

# BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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We achieve more success when  
communities work together



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# BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

*Business Connections* is a quarterly publication of SkyLine/SkyBest created for our business customers. As a local, member-owned cooperative, SkyLine Membership Corporation was established in 1951 to bring telephone service to rural residents of Alleghany, Ashe and Watauga counties. Today, SkyLine is the second-largest of eight telephone cooperatives in North Carolina. In 1998, SkyLine established SkyBest Communications, Inc. as a wholly-owned subsidiary to assume operations of SkyLine's deregulated businesses. Today, SkyLine/SkyBest provides a wide variety of telecommunications services—from basic dial tone services to advanced business systems and networking solutions.

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**Community** ties join neighbors together, build relationships and foster social and economic growth. As a business owner or manager, part of your role is to be a strong community citizen. SkyLine/SkyBest shares this goal and remains committed to providing communications services that add value to the lives of our customers and the communities we serve.

This June issue of *Business Connections* takes a look at community involvement from several angles. For example, on pages 4 and 5, we feature the Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BDC), a full-service business and technology center that serves the Alleghany community. The BDC's training programs and facilities help this community grow in its ability to nurture new businesses. Also on that spread is an overview of SkyLine's Revolving Loan Program, which provides zero-interest loans to qualifying organizations that supply essential community services and create or retain local jobs.

On page 7, we encourage you to "Go Green at Work" with easy-to-implement, environmentally-sound practices for the workplace. You'll also find on that page a look at a couple of community events that receive the support of SkyLine/SkyBest—the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life and the Ashe County Heart Walk to benefit the American Heart Association.

I hope you think of SkyLine/SkyBest as your business partner in the community and will take advantage of the technological expertise we offer. We're here to provide cost-efficient solutions to your communications needs.

Sincerely,

**Kim Shepherd**

*Customer Service and Sales Manager*





# Building Your Brand

Does your brand need work? How do you begin?

**G**ood branding helps define your company and includes elements such as name, logo, tagline, fonts, color schemes and graphics. The marketplace is full of instantly recognizable brands with which customers create an emotional bond—from Nike to McDonald’s to Apple. Is your company’s brand as clear and powerful as it could be?

To help determine whether you need to take a fresh look at your branding, ask yourself these questions:

- Do your customers and your employees tend to misinterpret your mission or the benefits of your products or services?
- If you put all of your marketing materials side by side, does each one look different from the other?
- Does your team disagree about who your customers should be, and what needs you should be meeting for them?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then it may be time for a change.

## Getting Started

If you’re considering developing a new brand or enhancing the one you have, it’s a good idea to get professional assistance. You can consult a local marketing agency, visit [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov), or check out the services of a business development center such as the Blue Ridge BDC featured on the next two pages. When you do, be prepared to answer questions like these:

**What are the unique selling points of your products or services?** Think about what truly makes you different as compared with your competitors. It can be just about any benefit—such as a better price, superior quality or outstanding customer service.

**What is your company’s mission?** A mission statement is important since it helps educate potential customers about your business and defines employee expectations. It can also help you decide on a succinct tagline to represent your company.

**How do you want customers to perceive your company?** This encourages a

discussion of your company’s personality. For instance, you may want your business to be seen as fun, innovative, socially responsible, experienced or especially attentive to customer needs.

**Who are your customers?** You and your marketing firm need to have a clear picture of your current and prospective customers including demographics, needs, habits and desires. Focus groups and phone surveys can help you understand your customers better, and doing such research will help you avoid making incorrect assumptions.

The information generated by these questions will help lay the foundation for building a brand that has meaning for your target audience. Once your brand is in place, remember the importance of consistent use. Place the elements of your new brand on all communications including internal documents, invoices, advertising and marketing materials, business cards and your Web site. The more often your customers see this consistent branding, the more familiar they’ll become with the advantages of your company.



# Blue Ridge Business Development Center

A full-service resource for the businesses and residents of Allegheny County

The Blue Ridge Business Development Center (BDC) in Sparta, North Carolina, was established to revitalize and diversify the local economic base of Allegheny County. To achieve this goal, the BDC offers a wide range of business and technology services for current business owners and entrepreneurs as well as free Internet access and computer training for all residents. It's a busy place and one that helps businesses grow by increasing their knowledge, skills and resources.

Manager Clark Hunter describes it this way: "The BDC is a full-service business and technology center serving the Allegheny community. We offer free business and start-up consulting services along with Internet technology training. And as a business incubator, we work with entrepreneurs throughout the process of business planning, marketing research and financial consultation. This allows us to meet the requirements of the community in an effective and cost-efficient

manner, and eliminates the need for residents to look elsewhere for solutions to their technology and telecommunications challenges."

