

BUSINESS connections



Local technical support means faster response times

Tracy Critcher, Field Services Technician



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BUSINESS connections

Staying close to your customers is essential in order to thoroughly understand and meet their needs. It's important to keep the lines of communication open, ask questions, listen carefully and respond promptly. At SkyLine/SkyBest, we can help you stay close to your customers by providing convenient and cost-efficient communications services.

You'll find an overview of these services on pages 4 and 5 of this March issue of *Business Connections*. The solutions we provide become even stronger when combined with our local employees; you can count on SkyLine/SkyBest to be close by with the ongoing technical support and professional advice you need. Also on this spread, we answer questions about phone porting and introduce you to one of our technicians, Tracy Critcher.

Phone calls and emails are two ways to stay close to your customers, and we offer advice on how to manage this communication more effectively on pages 6 and 7. I think all of us struggle at times to keep up with the heavy volume of messages we receive, and hopefully you'll pick up some tips you can use. Also in this issue, we take a look at QR codes as another tool for putting content in the hands of your customers.

The SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Team plans to stay close to you, our business customers, throughout 2012 as we work to bring you the communications services you need to reach your goals. Let us know what we can do for you today.

Sincerely,

Jimmy C. Blevins
Chief Executive Officer



About the cover: Tracy Critcher, Field Services Technician, takes a minute for a photo after a service call in downtown Boone. He's one of 23 SkyLine/SkyBest technicians who provide local support, and you can read more about him on page 5. Cover photo provided by Todd Bush (www.bushphoto.com).

Crack the QR Code

Picture how these mysterious symbols could change your marketing promotions



TRY IT NOW!

This QR code will direct you to a video from the SkyLine/SkyBest Business Sales Team. In it, you'll be introduced to the members of the Business Sales Team and learn that, "It's our business to take care of yours."

Don't have a QR code scanner for your smartphone yet? Try searching "QR Reader for iPhone" or "Barcode Scanner for Android."

They seem to be everywhere these days. QR (Quick Response) codes are those funny-looking symbols placed on ads, posters, business cards, mailers, websites and TV commercials — practically anything that includes a visual component.

Viewers use their smartphone's camera function to scan the QR code — similar to how a grocery checkout clerk might use a handheld device to scan a UPC code — and the phone directs its browser to a URL embedded within the code. This leads viewers to special online promotions and other information.

To make the technology work on your smartphone, you need to download one of the QR code scanning applications. (See sidebar.) Once you've downloaded a QR code scanner for your smartphone, test it out on the QR code to the left, which points to a video from the Business Sales Team at SkyLine/SkyBest.

There are many examples of how businesses might use QR codes. A car dealer could place them on car window stickers and when customers walk around the lot, they'd use their smartphones to scan the codes and be instantly directed to a website with additional details about the cars. Similarly, a real estate agent might place a QR code on flyers outside a house for sale, so curious home shoppers could immediately see details about the house.

Think about how you could use QR codes to promote your business:

- **Special Offers** – Reward customers who take action (scanning the QR code) by giving them a discount or free merchandise or services.
- **Free Shipping** – Have your QR code point to a discount code customers can use to get free shipping.
- **Contact Information** – Have your QR code point to a virtual business card.
- **Access to Restricted Services** – Have your QR code point to a portion of your website that is normally reserved for members only.
- **Exclusive Invitations** – Allow details for a special event to be viewable only at a site accessible through a QR code.
- **Social Media** – Help build social media connections by having a QR code connect to your Facebook page.

Generating a QR code for mobile marketing is easy. Visit skybest.com/qrcode now.

QR codes have been in use since the early 1990s, but have only recently gained popularity in the U.S. For best results, you may need to first educate your customers about QR codes, including how to use them and why they're convenient and beneficial. As QR codes become even more common, your business will undoubtedly find additional opportunities to use them for marketing purposes.

Go Local, Get More

It pays to choose SkyLine/SkyBest as your communications provider



Our local SkyLine/SkyBest team includes Graham Brown, Outside Sales Executive; Robin Miller, Inside Sales Coordinator; Brent Keith, Business Sales Executive; and Michelle Scott, Inside Sales Coordinator.

SkyLine/SkyBest is a local company with local employees, committed to helping other local companies like yours be successful. No matter what communications challenges you have, help is always nearby.

Robin Miller, Inside Sales Coordinator, notes, "The local support provided by our Business Sales Team is a large aspect of doing business with SkyLine/SkyBest. Our departments work together to give the best customer service possible. When a customer calls in to report a phone outage

or line issue, our repair department responds, and reaction time isn't days; it's usually within hours. Local businesses praise our timeliness and appreciate how quickly the technicians resolve issues."

