

BUSINESS connections

Communications are Critical for Ashe and Watauga Medics



Pictured L to R: Brent Keith, SkyLine Business Sales Executive; Craig Poe, SkyLine Field Services Technician; Craig Sullivan, Ashe & Watauga Medics Owner/Director; Eddie Greene, Ashe & Watauga Medics IT Specialist; Tim Watson, SkyLine Field Services Supervisor.



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BUSINESS connections

Good communication is critical for good business.

Staying in touch with customers encourages their loyalty; keeping in contact with employees means better team dynamics; and letting the public know what you're up to is a great way to generate new business.

In this issue of *Business Connections*, we take a look at a variety of communication strategies and how they can help your company. On page 3, we offer a **Playbook for Defensive Branding**. Maybe you've never thought of branding as a game, but as with most sports, a great strategy can truly help you win.

On pages 4 and 5, we highlight **Ashe and Watauga Medics**, which provide critical ambulance services to these communities. With the recent opening of the Ashe location, communications are more important than ever before; Metro Ethernet services from SkyLine/SkyBest help the locations stay in touch.

See page 6 for an increasingly popular strategy for communicating with customers, prospects, and current and potential employees: **business videos**. If a still picture is worth a thousand words, how many words can you express with a video?

Finally, if a big part of your communication strategy involves long-distance phone calls, don't miss the descriptions of our **Business Freedom Plans** on page 7. Find out how these plans can save you money!

Naturally, you're welcome to communicate with us any time. Just call or stop by to let us know your business needs.

Sincerely,

Jimmy C. Blevins
Chief Executive Officer



Cover photo by Todd Bush, www.bushphoto.com



Playbook for DEFENSIVE Branding

*Handling complaints and rumors
in the age of consumer-generated media*

Defensive branding is the process of protecting your brand from negative consumer impressions such as product/service complaints and harmful rumors. Of course, companies have always had to respond to negative press (remember Tylenol in the 1980s?), but now they must do it more quickly. In this age of consumer-generated media, bad news travels fast. That's why defensive branding is a hot topic and a subject worthy of discussion for businesses of any size.

It Starts With Search Results

Search results are fundamental to defensive branding, since they help determine brand equity. If a consumer goes to Google and types in the name of your business plus "complaints," what comes up? This is particularly vital in categories such as automotive, wireless and electronics, where most purchases start with a search.

For example, let's say your brand is suffering from a false rumor about product safety. You could use a defensive marketing tactic and purchase keywords via Google's AdSense to make sure consumers have access to your company's side of the story. People searching about the product's safety will see a banner or text ad from your company with a message about "getting the facts" that links to your website. This provides the opportunity to share honest information and address the safety rumor directly—important because consumers tend to believe accusations if they don't see a company defending itself.

Twitter and Facebook Play Different Roles

In addition to the purchase of keywords on Google, you can strategically use Facebook and Twitter as part of a defensive branding program. Each plays a different, but equally valuable, role.

You can think of Twitter as an early warning system that alerts you to what's going on in real time and enables you to respond rapidly. The online retailer, Zappos, is known for its successful use of social media. In one example, when Zappos saw a tweet about poor service from a disgruntled customer, it sent the customer an email with an apology, an explanation of the customer service snafu and a generous coupon toward a future Zappos purchase. More importantly, Zappos uses information from Twitter to make needed improvements to its customer service operations, thereby defending its brand.

The strength of Facebook is that it allows companies to engage consumers in a deeper, more comprehensive way. A brand's Facebook page is a public profile that encourages thoughtful conversations between companies and consumers and helps to cultivate brand advocacy.

As you consider defensive branding at your company, remember this: The closer you can get to your customers, the more effectively you can respond to their questions, meet their needs and prevent small problems from growing. A good defense really is the best offense.

Ashe and Watauga Medics

Staying connected helps these offices perform a vital community service



Photo by Todd Bush, www.bushphoto.com

Pictured above:
Ashe Medics
Office Manager
Candace Miller and
Crew Supervisor
Mark Worley

Page 5, upper left:
Ashe Base,
located at 716 Mount
Jefferson Road,
West Jefferson, NC

Page 5, middle left:
Watauga Base 1,
located at 921 West
King Street, Boone, NC

Page 5, bottom left:
Watauga Base 2,
located at 133 Longvue
Drive, Boone, NC

Page 5, bottom right:
SkyLine Field Services
Tech Craig Poe (left)
and Ashe and Watauga
Medics IT Specialist
Eddie Greene set up
SkyBest TV in the
Ashe Medics office.

As the primary provider of local ambulance services, Ashe and Watauga Medics respond to 911 calls and transport patients from emergency sites to the hospital. Emergencies can include car accidents, falls, strokes and heart conditions. The service also transports patients who need supplemental services to hospitals that provide them. Director Craig Sullivan says, “Between the two locations, we receive about 22 calls per day.”

