web site in the e-mail message. But e-mail should never be used as a *substitute* for regular sales tactics. You must still make cold calls, go to chamber of commerce meetings, visit with clients, and check back with them every few months in order to sell your business.

Never send an e-mail describing your products or services to someone unless you have called or met with them first to introduce yourself. If you send a "cold e-mail" to a potential client, it will probably be deleted with all the other Spam that they receive on a daily basis. After you have contacted a client and sent an e-mail to them, you should always call them back a few days later, to verify that they received the e-mail. And never assume, just because you've sent them an e-mail with your contact information, that a client will automatically think of *you* when they have a need for your type of product or service.

Managing technology is one of the most important functions you will undertake as a business owner.