In addition, interaction between SkyLine/SkyBest and its customers goes beyond business. "SkyLine/SkyBest gives back to the communities and people we serve. Many of our employees volunteer for community fund-raising programs, coach local sports teams and participate as trained first responder/fire department members.

They also attend the same churches and civic/community events as SkyLine/SkyBest customers, as well as frequently shop at local businesses and eat at local restaurants. So we know our customers on a personal level," explains Miller.

Brent Keith, Business Sales Executive, says, "Our Business Sales Team's goal is to equip our business customers with the best communications tools and technology. However, it doesn't end there. We continue to support them in today's ever-changing business environment."

The Value of Keeping Your Phone Number

What is phone porting?

Phone porting is the ability to transfer an existing landline or mobile telephone number, assigned by a local exchange carrier (LEC), and reassign the number to another carrier, such as SkyBest Communications.

How does porting work?

A customer with service from another telephone provider wants to sign up for SkyBest service. This customer can port (or keep) their current number(s) (for example, 336-246 or 828-262). Once the paperwork has been completed and the other provider has released the customer's number(s) to SkyBest for a minimal monthly fee, our company simply takes over billing.

What are the benefits of porting?

Porting eliminates the disruption and expense of changing phone number(s). It offers these benefits:

- Customers can keep your business numbers in speed dials, fax machines and cellphones.
- Your business doesn't need to reprint materials such as stationery or business cards or make changes to websites or advertising.
- There's no disruption of phone service.

How do I learn more?

To discuss switching your phone service to SkyBest Communications, contact Michelle Scott at 336-876-6155 or Robin Miller at 336-876-6231.



SkyLine/SkyBest can develop customized communications solutions for your business by combining products and services including:

BROADBAND SERVICES

To meet the demand for increased speed for file sharing, e-commerce and quick access, SkyLine/SkyBest has copper broadband offerings of 4 Mbps and 8 Mbps downstream and even higher speeds for fiber-optic-served customers. Businesses can also increase their upstream bandwidth for an additional cost. Availability of speeds varies by location.

METRO ETHERNET

Metro Ethernet is designed to enable connection speeds from 10.0 Mbps to 1.0 Gbps. Metro Ethernet can support customers needing to connect multiple LANs (Local Area Network) over a wide-area connection, send high volumes of data between several company locations or have sites that share high bandwidth applications.

T-1 AND PRI SERVICE

T-1 lines, sometimes referred to as DS1 lines, are a dedicated connection supporting data rates totaling 1.544 Mbps. We also offer Primary Rate Interface (PRI), a telecommunications standard for carrying multiple voice and data transmissions between two physical locations.

COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

SkyLine/SkyBest offers free consultations and evaluations of your phone needs. Start with

the system that fits your requirements today and easily add components later. Choose from a standard key system up to a Mitel (VoIP) platform. We can tailor your phone system to meet your communications needs.

LONG-DISTANCE AND REGIONAL CALLING

SkyBest offers long-distance plans at reasonable rates and with no hidden fees or minimum-usage requirements. The Freedom 500 Plan offers 500 long-distance minutes to share between multiple lines at a low monthly rate. SkyLine/SkyBest's regional calling plan offers a flat rate of six cents per minute using seven-digit dialing to locations across our region.

DATA NETWORKING SOLUTIONS

See us for data connections including copper data wiring, fiber-optic Ethernet connections and patch panels, as well as data hardware such as switches, routers and WiFi access points.

CUSTOMIZED SECURITY SOLUTIONS

Ask us about scheduling a free on-site evaluation to determine the best security solution for your business.

With SkyLine/SkyBest, you get everything you need locally. What's more, there are no extended contracts to sign, and the majority of our services do not require any type of contract. Call 1-800-759-2226 to speak with a member of our award-winning Business Sales Team.

Employee Profile

Tracy Critcher

Field Services Technician

Based in Watauga County, Tracy Critcher has worked at SkyLine/SkyBest for more than 13 years. As a Field Services Technician, his primary responsibilities are to install and repair SkyLine/SkyBest services over copper and fiber-optic cable. Critcher notes, "I work in Boone and in the communities of Sugar Grove, Foscoe, Vilas, Valle Crucis, Matney, Bethel and Zionville. I enjoy meeting new people and making sure they are pleased when I install or repair their services."

When he's not hard at work helping SkyLine/SkyBest customers, Critcher keeps busy with family and community activities. He says, "My wife's name is Emily, and we have three sons: Cooper, 6; Finley, 3; and Olson, 1. I volunteer at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church and help with their Equip Ministry, which provides sports recreation for children including baseball, football, wrestling, basketball and soccer."



