

business solutions

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LeadingAge Kansas Focuses on Seniors



BLUE VALLEY
tele-communications

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PLUS**

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When opportunity knocks, how do you respond? Do you hesitate because of the unknowns, or do you confidently open the door? In this issue of *Business Solutions*, we take a look at several challenges that can turn into opportunities if you let them.

First, on page 3, learn how to **Optimize Your Website for Mobile Devices** and why it's so important. With Google's new search algorithm, your site could actually be ranked lower if it's *not* mobile optimized. On the positive side, creating a mobile-friendly website is great for business.

The Business Spotlight on pages 4 and 5 features **LeadingAge Kansas**, an association of 160 not-for-profit aging services providers dedicated to serving the needs of aging Kansans. Major changes are taking place in the healthcare industry, and LeadingAge Kansas is helping their members navigate them and come out stronger in the end.

On page 6, we encourage you to **Stop Making Excuses and Start Blogging**. We know you're thinking, "I don't have time!" But, when you learn about the benefits of blogging, you may be convinced to find the time.

Finally, on page 7, I share the **Lessons in Rural Technology** that I learned in a recent effort to get to know our rural customers better. Agriculture will need to grow in the coming decades to meet the food demands of a booming population, and BVTC will be right there to help them meet this challenge.

What are your current challenges? Consider thinking of ways to turn them into opportunities. Then, let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,

Brian Thomason

General Manager/CEO

Blue Valley Tele-Communications/Networks Plus



Optimize Your Website for Mobile Devices

A mobile-friendly website helps you connect with customers and increase sales

As of April 2015, Google's search algorithm includes a preference for mobile-friendly websites, which are sites that can be easily used with a mobile device. A better Google ranking is important, because the higher it is, the more likely it is that your site will be found in searches for the types of products or services you offer. This is crucial when so many potential customers do their "homework" online before making contact in person or by phone.

If being found in Google searches isn't enough incentive to ensure your website is mobile friendly, consider these statistics compiled by user experience experts, Experience Dynamics:

- 60% of consumers use mobile exclusively to make purchase decisions.
- 48% of users say they feel frustrated and annoyed when on sites that are poorly optimized for mobile.

Is it time to mobilize your website? If you're already working with a company on your desktop site, contact them about going mobile. Or consider adding a mobile developer to your team.

- Mobile users are five times more likely to abandon the task if a site isn't optimized for mobile.
- 52% of users said that a bad mobile experience made them less likely to engage with a company.

Source: www.experiencedynamics.com/blog/2015/03/30-ux-statistics-you-should-not-ignore-infographic

If your website performs well on a smartphone or tablet, your business can reap its share of the rewards, which include product and price research, phone calls, store visits, and purchases. In addition, an easy-to-use website is part of an overall strategy to provide customers and prospects with the best user experience possible. It's also critical for your marketing efforts, which may include providing helpful content, blog posts, email newsletters, or social media links from your site.



TOP 4 FEATURES OF A MOBILE-FRIENDLY WEBSITE

To be considered mobile friendly, your website should have the following characteristics:

1. Avoids software (like Flash) not typically available on mobile devices
2. Uses text of a readable size
3. Adapts to the size of the screen, so users don't have to scroll or zoom
4. Places links far enough apart to be easily tapped

These are the criteria recently set by Google, but if you think about it, they're just common sense, and they all have one thing in common: usability. Make it easy for users to interact with your site, and they'll want to come back!

To see how your website looks on a smartphone, visit www.howtogomo.com/en/d/test-your-site. Simply fill in your URL and this tool shows you what your customers see on the screen. It also provides a free report with personalized recommendations tailored to how your business can build a more mobile-friendly experience.



LeadingAge Kansas was started 61 years ago to serve as a voice for nonprofit aging services and providers, and offer education about the latest developments in long-term care; the agency still does those things today. Member organizations benefit from the opportunity to come together under the LeadingAge Kansas umbrella, and from the governmental advocacy the association provides.

A Spectrum of Care

Chief Operating Officer Dana Weaver describes the many levels of care addressed by LeadingAge Kansas: “We serve not-for-profit aging services of all types, across the spectrum of care. We have members that operate assisted living facilities, continuing care retirement communities, affordable housing complexes, and nursing homes. We also have members that provide managed care, adult day services, home and community-based services, Meals on Wheels, and Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) services. Seniors can take advantage of any of them as needed.”

LeadingAge Kansas has 10 employees, who appreciate the family environment that includes the office itself as well as employees of member organizations. Weaver notes, “When we get together at conferences, it’s like a family reunion. We’ve built close relationships over the years, and are so pleased to be able to help them provide great care to the seniors they serve.”

