

## Could Your Company Benefit from "FedEx Days"?

No, I don't mean switching to FedEx as your courier company. FedEx Days are based on an unusual practice of the [Atlassian company](#) in Australia. Once each quarter, on a Thursday afternoon, all software developers are instructed to work on anything they want during the next 24 hour period, provided it's not part of their regular job.

However, in true FedEx tradition, each participant is expected to "deliver" an overview of the results on Friday afternoon adhering to FedEx's slogan, "When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight."

Daniel Pink, in his recent book *DRIVE*, wrote about this concept (similar in scope to Google's 20 per cent time, in which engineers spend one day a week working on projects that aren't necessarily in their job descriptions) and the idea is catching on like wildfire around the world.

According to Atlassian, the goals of "FedEx Days" are:

- To foster creativity. Atlassian is good at hiring smart people and believe they'd be mad to keep all that brain-power locked up.
- To scratch itches. Every developer has something that bugs them about products, or something they'd like to see them do.
- To spike. Often, radical ideas don't get traction because we don't understand how they would work, or what benefit they'd provide.
- To have fun. Initiatives such as FedEx make Atlassian a fun place to work.

FedEx Day culminates in selecting a winner who gets a FedEx Day t-shirt, a trophy, and serious bragging rights (at least until the next winner is crowned). Presentations are organized for participants to demo what they've built in the past 24-hours. Because Atlassian has spread across multiple continents, there are now multiple FedEx Day winners every quarter.

When I first read about FedEx Days, I wondered how employers could afford to release their workforces from their regular tasks for that amount of time, but the results appear to speak for themselves.

Many innovative companies are catching the vision and trying this with their employees. Dave Moran, an employee of Software Results, shares in [his blog](#), "As a company, we're looking forward to reaping the innovative benefits that the FedEx day concept offers. And equally important, we're looking to have some real fun. We're not alone in trying FedEx Days. Other companies, in addition to Atlassian, are experimenting with FedEx Days as well, such as Ambientia and Snowflake Software. Yahoo! has done something similar for years, but they call it [Hack Days](#). And, Google of course has its [20 percent time](#)."

Moran continues, "As expected, we have a number of ideas to work on that have been tossed around as concepts from time to time in the past, but never pursued. And there are some excellent variations and innovative twists to those ideas as well. It's great to see our organization dedicating this sliver of time to go after some of these ideas! In fact, it's looking like we are going to have a surplus that will have to wait until our next FedEx Day."

Are the wheels turning for you? How could you apply FedEx Days to your small business? Are there things about your product or service that have been bugging you for months, even years, but you haven't had time to think of a fix? Is there a project or idea you've been wanting to develop, but just haven't taken the time to think it through? Are there untapped markets, products or services you've yet to discover? Are you using the people who work for you to their fullest potential, especially outside of their typical work tasks? Whether you're on your own, or have people working for you, might it be worth the experiment?

Imagine what could happen as a result of unleashing all that creativity! This ingenious concept might just move your business into a leadership position in your industry. Better yet, it could provide you with the impetus you've been looking for to achieve your next big growth surge!

## Lessons from Canada's Top 100 Employers

Recently, the company I work for asked me to look into applying for the prestigious "Canada's Top 100 Employers" award. I thought it would be an easy exercise - simply fill in the application, show how great our company is, and hope for the best. What I learned surprised me. This is a tough competition with high standards. I also learned what top Employers are doing for their employees, and why they're considered top Employers. I saw immediately that it would take us 2-3 years of implementing key strategies before our company was ready to compete with others in this league. While your small business may not be in a place to apply for this particular award, it may interest you to know how you can work towards becoming the kind of company that does. These are solid strategies that can help you grow your business now. Here are a few of the things Top 100 Employers do.

