



*"Professional Guidance for Business Growth"*

**March 2, 2015**

**In Today's Weekly Connection:**

- + Spotlight on Success – Amy's Organics**
- + Maximizing Neoserra**
- + Valued Resources**
- + IESBGA Update**
- + Network News and Moves**
- + Make a Connection: Connecting Communities to Illinois Business Opportunities**

### **Spotlight on Success – Amy's Organics**

For Amy Ernst, fresh and healthy foods are both a business & a way of life. Ms. Ernst was diagnosed with breast cancer at 39 and believed that chemicals in our food supply are a major cause of cancers, autoimmune diseases and overall poor health. She began exploring healthy food choices as a way to protect her family. She decided it was best for her family to start eating organic rather than processed foods. This lifestyle change included shopping at farmers' markets and searching out other organic suppliers.

Amy explained that in May 2011, she was outside planting tomatoes in her garden when an ice cream truck playing its music drove by. She told her daughter that it would be nice if he was selling home-grown tomatoes instead and this gave her an idea.

In July 2011, she bought a truck and opened Amy's Organics. For the first few weeks she drove around trying to sell her products to people in the neighborhood. This didn't work well because kids were very disappointed when they came for ice cream only to find tomatoes and other organic products. Ms. Ernst felt that she had a great idea but just needed to rethink her selling technique.

She now has customers place orders via website and delivers the fresh, healthy products to their home. Amy's Organics is "Bringing the Farmers' Market to You!" Delivery areas include: Bolingbrook, Joliet, Montgomery, Naperville, Oswego, Plainfield, Shorewood and Yorkville. As business grows, Ms. Ernst is planning to hire a part-time driver to expand the delivery area. In summer Amy's Organics are available at both the Plainfield and Oswego Farmers' Markets.

Ms. Ernst's regular clients appreciate her service. She said, "The personal aspect is fantastic. I love hearing success stories from my customers about how changing the way that they eat has made a positive impact on their overall health."

Amy's Organics buys from farmers within a 200-mile radius to offer products that are organic, all-natural and free of hormones or antibiotics. Her merchandise includes: produce, eggs, dairy, meat and more.

Ms. Ernst consulted with the [Illinois Small Business Development Center at Joliet Junior College \(JJC\)](#). She said the advisors at the [Illinois SBDC at JJC](#) relate well to the small business owner. "I feel it's like talking to somebody who has been there before and went through the same obstacles. They are able to provide feedback to help me reach my business goals. It was invaluable to me, she said."

[Business Advisor Joe Giunta](#) provided Amy with a list of professional resources to assist her with various aspects of her business in areas such as insurance and accounting. The [SBDC at JJC](#) also provided QuickBooks training and showed Ms. Ernst how the software program could best be utilized in her business. Mr. Giunta said, "I was very impressed with Amy's creativity and innovative approach to selling. . . She developed a business model that makes it easy for customers to purchase organic food. I also like the fact that she was able to adapt and change from her original approach to one that really worked."

For more information about Amy's Organics, visit her website at <http://amysorganics.myshopify.com/> or call (815) 483-8627.



### **[Maximizing Neoserra – Creating a Hard Copy Training Evaluation Form](#)**

Open the link below to learn how to create a hard copy evaluation form for you training events.

<http://support.outreachsystems.com/resources/help/neoserra/faq.jsp?id=n228>

### **Valued Resources**

**12 Point Checklist for Clients Creating a Website** - Creating a website can be daunting. Same goes for updating or improving your existing website. It feels like a huge project. You may feel like you don't know where to start.

The good news is, with the right help and the right tools, creating a website is a very manageable process today. And it all starts with a good plan. To get started, think through what you need to do. Start making notes to keep track. The following website checklist, provided courtesy of Verisign, will guide you as you consider key issues and what is involved.

#### **1. Purpose and Goals**

Determine the purpose of your website. Is it an ecommerce site designed to sell items online? Is it mainly an informational brochure for your business? Is it a blog that you intend to update regularly with posts? This will be your starting point.

#### **2. Domain Name**

[Choose and register a domain name](#) for your Web address.

### **3. Priorities**

Determine what is critical for your website today. Can you start with a simple site and add more bells and whistles later? Write down what you need now, versus later.

### **4. Site Pages and Features**

Develop a list of your website requirements. For example:

- Number of website pages
- Amount of website storage (images and videos mean more storage space)
- Tools such as online forms, blogs, customer reviews, maps, slideshows
- Links to or integration with social media
- Video and/or audio players
- Shopping cart
- Tech support
- Mobile device optimization (so your website looks good on mobile devices)
- Easy way to make content updates
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### **5. DIY vs. Professional Service?**

Decide if you want to create a website yourself or if you want to outsource the development and design to an expert. Most DIY website building tools are now made with small business owners in mind, and do not require coding or design skills. Non-technical people can achieve a professional-looking result just by following the online instructions included with a good DIY tool.

### **6. Website Builder**

Choose a website builder. This can be either a do-it-yourself tool, or a professional service that sets up your website for you according to your specifications. Do an Internet search or ask colleagues for recommendations.

### **7. Hosting**

Your site will need to be stored on a computer accessible over the Internet in order for visitors to reach it online. For that you'll need a Web hosting company. Some website builder tools include hosting — just use the tool, follow the instructions, and it will automatically get the site online for you. Or another approach is to choose a hosting company first (such as the one where you bought your domain name), choosing one that offers a website building tool or service.

### **8. Connect Your Domain Name to Your Website**

If you choose to use a website builder tool that places your website online on the builder's domain name instead of yours, [redirect](#) (also known as web forwarding) your domain name to where your website is located. That way you will have a Web address that's easy for customers and the public to remember, so you can build up your brand with and to make marketing easier and more effective.