Change Brings Opportunity

With changes in the healthcare field due to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), providers have some new challenges. Weaver says, “The healthcare system continues to change, particularly with the way our member organizations receive funding and get reimbursement. Some will have to partner with emerging ACOs in the state.”

Accountable care organizations are groups of providers like hospitals, physicians, and nursing homes that come together as a group and provide services. Payment gets reimbursed from Medicare and Medicaid and gets divided up between the providers. Weaver notes, “This isn’t new, but will start happening more in Kansas. Our members will have to link with these organizations and provide outstanding care to become preferred providers.” She adds, “Times of change like this provide an opportunity for our members to offer creative services to seniors.

So we're encouraging our members to look forward to what seniors might need in the future and find innovative ways to look after them, such as providing more off-campus services."

Supporting the Mission

To support its mission, LeadingAge Kansas holds various events throughout the year. The Spring Conference and Expo gives members an opportunity to network, learn, and connect with companies that provide services to them. In addition, business partners provide sponsorships and other dollars to help support their work.

LeadingAge Kansas also continually raises funds for its scholarship program. Scholarships go to employees of member organizations to advance their education, which can include college classes or certification programs. "For example," says Weaver, "a nursing assistant may want to become a medication assistant, or someone working in a nursing home might want to get an administrator license. The scholarship supports opportunities to advance within the field of aging services." The program has been gaining in popularity, with more applications received each year. In the first three years, it awarded over \$12,000.

The FIT service is a huge benefit for us because we don't have anyone onsite with expertise in IT."

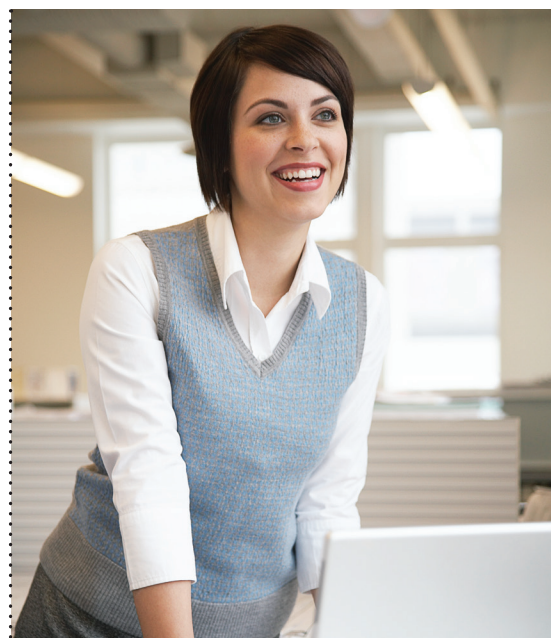
— **DANA WEAVER**, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
LEADINGAGE KANSAS

To keep things running smoothly in-house, LeadingAge Kansas uses FIT onsite and remote managed services from Networks Plus, now part of BVTC. Weaver comments, "The FIT service is a huge benefit for us because we don't have anyone onsite with expertise in IT. We pay a monthly fee for service, and they're like an extension of our team. Any time there's an issue, we call and they fix it immediately. Brian and Joe have been fabulous! We can't say enough good things about the FIT program, and would recommend it to anyone needing this type of service."

Richard Lincoln, Business Account Consultant at Networks Plus, says, "LeadingAge Kansas is a perfect example of how FIT can help a small to medium-sized organization that doesn't have its own IT staff. Any time they have an issue, they just call us. Most problems can be fixed remotely, which is much faster because there's no drive time." He adds, "We also like to support our customers whenever possible, and we do this with LeadingAge Kansas by participating in their Spring Conference and Expo, and sponsoring the Executive Lounge. We like to help in these ways because fundraisers like this are a large source of operating capital for nonprofits."



Dana Weaver



KEEPING YOUR NETWORK FIT

Networks Plus, now part of BVTC, offers a suite of services called FIT, which stands for Fortified Information Technology. The services are as follows:

- **Essential Server Care** – a business hours monitoring service for servers
- **Elite Server Care** – a 24-hour monitoring service for servers
- **Total Desktop Care** – a business hours service for desktops and laptops

FIT is a proactive approach to managing a network; our remote applications can often spot troubles before you're even aware of them, and we can apply solutions before you notice an issue. However, if you do notice an issue, we can address it quickly via our remote system, or, if necessary, an onsite visit. Cost-effective FIT services increase uptime, meaning more time working productively and less time managing computer hassles. It also means time and attention devoted to your core business activities and your customers.

To learn more, visit bluevalley.net/business/managed-services.