## Business and Technology Services

Members of the business community can come to the BDC for:

- Tailor-made training to meet specific objectives.
- Business consulting services.
- Entrepreneurial training.
- Technical services at competitive prices.
- Incubation space and flexible physical space in the form of offices, work stations and meeting facilities.

Both the business community and general public also have access to these BDC resources:

- A technical support desk at 336-372-1616, Mon. - Fri. from 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
- Video production.

- Client computer terminals with 6 Mbps SkyBest High-Speed Internet.
- A 10-seat conference room.
- Leased office space.

"It's a rich environment for entrepreneurs and current business owners to establish a niche, increase their market share and expand their businesses," notes Hunter. The BDC is home to many organizations including the Allegheny campus of Wilkes Community College.

To help develop the technologically savvy workforce that today's employees require, the BDC also provides a Community Access Site (CAS) for Allegheny County residents. The CAS offers free or nominally priced computer training to the public through a variety of technology-based programs. This training is a valuable resource for building job skills and enhancing employment opportunities while fostering a sense of community and personal effectiveness.

### Allegheny Community Television (ACTV)

One of the newest additions to the BDC is Allegheny Community Television (ACTV), a small community access television station that operates in cooperation with SkyBest TV, Allegheny Cable TV and the Allegheny School System. The BDC Studio opened in June 2009, and serves the counties of Allegheny, Ashe, Avery and Watauga. It reaches approximately 1,200 viewers.

“The primary use of this studio has been by local high school students who produce their own sports, music and news programs,” Hunter explains. He adds, “This has been a great educational opportunity for them to learn about all aspects of the TV business including video production.”



ACTV encourages area residents to participate in its local programming. The station runs informative, community-related Public Service Announcements on topics such as the importance of calling 811 to check on utility lines before you dig. ACTV also airs a talk show called

Mountain Topics; selected family movies in the western, comedy and mystery categories; county and town council meetings; and church services.

Hunter says, “Through an active Board of Directors, the ACTV partnership between the Allegheny School System, SkyBest TV and Allegheny Cable TV has been one of extreme cooperation. We’re working together to bring informative, entertaining and high-quality community TV to families in our counties.”

Clearly, the BDC is touching many lives through its wide spectrum of services. Whether you’re an entrepreneur with a great idea to develop, or a parent of a teen that’s interested in a television career, you can get down to business at the BDC.

## SkyLine’s Revolving Loan Fund Boosts the Business Community

In 1994, SkyLine received a \$400,000 grant from the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to establish a Revolving Loan Fund. To receive this grant, SkyLine had to commit \$80,000 to the fund—an indication of our company’s dedication to fostering local business development. The Revolving Loan Fund provides zero-interest loans to organizations that supply essential community services and create or retain local jobs. Examples of qualifying projects include:

- Rural development activities resulting in the creation or retention of job opportunities for rural people.
- Construction and installation of needed community facilities or services that support rural economic development and result in the creation and/or retention of job opportunities.
- New business development and/or existing business expansion within the area served by SkyLine.

Since its inception, SkyLine’s Revolving Loan Fund has provided more than \$1 million in loans to benefit a variety of economic development projects in Allegheny County, Ashe County and Watauga County. These loans ranged from \$25,000 for much-needed daycare playground equipment for Sugar Grove Developmental Day School to \$400,000 for site improvement to the Allegheny County Industrial Park by the Allegheny Economic Development Corporation.

The most recent recipient of a loan through this program is Tri-State Components of Allegheny County. Tri-State is a manufacturer of wood floor and roof truss systems, metal roofing and siding, and Buffalo Barns that’s located just off Highway 18. Its customer base includes residential, commercial and agricultural markets from a three-state area. The company is adding a new product line, standing seam roofing, and will expand at its facility by 15,540 square feet



*Pictured (left to right) during the recent loan presentation are: Jim Shepherd, SkyLine Board Secretary of Allegheny County; John Miller of Tri-State Components; and R.C. Mitchell, SkyLine Board President of Allegheny County*

and add new equipment to accommodate this growth. Owner John Miller says, “The building addition will enable us to become more efficient, and have floor space to add 50 percent more capacity to our truss line when the need arises.” Tri-State’s expansion will also support the local service industry and bring approximately 20 full-time jobs to the area, which has been hit hard by the economic downturn.