Photo by Todd Bush
(www.bushphoto.com)

Guilty of Not Returning Calls?

Rethink your excuses—good etiquette is good for business

Have you noticed that returning phone calls is becoming a lost piece of etiquette in today's business world? Granted, we all have a lot on our plates. You may even think you have perfectly legitimate reasons for not returning calls. But think again. Failure to respond promptly—or respond at all—to phone messages could end up costing you in terms of lost sales or damage to your professional reputation.

Why don't people call back? Here are some common excuses for not returning business calls along with cautionary "food for thought" for each:

"I'M TOO BUSY."

Any given call could end up being a chance to strengthen a business relationship, learn something valuable or reinforce your image. Given this fact, are you really too busy to return those calls? Look at it this way: Whenever you ignore a phone message, you run the risk of missing a hidden opportunity that could benefit your business. So make the time to return calls, even if it's only with very brief messages or conversations.

"IF IT'S REALLY A BIG DEAL, THE CALLER WILL TRY ME AGAIN. I DON'T NEED TO CALL BACK."

This belief can backfire on you, particularly in time-sensitive situations. For example, if a reporter calls to get your insights about a development in your industry and you don't return that call promptly, he or she may move on to the next contact on the list in order to meet the publication deadline. By not responding to the call, you've missed your chance to get publicity for your business and enhance your reputation as an expert.

"I ONLY RETURN THE IMPORTANT CALLS."

This strategy makes sense at first glance, but how can you know for sure which calls are important and which aren't? Say a caller simply leaves a message such as, "This is John Smith at ABC Company. Please call me at such and such phone number." What you may not realize is that John Smith was referred to you by one of your customers and is interested in doing business with you. By ignoring the call, you not only run the risk of offending the caller (a potential customer) but you could also adversely affect your relationship with the customer who made the referral.

While it can be challenging to respond to all phone messages, it's worth the effort. After all, when you don't return a call, you're communicating that the caller is unimportant to you. Is that really the message you want to send?





Sound Strategies for **Email** Management

When you're getting buried in emails each day, it may seem like the impossible dream to keep up with all the filing, deleting, forwarding and responding. You know you should reply to that customer's request or that supplier's question, but you can't seem to find the time.

A good place to start is by studying what's typically found in your inbox. If there are hundreds (or thousands) of emails in your inbox right now, you could have a system issue that needs to be addressed. Consider the following strategies:

- Take a closer look at your spam filter. Does it need to be upgraded or the settings changed?
- Are there newsletters you receive regularly that are no longer of value to you? Unsubscribe to them.
- Are you being copied in on communications unnecessarily? Be clear with colleagues about which projects require emails to be sent to you and which do not.
- Do you lack an effective system for processing emails or fail to designate adequate time for email management?

Your approach to dealing with each email is also vitally important. Efficiency experts generally recommend you check emails periodically, but not constantly, during the workday. Scan them quickly to determine which are most urgent/important, then read them in order of priority. The goal is to read each email once and act on it—either by replying, filing or deleting. If you can't immediately act on a particular email, set up a to-do task and schedule a time that you are going to complete this task.

The bottom line is this: Don't let email reduce your productivity. Instead, manage it more carefully so that you have the time to effectively communicate with those people most critical to the success of your business.



RULES OF THUMB FOR TIMELY RESPONSES

In the business world, how quickly you should reply to an email or return a phone call depends on the nature of the communication. But it's never acceptable to not respond at all to individuals:

- You are doing business with
- You want to do business with
- That can refer business to you
- Who were referred

Conventional wisdom says to respond in a timely manner to emails and calls, often defined as within 24 to 48 hours. If you don't have an immediate answer to a question, reply to acknowledge receipt of the email or phone message and give a time frame of when you'll be able to respond completely.

What's in it for you if you get back to people promptly? It fosters a reputation of reliability and paints you as a professional who's considerate of others. In fact, since ignoring emails and calls is now so commonplace, simply responding in a timely way can put you way ahead of your competition.

Anna Banana's Found Great Service with SkyLine/SkyBest




SkyLine
SkyBest

Call SkyLine/
SkyBest today
for great service!

1-800-759-2226
www.skybest.com

"When choosing service providers I always consider local first. Not only is SkyBest a local company, but they meet all of my communications needs affordably and provide exceptional customer service. Everyone has gone above and beyond. With SkyBest, I know my business is handled by people who care."

Anna Lipford, owner of Anna Banana's

Pictured: Michelle Scott, SkyLine/SkyBest Inside Sales Coordinator
with Anna Banana's Owner, Anna Lipford and Sales Manager, Natalie Cates.



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