Stop Making Excuses and Start Blogging

You may be able to write your way toward business growth

Owners and managers of small businesses are some of the busiest people on the planet. Given the multiple hats you wear, it probably seems there's never enough time in the day to get your "to do" list done. So it's perfectly reasonable when your excuse for not blogging is lack of time, right? Wrong.

Given the proven value of blogs, lack of time really isn't a good excuse. In fact, after reviewing these benefits, you might just be motivated enough to make time in your schedule for blogging:

Blogging increases your online visibility.

Most of today's sales process takes place behind the scenes. Customers are online researching, surfing, and browsing long before deciding on the products and services they want. To help potential customers find your business, you need to be readily visible. Blogging (especially when using the right keyword strategy) helps search engine optimization and drives traffic to your website. All of which can attract new customers.

Blogging enhances your credibility with customers.

By regularly providing compelling and educational blog posts, you build your reputation as a source for solutions to problems. This leads to more trust, which can lead to more sales. In addition, having to generate blog content will motivate you to pay even closer attention to your industry's developments and your customers' changing needs—information that's vital to your long-term success.

Blogging provides instant feedback to help improve your business.

It's smart to end every blog post with a question for visitors; this encourages feedback and fosters valuable conversations. For example, if you're thinking about changing the menu at your restaurant or adding a new product line to your retail store, blog about your ideas and ask for comments. The responses your customers provide can help you make better decisions, create popular products, and avoid costly mistakes.

Blogging sometimes leads to other income opportunities.

Blogging, when done properly, will make you and your business more appealing to not only customers, but other businesses as well. You may start to receive inquiries about speaking/consulting gigs, franchise opportunities, or project partnerships. You never know where your blog might lead.

If you decide to start blogging, keep in mind that you can't expect immediate gratification. A few weeks' worth of blog posts are probably not going to cause dramatic sales results. Blogging sows the seeds for business growth down the road. Be patient and your harvest will come.

Read Blue Valley's blog at bluevalley.net/news/blog.



Lessons in Rural Technology

CEO Brian Thomason observes farm operations first-hand

As a rural communications company, BVTC is focused on serving the heart of its customer base, which is located predominately in agricultural areas. Recently, CEO Brian Thomason decided to visit several Kansas farms to better understand the challenges farmers face today. Thomason explains, “I wanted to capture a basic understanding of how technology—specifically, broadband—could contribute to the overall success of their operations.” He visited Glen Brunkow in Westmoreland, Adam Dressman in Frankfort, Craig Pringle in Winfield, and Matt Splitter in Lyons.

Thomason’s trips surpassed his initial expectations. He says, “Each visit presented a unique learning opportunity. From being invited in to a farmer’s home and served breakfast at his family’s table to riding in the cab of a young farmer’s tractor, I was given the chance to get to know hard-working Kansans and experience their love and passion for farming, as well as the close ties they have to the land they work.”

Through these visits, Thomason learned five key areas in which broadband has positively impacted farming:

1. Soil mapping
2. Precision farming
3. Monitoring systems
4. Monitoring markets
5. Management of financial operations

Thomason was told by three of the four farmers that they believe only 10 percent of the country’s farmers utilize technology in their operations. “I’ve read that by 2050, the need for crop production must double in order to feed the world’s population,” says Thomason. “I feel strongly that this can only be accomplished by technological advancements made through the utilization of broadband.”

Another challenge for the farmers is cost and capability limitations for cellular and wireless phones. Thomason observes, “Three out of four of these farmers are using their cellular or wireless connections for their primary Internet source. In one situation, a trip to the local library is required in order to find

sufficient broadband speeds to allow for updates and data downloads.”



For technology utilization to grow from 10 percent to 20 percent and beyond, and for cellular service to expand, the demand on companies such as BVTC will be tremendous.

Many companies, including BVTC, have already started deploying Gigabit technology, but there is still a lot of area left to reach. Thomason stresses, “Companies with Gigabit speeds in place are not over-compensating; they’re pre-planning in an effort to keep up with growing demands.”



STORE *your data* SAFELY

Advantages of Outsourcing Your Data Needs

1. You only pay for what you use. There is no need to overbuild for future growth.
2. You can easily and efficiently scale your IT infrastructure to your changing business needs.
3. You have access to the latest technology without large capital expenses.
4. You have high availability and reliability due to our redundant network, power, and climate control systems.
5. You are a priority! Uptime is guaranteed through the Service Level Agreement (SLA).
6. You can trust the state-of-the-art security and fire suppression systems.
7. Your data center is staffed by highly skilled and certified technicians.
8. We're your total IT solutions advisors! Local people who understand and care about you and your business.

For more information, speak with your business consultant today.