Two Locations, One Mission

The company’s Watauga office has been open for 14 years; Sullivan worked as a paramedic for nine years there before purchasing it. The Ashe location opened earlier this year. Sullivan says, “Getting the contract in Ashe was very competitive, so we were very pleased.”

The Watauga location has 32 employees; the Ashe location has 26. Most are paramedics but the staff also includes drivers as well as billing and administrative personnel. Though there is no “typical” routine, standard tasks include checking the equipment and trucks, and getting prepared for what each day might bring.

Sullivan notes, “The most challenging part of our job is keeping in mind patients’ perspectives in terms of what they’re experiencing during an emergency. It may be the paramedic’s 100th emergency, but the patient’s first. We strive to keep this idea at the forefront of our minds to provide the best possible service.”

Another way the company strives to better serve patients is to provide new, cutting-edge equipment. Sullivan says, “The most rewarding aspects of the business are knowing that the staff is providing a quality service that has the public’s confidence.”

The folks at SkyLine/SkyBest have been absolutely wonderful to work with. They’re very friendly and helpful and have responded well to all of our needs.”

— CRAIG SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR,
ASHE AND WATAUGA MEDICS

The keys to Ashe and Watauga Medics’ success are the staff and the first responders who often arrive at emergency scenes prior to the paramedics.



Sullivan says, "I have all the confidence in the world in our staff. We also count on fire departments and police, who often administer life-saving first aid or CPR. They can arrive within a few minutes of calls and are highly trained to respond immediately to a variety of emergency situations."



Critical Communication Tools

Watauga Medics first started working with SkyLine/SkyBest in 2013; SkyLine/SkyBest provided the business with broadband Internet and SkyBest TV services. TV is especially important, as Sullivan explains: "We have paramedics here 24 hours per day; our office is essentially their home every third day. So it's nice to be able to provide them with something to do during their down time." Broadband service is also critical because our staff needs to send reports and other data daily, online, to different databases.



Photos by Todd Bush, www.bushphoto.com

Business Sales Executive Brent Keith comments, "We were happy to get to work with the business in Watauga County and are pleased that they trusted us with their communications needs in Ashe County as well."

Staying Connected With Metro Ethernet

When the Ashe location opened, Sullivan wanted to connect the two locations together with a seamless network. To keep the offices connected, the business uses Metro Ethernet service from SkyLine/SkyBest. Sullivan says, "I'm the director of both locations, so I need to be in both places at once. The Metro Ethernet service helps me to do this by providing ready Internet access for my employees and me."

Keith adds, "Their Metro Ethernet network connects the locations together to allow the staff to share data resources such as broadband Internet and their Internet Protocol-PBX phone system. They are pleased with the quality of their services and the fact that they can share resources between the two counties, which keeps operating costs low." Keith notes, "The business basically has the best communications it can get to help make staff efficient and ready to respond."

Sullivan further appreciates that all these services can be billed on one statement. He says, "It saves us time and money." He is pleased with SkyLine's services overall, noting, "The folks at SkyLine/SkyBest have been absolutely wonderful to work with. They're very friendly and helpful and have responded well to all of our needs. We couldn't be happier with the service."

The feeling is mutual. Keith says, "Craig is easy to work with and is committed to making sure that he is set up to carry out the responsibility he has to provide emergency services to our communities."

Emergency-related Health Resources

As a community resource for emergency services, Ashe and Watauga Medics strive to educate the public about a variety of related topics including poison, rescue, healthcare systems, highway safety, emergency services and trauma. The company recommends the following sites to help teach the community about these topics:

Carolinas Poison Center
www.ncpoisoncenter.org

Watauga County Rescue Squad
www.wataugarescue.org

Blowing Rock Rescue Squad
www.townofblowingrock.com/faq.php?subject=Rescue%20Squad

Appalachian Regional Healthcare System
www.aprhrs.org

The University of North Carolina Highway Research Center
www.hsrc.unc.edu/index.cfm

NC EMS
www.ncems.org

Journal of Emergency Medical Services (JEMS)
www.jems.com

Mountain Area Trauma Regional Advisory Committee (MATRAC)
www.matrac.com

North Carolina Association of Rescue and EMS
www.ncarems.org



Photo by Todd Bush, www.bushphoto.com

Capture Your Company in Action

Online videos help customers find and better understand you

YouTube and other video sharing websites, such as Vimeo, have become much more than just online entertainment phenomena. The popular video sites are now being used successfully by many businesses for marketing, customer service, recruiting and training activities.

Why are businesses turning to video sharing sites? One reason is that when you upload a video, you allow your business to be found by customers; the search potential for YouTube approaches that of Google. Online videos also help build trust with your customers by matching a friendly face with your brand and giving you the chance to do product demonstrations.

