

Out-of-the-Box Warehousing

PROBLEM: Shane Ellison's new Internet enterprise was making money, but he had no room to grow the business. Soon after he founded **The People's Chemist** to sell organic nutritional supplements, the Santa Fe, N.M.-based business took off — and Ellison was left scrambling. "It got crazy on many levels," he says. "We were snatching orders off the Internet, packaging, labeling, and standing in line with a bunch of boxes." What's more, the fledgling company had no way of tracking orders.



SOLUTION: With most fulfillment services geared toward bigger businesses, Ellison's search for a solution was frustrating until he saw an article about **Shipwire**. "Our services are designed for entrepreneurs, by entrepreneurs," explains Nate Gilmore, vice president of marketing and business development at Shipwire. From its home office in Sunnyvale, Calif., Shipwire offers a scalable model of inventory management in strategically located warehouses, along with shipping and tracking services that small businesses can customize online. "It's designed to be point-and-click, so small business owners can run a global operation from their couch," Gilmore says.

According to Gilmore, many new businesses stumble because the challenge of shelving, tracking, and moving product is a difficult one. "They're soon saying, 'I need to focus on my customers — I don't have time to manage a warehouse,'" he notes.

Ellison, whose business has doubled since he started **The People's Chemist** three years ago, gives a lot of credit to Shipwire. "It was the missing link to the technology I needed to grow," he says. "I look at online entrepreneurs who are still packing their goods and taking them to the post office, and I can't understand it."

Personal Approach to Generating Publicity

PROBLEM: Employees of **PrivateCommunities.com** are on their computers and phones for much of the day. The Vero Beach, Fla.-based business connects prospective buyers with developers of specialty communities. "We were early on the Internet and grew quickly," says co-founder Elisabeth Miller-Fox. "We work remotely with large-scale developers, so sometimes it's hard to stay in touch with our creative selves." When she realized that her staff would benefit from a chance to refocus from their intense, detailed jobs, Miller-Fox looked for a non-traditional corporate retreat that would offer her staff an experience with lasting positive effects.

SOLUTION: Miller-Fox invited a group of professional presenters to facilitate the retreat, among them Leslie McGuirk, creative director of the **Alexis Agency**, also of Vero Beach. "I was intrigued by how Leslie can get high-powered people to participate in what she's asking them to do," Miller-Fox says. "What Leslie gets out of people is discovery."

McGuirk says her approach, which the agency markets under the brand **MindSpa**, is not about fostering creativity in the sense of drawing or writing. "I'm breaking patterns that are typically highly tuned to what the business wants," she points out. "I'm using the opposite side of the brain from what they're used to, and that break allows creative thoughts."

Miller-Fox discovered that in addition to offering her employees an enjoyable experience, the retreat mobilized her staff to come up with new business ideas. "Our revenue is up 35 percent," she says. "And Leslie is part of this really good year. For me as a business owner, the data that comes from an experience like that is priceless."

Q&A

A Fresh Way of Thinking About Creativity

In today's marketplace, diverse and creative employees have become the most valuable asset for successful businesses. Unfortunately, many companies are inflexible in how they approach innovation. **FuelNet** reached out to social economist **Richard Florida**, author of the critically acclaimed book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, to get his thoughts on how to build "creative capital."

FuelNet: How can a manager help nurture creativity?

Florida: Openness to creativity must

start at the top, but often the most creative ideas come from the bottom. Few creative managers actually understand this. All of us, including the best-intentioned among us, are trapped because we're beholden to the old industrial principles of how efficiency and effectiveness are measured.

FuelNet: What do you see as the catalysts for changing old attitudes?

Florida: Thinking about the future starts with getting over our fear of the unknown and adopting a willingness to

learn as we go along. How do we learn? We need to do a better job of listening to our employees.

FuelNet: What does a creative company look like?

Florida: It's a company that embraces cultural and social diversity. Creativity is about giving people room to be themselves. They don't want to be seen merely as a software engineer or a salesperson. They want to be appreciated by their employer and their peers as a whole person.