**Communication and action** - Top 100 Employers are in touch with their employees and their customers so that they have a good sense of their own scorecard. They regularly ask their employees how they're doing in areas like work culture, commitment to core values, compensation, and benefits. They not only ask the questions, but respond to the answers in positive, proactive ways. They also survey their customers regularly so they know where they stand and how they can improve their service and offerings. **How often do you touch base with your employees on things that matter to them? Are you responsive to what they tell you? Do you know what your customers think of you, and how you can improve service?**

**Benefits** - Top 100 Employers understand how important benefits are to their employees. Benefits are a major consideration for job seekers when they are deciding on which company they want to work for. It is often equal in weight to compensation. Dental work, prescriptions, eye glasses, massage, physiotherapy and other medical procedures are expensive, and having coverage through work is a big bonus. Some Top 100 Employers even pay 100 per cent of the employee portion of the benefits. Moving forward, benefits will continue to be a major factor in hiring and retaining employees. **Don't assume that providing benefits to employees is cost-prohibitive. Chambers of Commerce in every city have plans they offer to their members at extremely reasonable rates, so even one-and two-employee businesses can afford to offer benefits.**

**Vacation** - according to my research, three weeks is the new standard for employee holidays. Every Top 100 Employer I researched offered three weeks as a starting allocation for holidays. In the past, two weeks was the accepted number of weeks paid holidays an employee could expect to receive in his or her first three to five years with a company. As we learn more about wellness, stress, and productivity, it's becoming clear that two weeks is simply not enough time for people to fully recharge during a long year of work. **This is one strategy that's not too difficult to implement, regardless of the size of your business, but I guarantee it will make a big difference to your employees and your capacity to retain them.**

**Wellness programs** - Top 100 Employers are recognizing the connection between wellness and productivity. Providing opportunities to their employees to stay well reduces absenteeism, increases energy, and improves productivity. Simple things like offering fitness subsidies, on-site fitness equipment, or involvement on company sports teams; providing healthy snacks for employees; ensuring work spaces are ergonomic, comfortable and bright; allowing for appropriate sick time; and providing stress management workshops are all ways employers can assist employees in staying healthy, happy, and motivated. Are there small ways you can begin acknowledging this important connection with your employees?

**Employee Engagement** - Top 100 Employers engage their employees regularly through performance reviews, 360 Degree Feedback, satisfaction surveys, and employee development plans. Employees feel connected, committed and engaged with employers they feel care about them and their goals. They want feedback on their performance. They want to be acknowledged when they've done a good job, and be offered positive, constructive feedback when their work isn't up to snuff. They also want to grow and develop in their careers and in your company. Most aren't happy to stay static in one position or role forever. **Are you looking around you to see where people are best suited within your company? Do you provide regular opportunities for performance-based feedback? Do you provide opportunities for people to take on new challenges and grow with you and your business?**

**Corporate Social Responsibility** - Top 100 Employers are actively involved in supporting their communities - both locally and internationally. Employees want to be part of a company that cares and reaches out, and where they feel they are part of that effort. **Does your business give back in some way to your community - either locally or abroad? Are your employees involved in your outreach efforts and do they feel connected to what you're doing?**

These are just a few of the things companies are doing to become Top 100 Employers! Check out [www.canadastop100.com](http://www.canadastop100.com) to learn more about how your company can grow in this area.

## **Blogging for Business**

### **Does your Small Business Need a Blog?**

Blogging has become a social media business tool that has far-reaching effects, but will your business benefit from having one? Many businesses do it incorrectly, and often for the wrong reasons. A blog should have a clear focus, goals, and actionable metrics. You should know why you are writing the blog, and understand the blog's audience. Here are a few of the reasons your business might consider having a blog.

### **Connecting with Customers**

Blogs can be an informal, effective way to communicate with your potential and current customers. They allow you to position yourself as a trusted resource in your industry by addressing your customers' needs, desires, questions, or concerns.

### **Engaging Employees**

Blogs can be a vehicle through which your employees share and contribute information. When employees are engaged in contributing to your company through social media strategies, they are invested in your success. A blog is also a good way for potential employees to get to know your company and determine if they might want to work for you.

### **Success with SEO (Search Engine Optimization)**

Blogs can be a great way to attract search engine attention and bring traffic to your web site. Your blog posts, and any user-submitted comments, are likely to contain keywords and phrases that will help you achieve better ranking in the search engines, and more traffic to your site translates to more potential business.