How could your business use video sharing sites? Consider these ideas:

Video Marketing

Use this method for engaging potential customers when words alone don't do the trick. Provide details about your products and show how they're used. Or, do something completely unexpected that's likely to go viral.

Product Information

For customers who are already doing business with you, videos are a great way to keep them happy. Provide step-by-step product instructions to help them use your products.

FAQs

While Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) can be written, why not take it a step further? As with product information, you can demonstrate some things much more easily using video.



Recruiting

Consider creating a series of recruiting videos that show your various departments, give a tour of the facility and talk about company values and expectations. Upon applying for work, potential candidates will feel more comfortable if they have already come to know you online.

News

Tired of the media chopping and slicing your well-crafted news releases? How about releasing them on video? Record a prominent company representative broadcasting your news item.

Training

Rather than always spending money for employees to travel to training sessions, create videos to disseminate some of the information.

Testimonials

What's better than a potential customer reading about a raving fan? A potential customer seeing that raving fan! A video can bring a customer testimonial to life.

For best results with online videos, keep these guidelines in mind:

- To avoid using valuable company bandwidth, reserve a channel on one or more video sharing sites and store your videos there.
- For search engine optimization, enter a title, description and tags (common words associated with the content) when you upload each video.
- Try to keep the length of each video to less than two minutes.
- Promote videos within your other online communities, such as your blog, Facebook and Twitter.

Finally, don't make this harder than it needs to be. Your video doesn't have to be a polished production and uploading to video sharing sites is free and easy to do. Give it a try and put your communications plan in motion.

*Check out SkyLine/SkyBest on YouTube!
[youtube.com/user/SkyLineSkyBest1951](https://www.youtube.com/user/SkyLineSkyBest1951)*

Business Freedom Plans are Great Long-Distance Values

Business Customers can save money by switching to SkyBest

To meet the changing needs of our business customers, SkyBest has offered Freedom long-distance plans for the past six years. Changing to SkyBest Long Distance has helped local businesses save money. Below are examples of how local businesses were able to save by switching to SkyBest Long Distance:

"Since switching to SkyBest Long Distance in November 2013, Lees-McRae has realized substantial savings and experienced wonderful service. We wish we had transitioned sooner!"

– SUZETTE FRONK, VP OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS, LEES-MCRAE COLLEGE

"Even though we had a low per-minute rate with our previous long-distance provider, the monthly surcharges were costly. SkyBest assisted Vannoy Construction, saving hundreds of dollars per month on long distance."

– MELISSA WATSON, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES, VANNOY CONSTRUCTION

Inside Sales Coordinator Robin Miller says, "If your business doesn't have SkyBest Long Distance, we can do a cost analysis between SkyBest and your current long-distance provider to determine how much you will save by switching."

To choose the best money-saving Business Freedom Plan yourself, check the average number of long-distance minutes your business uses each month.

Compare those minutes with our plans below. All plans allow minutes to be shared between multiple phone lines on your account:

Business Freedom 500 Plan

Get a bucket of 500 minutes for \$34.95 per month. Each minute above 500 is \$0.08 per minute.

Business Freedom 1000 Plan

Get a bucket of 1,000 minutes for \$59.95 per month. Each minute above 1,000 is \$0.08 per minute.

Business Freedom 2000 Plan

Get a bucket of 2,000 minutes for \$119.90 per month. Each minute above 2,000 is \$0.06 per minute.

Switch to SkyBest Long Distance and get a \$25 credit.* For a free consultation and cost comparison, call 1.800.759.2226 or contact:



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* Some restrictions may apply.



SkyLine Retail Sales Associate Ann Estes, with customer Lannie Jones at last year's Customer Appreciation Day

Upcoming SkyLine Events

SkyLine Annual Meeting – Saturday, September 27

Please join us at Ashe County High School in West Jefferson. Member registration starts at 9:30 a.m. and the meeting begins at 10:30 a.m.

Rise & Shine Initiative – September and October

October is National Cooperative Month and as part of our celebration, we are joining with the Cooperative Council of North Carolina and fellow Council members to coordinate food drives for our local food pantries. We urge you to participate in our Rise & Shine initiative to collect non-perishable breakfast items for area families who need help. Simply drop by any SkyLine/SkyBest Customer Center in September to pick up an insulated shopping bag.* Fill it with non-perishable breakfast items, bring it to any SkyLine/SkyBest Customer Center in October, leave the food with us to distribute and keep the shopping bag as our gift.

Customer Appreciation Day – Thursday, October 9

Let us thank you in person for being a member of our cooperative. Stop by any SkyLine/SkyBest Customer Center to enjoy a snack, pick up a free souvenir* and register for some great door prizes.

*While supplies last.



Metro Ethernet Connects Multiple Locations With Multiple Benefits

Metro Ethernet from SkyLine/SkyBest makes sharing information between computers across town as simple as sharing information between computers across the hall. Call the Business Sales Team to find out more.