## Can You Speak Office Slang?

If the up-and-comers in your office are using terms you've never heard before, you may need to catch up on the latest office slang. Here are a few examples:

**404:** This term refers to someone who's not exactly "with it." It comes from the Internet-based error message, "404 Not Found," which means the Web site or document requested couldn't be located.

**Alpha Geek:** Tech-savvy people who can help with practically any computer-related issue.

**Blamestorming:** A group discussion to determine why a deadline was missed or some other goal was not achieved. Usually involves finding out who was responsible.

**E-mnesia:** When you can't remember sending or receiving an e-mail.

**Flight Risk:** An employee who may be on the verge of leaving their job.

**Open-collar Workers:** Telecommuters

**Plug-and-Play:** A new hire who doesn't require training.

# Secrets to Successful Selling

## Focus on building relationships to boost sales

Why do some salespeople seem to struggle with the process while others make it look so easy? The answer is that while successful sales people may appear to be coasting on natural talent, they're actually doing a great deal of work. Building relationships—a key to successful selling—takes considerable time, effort and attention.

When you focus on relationships, you're rewarded with a positive feedback loop: People buy from people they know and trust, so customers feel comfortable doing business with you. As they do, these relationships strengthen, generating more sales. And the more familiar customers become with your services, the more likely they are to refer others to you.

Try the following suggestions for building sales-generating relationships:

### Do your homework

Research your potential customers' history, services, initiatives, needs and customers before you arrive at their doors.

### Have a dialogue rather than a presentation

Think twice before you break out the "canned" PowerPoint presentation. Customize your interaction to each potential customer, and have a two-way dialogue about needs and solutions.

### Play the role of advisor

Pretend you work for your potential customer. In this role, how would you advise them? If your product or service fits in with this advice, great! If not, help them find one that does. You may not get the



sale now, but you'll be remembered for exceptional customer service—setting yourself up for future sales and referrals.

### Sell yourself as much as your product or service

Don't forget the human touch. Ask about your customers' kids, send them a card on their birthday and discuss common interests.

### Consider every contact with customers to be a potential sales opportunity

Don't make the mistake of thinking all your work is over now that the customer has agreed to do business with you. Continue to provide outstanding service to your long-time customers, and remind them often of how much they're appreciated.

The investment you make in building customer relationships will pay dividends for years to come.



# Go Green at Work

## Five easy ways to make a difference

We're all trying to be more environmentally conscious these days. But while "green" practices are gaining popularity in homes across the U.S., many businesses have some catching up to do. If you're looking for simple ways to make a difference, here are five easy-to-implement ideas:

### 1. Recycle

This is one of the easiest ways to begin going green. First, decide which materials you want to recycle. This could include things like paper, soda cans and plastic bottles. Then contact your local trash service or recycling company to schedule regular pick-ups, and place their bins throughout your office building.

### 2. Use a better bulb

According to the Sierra Club, artificial lights account for 44 percent of the electricity used in offices. To cut back, turn lights off when you're leaving a room for more than 15 minutes. Let as much natural light in as you can, too, to reduce the need for light bulbs.

### 3. Use computers responsibly

Your computer shouldn't have to run on full power while you're down the hall in a meeting. By setting your system to go to sleep automatically after it hasn't been used for a few minutes, you can cut energy use by 70 percent. (Setting a screen saver isn't the same—it keeps your computer turned on completely!)

### 4. Reduce paper use

Store everyday work documents electronically whenever possible. You can even post employee manuals and other corporate information to a Web site or server. When you do need to print, use both sides of the paper. And be sure to recycle your toner and ink cartridges to keep them out of landfills. Green Tip: Save your SkyLine Telephone Directories to be recycled. Call 800-759-2226 for more information.

### 5. Create a greener kitchen

It's easy and ultimately cost-effective to provide workers with washable dishes, silverware and glasses, rather than disposable paper or plastic.

## Community Corner



### Relay for Life

SkyLine has been involved with the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life since 1995 when the first event was held in Ashe County. Since that time, we have either fielded teams or served as a corporate sponsor in other counties we serve including Alleghany, Avery and Watauga in North Carolina and Johnson County in Tennessee.

Upcoming 2010 Relay for Life events:

- June 18 - Watauga County
- July 16 - Ashe County
- July 16 - Johnson County
- August 6 - Avery County

SkyLine is proud to help raise money, and hope, for cancer survivors and their families.



### Heart Walk

Since 1998, SkyLine has fielded a team for the Ashe County Heart Walk to benefit the American Heart Association and has raised more than \$30,000 to date. For the last several years, SkyLine has also supported local efforts to benefit the AHA by providing telephone banks for the annual Heart Auctions in Alleghany County and Ashe County.

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