### **Exemplifying expertise**

Blogging is one of the most critical social media activities for service providers. Many service-based businesses thrive by creating great content that sets them apart from the crowd. If you can continually demonstrate that you're an industry leader, that you have something special or unique to contribute, and that your conversations are interesting and informative, you'll find people returning again and again to hear what you have to say.

## **To Blog or Not to Blog - The Checklist**

While blogs can provide the benefits mentioned above, they do require regular work and maintenance. People who read blogs have no patience for static sites and will strike your blog off their list pretty quickly if they're not feeling engaged by new and interesting content. So, ask yourself the following questions:

Are you a decent writer and do you have the interest and capacity to regularly write unique and revolutionary content?

- Do you have a website that will support the blog, technically?
- Do you have time to read and respond to the interactions generated by your blog?
- Do you have the time, interest and energy to keep it up to date on a regular schedule?
- Does your website have a clear SEO (Search Engine Optimization) strategy and/or the need for SEO?
- Do you have a clear picture of who your blog audience is, and how to speak to them in a way that will engage and interest them?
- Will your blog be something you look forward to doing, or just another chore on your "to do" list?

Whether you're just going to start posting some company news, or plan on becoming a recognized expert in your industry, blogging can be a great way to market your business and build a connection with your customers, stakeholders and your community.

## **Tips for Writing a Professional Bio**

I've never met a person who loves writing bios. Not many people are comfortable talking about themselves. In fact, for some people, the thought of writing their own bio can be paralyzing. How do you create credibility without sounding pompous? Entrepreneurs in particular are more interested in getting out there and 'doing' something, than talking about it. And yet, whether it's on a website, a trade show program, a speaker's bureau, or a newspaper article, most small business owners at some point will need to write their bio. Here are some quick tips for making a daunting task more manageable.

### **Less is More**

Keep it short. Remember this simple rule:

Bio = short. Biography = long.

If you've been asked for a biography, you may be required to write something more detailed, however, a bio should be limited to three or four sentences. If it's too long people won't read it.

### **Focus on Achievements**

A bio is not a resume highlighting all your skills and experience. The purpose of a bio is to demonstrate your professional credibility, and people see credibility in terms of what you've done - not what you are capable of doing. What are some key milestones you've reached with your business? Specific awards or achievements you can point to? Focus on things that you have DONE.

### **Maintain Integrity**

Your bio is a reflection of you. Make sure it represents you accurately. If you have a super outgoing, gregarious personality with lots of flair, don't write a bio that makes you sound flat and boring. If you're a non-nonsense, down-to-earth person, don't write a bunch of pretentious fluff. When people read your bio, they should get a strong sense of who you are. People often ask whether it's OK to include personal information such as hobbies, family status and pets. This really depends on the type of publication you're writing the bio for. If it's for your website, stick to business. If you're the guest speaker at a local charity event and your bio is going in the program, it may be appropriate.

## Understand your Audience

Your bio is a marketing piece. Just like any other marketing material, understanding your audience is the key to making it effective. A bio for an industry-specific business conference, for example, might have a different flavour than one in your local newspaper. Tailor your bio to the industry. If you're a tradesperson, your bio may feel different than if you're a lawyer or an accountant.

## Bio Key Points

Typically, most bios include:

- Current job, business or professional experience
- Publications or presentations you have completed
- Professional memberships you currently hold
- Awards, honors and certifications you have received
- What you're particularly good at

You can personalize your bio by including elements such as a photograph, your educational background, quotes or testimonials from clients, and links to examples of your work

## Always Write in Third Person

Your bio should sound as though someone else is talking about you. Instead of writing "I am" and "I graduated", you write "Jane Smith is" and "She graduated." Use your full name (first and last) the first time. After that, it's up to you whether to refer to yourself by your full name, just your first name, or just your last name.

Here are two examples of strong bios. Both Mike and Tom are from [Blue Beetle Books](#). The company's style is energetic and casual, and reflects the personalities of the principles.

