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5 reasons you need a Small Business Specialist

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, it nearly swept Manning Architects away with it.



In fact, were it not for the determination of Manning's displaced employees and the quick actions of a Microsoft Small Business Specialist, the architecture firm might have become another casualty of a storm that claimed more than 18,000 businesses in the state of Louisiana.

The story of Manning Architects is a cautionary tale for any of the 17 million small businesses in the United States. It suggests that the difference between profit and loss, survival and extinction, can often hinge upon the IT know-how of a single person.

Here's what happened.



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When Hurricane Katrina hit the Crescent City on August 29, 2005, the company had already evacuated its employees from its downtown New Orleans offices to temporary quarters in Baton Rouge, La., about 90 miles away. After the power outages, Manning's Web site, email and server went offline.

"Only three tape drives containing the most recent backup of our server data made the trip to Baton Rouge," says Wm. Raymond Manning, the company's president.

Retrieving the data from the tapes was critical. Manning knew that there were clients outside of New Orleans that depended on his firm's services. If he could not get the server up and running again, he risked losing those customers — and possibly his business.

"Returning to New Orleans wasn't an option," he says. "The city was shut down, and no one knew when residents would be allowed to

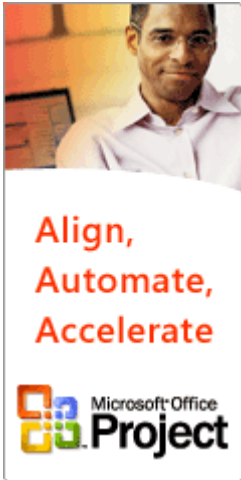
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come back."

The company called on General Informatics, a Microsoft Small Business Specialist, to help bail it out. (Want to know more about the specialist program? [Here are a few frequently asked questions.](#)) Within 72 hours of the storm, Manning's server was restored and email and Web site were operational.

"Because we're certified to handle the needs of a small business, we understood more than just the Microsoft server technology that Manning Architects was using," says Mohit 'Mo' Vij, who runs the General Informatics' IT practice. "We also knew that achieving the firm's objectives in a timely manner was essential."

It was a close call. But a Manning survived.

As many of the firm's competitors struggled to get up and running in the wake of the storm, the company flourished. Thanks to the quick recovery by General Informatics, Manning was able to win a key account in New Orleans: the damage assessment at Louis Armstrong Airport, which involved taking inventory of the damage caused by the storm and from turning the airport terminal into a makeshift hospital in the hurricane's aftermath.

Your company may never experience a storm like Katrina. But no small business should be without the services of a certified Small Business Specialist. Here are five reasons why:

1. **Understands your unique needs.** A Small Business Specialist is not a scaled-down IT consultant, but someone with special training offered to Microsoft Partners who can support the IT needs of a small business. For example, General Informatics knew that Manning didn't have an unlimited IT budget. (In fact, it had been running a patched-up version of Small Business Server 4.5 that was being underutilized.) In the short-term, Vij worked within the company's existing IT infrastructure — readily adapting to its needs instead of compelling it to spend more money on a new system.
2. **Helps you make the most of your technology.** A Small Business Specialist understands how to leverage technology for your business. In Manning's situation, it helped develop a blueprint for upgrading its IT systems, while staying within its budget. Instead of replacing the server, it added a storage array which could allow the company to grow for a long time without replacing its hardware. The server's operating system was upgraded to Microsoft Small Business Server 2003. It helped Manning take a two-tiered approach to on-site backup, using a tape drive and deploying new USB drives.
3. **Is "Mr. Fixit."** Obviously, a storm like Katrina doesn't come along very often. But data disasters do happen, and with some frequency. When they do, it's helpful to be able to call on someone locally who is familiar with your company's IT needs and has the latest Microsoft certifications and training. That's where the value of a Small Business Specialist becomes apparent. A specialist will not only work quickly to fix your IT glitch, but will tell you how to avoid the problem in the first place. For instance, Manning's new server is backed up in a number of ways, including with Small Business Server 2003's built-in backup features, as well as remotely.
4. **Helps you meet productivity goals.** You have a business to run. Small Business Specialists know that, and have the experience and training to help you achieve your goals. In Manning's situation, Vij went beyond helping the company take full advantage of the server technology it had installed. He suggested new ways of increasing the firm's efficiency and productivity, when it came to technology. One way it did that was changing the way in which it handled mobile data. General Informatics oversaw the replacement of the company's mobile phones with HP 6515 pocket PC phone edition, so that managers could access information from their server at any time.
5. **Ensures best practices.** Maybe you don't spend a lot of time pondering the concept of "best practices." But if you've ever thought about selling your business or bringing in a new partner, then determining if you run a company according to your industry's best

practices could become a factor. Small Business Specialists know that. And when it comes to your IT systems, they are constantly on the lookout for ways to ensure your servers, workstations and mobile devices are up to standards. In Manning's case, General Informatics redid its file organization system and policies. And employees were trained to utilize the rich functionality of Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 in conjunction with best practices for architectural firms.

Hurricane Katrina changed Manning in many ways large and small. For Christmas, employees were given hard disk drives to back up their data individually, and it is now considering buying laptop computers for everyone.

Thanks to the diligent work of its employees, and the services of a Small Business Specialist, if another hurricane hits New Orleans, it will be ready.

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