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Summary: The key to limiting a loss is quick reassessment and recommitment to growth goals

Title: How Creative Entrepreneurs Succeed

Word Count: 308

by Susan Kirkland

Standard & Poor's predicts a 25% chance of recession in the next year and small businesses are clamoring to ride out the next tide of a continuing soft market. Many small businesses find the current marketplace more competitive as big fish dip lower into the food chain to overcome business losses. Those little jobs they ignored (the jobs one person shops thrive on) are being gobbled up to replace lost revenues from big accounts now in demise.

What can you do to protect yourself? Here are some tips to help you solidify your client list:

1. Stay in touch with clients whether they have a job in house or not.
A casual lunch, a quick call or a less invasive email will renew and remind a good client of available services without pressure. It's easier to maintain a relationship than establish a new one.
2. Call the vendors you've used most; they know who's buying and succeeding even in a slow economy. Make friends at all levels of your industry. You never know where your next job referral will come from.
3. Maintain industry presence; even though things are slow, stay active in professional affairs. Attend that monthly meeting, press the flesh, and work for charity to show off your creative skills.
4. Revamp your website, then send out email announcements about the eye candy you've just displayed. Be excited about your work and that excitement will attract business.

Above all, stick to your weekly phishing schedule. Cold call new clients whether you need them or not. Successful entrepreneurs always have a few new clients ready to step in to replace those who step out. What's the real key to success? Get up and get busy--there's no time for sulking.

©2005 Susan Kirkland, veteran small business owner and author of Start and Run a Creative Services Business, shares the secrets to finding and keeping clients, negotiating with vendors, protecting yourself from scoundrels and scalawags--a valuable resource for everyone, no matter what line of work. For more information and a complimentary POD cartoon visit <www.sdkirkland.com>