**Mike Wicks** is an award-winning writer who has worked for seven major international publishers in a variety of roles. In the U.K. he was a divisional head at Random House and held the title of managing director of a specialist publishing house. He's ghostwritten or collaborated on several books for clients and has written for some pretty skookum magazines. When it comes to publishing, he has second sight; he just knows what will work and his clients love him for it.

**Tom Spetter** is our head designer and production manager; the art guy with a great deal of vision. He may be calm, but the creativity and passion just smolders away quietly and comes out in his truly amazing work. Tom's an award winning illustrator, a highly accomplished web designer and CMS expert. His greatest asset is his ability to listen to clients and come back to them with artwork that seems to have been extracted sub-consciously from them.

Writing a bio doesn't have to be a daunting task. Follow these simple tips and you'll be establishing your credibility in a powerful way.

## 10 Must-Have Business Apps for 2011

Whether it's an iPhone, iPad, Blackberry, Android or other smartphone, most small business owners own one to make their lives easier. These devices have changed the way we interact with the world, and do business. Gone are the days of having to wait until you get back to the office to return an email, read a report, or book an appointment. Now, there is almost nothing you can't do on your smartphone - pay your bills, scan your receipts, keep track of "to do's", book a flight or hotel, the list goes on. But with thousands of apps available for download on dozens of mobile gadgets, it can be hard to tell which are really worthwhile. Scott Steinberg, Technology Expert and CEO of [TechSavvy Global](#), has done some

research and created the following list of top 10 business apps for entrepreneurs. Check them out and see which ones might make sense for your business.

**Square** (Free) - Process credit card payments from anywhere with Square's free card-reader accessory. An intuitive interface and single universal fee with no monthly charges or contracts make it easy to use.

**Evernote** (Free) - Lets you take virtual memos on-demand. Capable of storing text, photos and voice recordings, you can dictate, snap pictures and synchronize updates across your other devices.

**Scanner Pro** (\$6.99) - Instantly transforms your iPhone into a portable, multi-page document scanner that can capture electronic copies of invoices, business cards and signed documents. High-quality image processing and automatic edge detection readily handle conversions. Produce and skim email-ready PDFs, set up custom page sizes and password-protect your files.

**Flight Track Pro** (\$9.99) - Stay on top of flight delays and gate changes. Import trip data from an airline confirmation email, and it monitors your itinerary, alerting you to delays, cancellations and alternate boarding plans. The program also provides satellite and weather imagery and maps of airport terminals - in case you need to sprint for a connection.

**MightyMeeting** (Free) - Upload presentations and product videos to the cloud, then access them nearly anytime, anywhere with this handy demonstration tool. It allows you to quickly call up clips and slideshows on your smartphone to showcase sales pitches or market overviews. Also, it connects to mobile devices to a widescreen projector.

**Gist** (Free) - Organize and update contacts in a single location with minimal fuss. Capable of importing email, phone and address data from multiple sources (inbox, social network, smartphone, etc), the program makes it easy to keep up with ever-changing contact information. There is an option to view colleagues' real-time Facebook and Twitter feeds without exiting the program.

**LinkedIn** (Free) - Access the leading social network for professional users while on the go. Search for new workers, mentors or strategic partners; mingle with peers; and share business tips, news and insights with like-minded people.

**Print n Share** (\$8.99) - Send documents straight to a WiFi printer, or one connected to a Mac or PC. Requests may also be issued remotely over 3G wireless networks, so you can pick up copies of contracts or insertion orders the next time you're in the office.

**Jump Desktop** (\$19.99) - Control your desktop remotely, regardless of where business takes you. Armed with an Internet connection, you can manipulate files or folders via touchscreen, and actively browse on your home or work computer. Compatible with Mac or PC systems.

**OmniFocus** (\$19.99-\$39.99) - This full suite of utilities for task management makes plotting a daily agenda much simpler. Capable of organizing tasks by groups, contexts, tools, locations and resources, it helps you keep tabs on ongoing engagements and prioritize to-do lists. It also supports synchronizing between multiple devices.

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