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## August 2006 | Ideas @ Work

### The DiscountCall.com alternative

by Blane Bachelor

About two years ago, a Duluth-based dental firm noticed that three phone lines simply weren't enough to support the office's growing clientele. After a well-timed cold call from DiscountCall.com founder Randy Berlin, the company decided to take advantage of an alternate solution to the traditional BellSouth route for the firm's telecommunication upgrades.

"They cut our phone bill, gave us another line and they added Internet," Ballar and Bleicken founder and dentist Allen Ballar says of DiscountCall.com. "The beauty for us is that we have computers in all of our treatment rooms, and everybody has Internet access in all of the treatment rooms. And the assistants and providers have e-mail addresses. Now we can do electronic claims over the Internet instead of the phone. It's been a huge time saver."



Dozens of Gwinnett small business owners such as Ballar have similar success stories to speak of when it comes to their partnerships with DiscountCall.com. In an industry dominated by major players such as BellSouth, the Atlanta-based company has carved out an impressive niche for itself by providing customized tele-communications systems and services to small- and medium-sized businesses.

While DiscountCall.com's selling point might be its competitive prices, its staying power lies in its stellar customer service.

"[Customers] come to us for one reason but stay with us for another entirely different reason," Berlin says. "They call us up because they have problems, but they stay with us because of our service, and they tell us that. But it's very hard for us to articulate that from a marketing standpoint. So we have to look for new business from moves or service issues."

Boasting one of the area's largest carrier networks, DiscountCall specializes in creating tailored solutions to its clients' specific phone and Internet needs. In addition, the company provides installation of phone systems, cabling and superior customer service solutions that include an on-site technician who can resolve issues over the phone - preventing companies from having to pay for costly service calls. The company targets businesses with between five and 25 employees.

The company's customer base is approaching 1,000, and about 40 percent of that is Gwinnett County. Berlin points to Gwinnett's booming economy and abundance of service-oriented businesses as an ideal market for his company.

"There's such explosive growth up I-85 North," Berlin says. "A lot of business owners need a

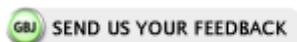
space just like my own office environment, and they are usually service-oriented. They understand the need for a strong telecommunications system. I don't have to explain it."

However, Berlin often explains to customers exactly what they need in terms of that system - items such as T1 lines and automated answering services. Berlin won't hesitate, though, to advise business owners to buy phones from business supply stores when that's a better option.

"We sit down with them and ask them all sorts of questions about their business, like their growth and how long their lease is," Berlin says. "We teach them how to buy a system."

That sort of personalized service is what sets DiscountCall.com apart from big-name competitors like BellSouth, Berlin says. Other overlapping competitors include Telco Solutions, based in Norcross, and the Austell-based AML Communications. Berlin, though, takes pride in providing both tailored services and systems.

"It's very hard to be good at two things," Berlin says. "It's a lot of responsibility, but it has made us stronger."



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