### **9. Plan and Develop Content**

Determine what website content is essential and create it. What information will your visitors find valuable? At a minimum, make sure your website shows your business' contact information such as your company branded email and phone number, as well as any required information your line of business may require such as a state license number. Note: Your domain name can be used to create a company branded email. Check with your hosting company or the company you bought your domain name from.

### **10. Promote Your Website!**

Think about how your visitors will find your website. Put your Web address everywhere possible including business cards, social media, advertising, and online business directories. Experiment with paid search advertisements to attract pay-per-click traffic to your website.

### **11. Track Performance**

Understand how your website is performing and who is coming to your site. Website analytics can yield great insights into what you need to do more of, or what you need to change. You can install an external analytics program, or use one provided by your website builder tool or hosting company.

### **12. Keep Up a Cycle of Continual Improvement**

Continually optimize your site and develop useful content to your visitors based on what's working. The post [12 Point Checklist For Creating a Website](#) appeared first on [Small Business Trends](#).

### **IESBGA Update**

The Illinois SBDC and IESBGA are working on plans to offer a GrowthWheel Business Advisor Certification program for Network center directors and advisors who have not yet been certified. Plans are to offer the program on May 18-20, 2015 prior to the Annual Professional Development Conference with a half-day session on Monday afternoon, a full day on Tuesday and a half-day on Wednesday. If you or anyone else at your Network Center is interested in participating in the GrowthWheel Certification Session please contact your Network Coordinator at your earliest convenience.

### **Network News and Moves**

**- [The 2015 James Tyree Emerging Business Leadership Award!](#) The link to apply for the 2015 Tyree Award is [here](#).**

The Tyree Award is presented annually to a high-growth small business with a demonstrated commitment to philanthropic values that best represents the spirit of the late Chicagoland Chairman and business leader James Tyree. The recipient will receive \$25,000 in cash courtesy of Mesirow Financial and valuable small business training and consulting from the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce.

Qualified applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Operate within the six-county Chicagoland metropolitan area
- In business for a minimum of two years
- Revenues of at least \$500,000 but less than \$10 million
- Demonstrated substantial growth over the past two years
- Five or more employees
- Active in local civic/philanthropic initiatives

Past winners:

- 2014 - John Roa, [AKTA](#)
- 2013 - Jim Alvarez, [AuctionsByCellular](#)
- 2012 - Matt Matros, [Protein Bar](#)

**The application period extends throughout the month of March. [The link to apply for the 2015 Tyree Award is here.](#)**

Additionally, we are hosting a 2015 Tyree Award Kickoff Reception from 5:30-7:30pm on Weds., April 22 at Mesirow Financial, 353 N. Clark St. Register for that event [here](#). Thank you for spreading the word!

**- 2015 Illinois Governor's Sustainability Awards - The Illinois Sustainable Technology Center (ISTC) is now accepting applications for the [2015 Illinois Governor's Sustainability Awards](#)!** This award, begun in 1987, is the nation's longest standing state environmental award program that annually honors organizations and businesses who have made a commitment to the environment through implementation of outstanding and innovative sustainability practices.

The deadline for submitting your application is close of business **May 22, 2015**. Applications will only be accepted electronically. Details and application information can be found on our [website](#).

The award ceremony will be held this fall in Chicago. A technical symposium that acts as a forum for information exchange, education and networking opportunities will be hosted prior to the awards ceremony and luncheon.

This program is open to the public and we encourage you to forward this announcement to colleagues that may also be interested in joining us. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the award application or assist you with the application process. Please don't hesitate to contact us.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to remind you that [ISTC's Technical Assistance Program](#) is available to provide onsite environmental sustainability assistance. We work with organizations to identify process improvement opportunities to reduce waste and provide cost savings. There is no cost or obligation for the initial site visit. Please complete the on-line [request form](#) to schedule a visit from one of ISTC's technical assistance engineers. We look forward to working with you in achieving your sustainability goals. *Debra Jacobson, Senior Operations Manager, [djacobso@illinois.edu](mailto:djacobso@illinois.edu)*

### **Make a Connection: Connecting Communities to Illinois Business Opportunities**

The Illinois Department of Central Management Services presents Make a Connection: "Connecting Communities to Illinois Business Opportunities", An informational event and networking opportunity for business owners to learn the process in doing business with the State, connect with other professionals and gain access to State and local resources that promote the growth of small businesses.

March 20, 2015 - 8:30am to 1:00pm - Malcolm X College Auditorium - 1900 West Van Buren - Chicago, Illinois 60612

Register to attend: [www.CMS.Illinois.gov/Events](http://www.CMS.Illinois.gov/Events)

Event Agenda:

8:30am	-	9:00am	Registration
9:30am	-	9:15am	Welcome Remarks

9:15am - 10:00am Business Enterprise Program - Certification for minority, women, persons with disabilities and Veteran business owners  
10:00am - 10:45am Chief Procurement Office - Process in Contracting with the State  
10:45am - 11:00am Procurement Technical Assistance and Women's Business Development Center  
11:00am - 1:00pm Networking and Visiting with Booth Exhibitors:

- This event is open to the public at no cost
- Light refreshments will be served
- Free parking is available

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The **WEEKLY CONNECTION** is distributed by the Illinois SBDC and DCEO Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology each Monday to members of the DCEO Illinois SBDC Network to provide the service delivery partners with regular updates on small business issues, opportunities and resources. You may send any information to share with the Illinois SBDC Network to [Tom.Becker@illinois.gov](mailto:Tom.Becker@illinois.gov). Please feel free to forward this update to other interested resource providers and key stakeholders.  
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