

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR OWNERS

The Small Business Technology Guide

Phones, managed IT, websites and the daily operations that hold a growing business together.



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Before You Switch Business Phone Systems, Ask These Six Questions

Changing phone systems is one of those projects business owners put off for years, then try to finish in a week. As Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, I oversee managed VoIP and telecommunications for small and medium-sized businesses across Tennessee. The switches that go smoothly almost always start with the same six questions.

- 1. What happens to our phone numbers?** Your main number is on your website, your trucks, your Google listing and years of customer contacts. Ask exactly how numbers move (it's called porting), how long it takes and what keeps calls flowing while it happens.
- 2. Who do we call when something breaks?** "Support" can mean a ticket system in another time zone or a person who knows your account. Ask who answers, how fast, and whether they'll still answer after the contract is signed.
- 3. What does it cost after the first year?** Introductory pricing is common. Ask for the full monthly cost, including taxes and fees, in year two and year three.
- 4. Does it work the way our team actually works?** Think about people who answer from a cell phone, after-hours calls, ring groups, voicemail to email and text messaging from your business number. Make a short list of how calls really move through your business and confirm each item.
- 5. Is our internet ready?** Internet phone service depends on your internet connection. A quick check of your network before the switch prevents choppy calls after it.
- 6. What's the cutover plan?** Ask for the day, the time and the steps, and who will be on hand when the new system goes live. A good provider schedules the switch when it will interrupt your customers least.

Get clear answers to these six and the switch becomes a planned project instead of a scramble.

Switching Phone Providers Without Losing Your Business Number

Your business phone number is one of the oldest things your business owns. It is on your trucks, your business cards, your Google listing and every review site that mentions you. When owners hesitate to switch phone providers, losing that number is usually the reason.

You don't have to lose it. Moving a number from one provider to another is called porting, and it is a routine process. It just has to be done in the right order.

As Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, I oversee our managed VoIP and telecommunications services. These are the steps I'd want every owner to know before they start.

Don't cancel your old service first. This is the most expensive mistake. If you close the old account before the port is finished, the number can be released and you may not get it back. Keep the old service active until the new provider confirms the number is working on its side.

Pull a recent bill before you do anything else. The new provider will ask for the details exactly as your current carrier has them on file: the account number, the name and service address on the account, the authorized contact, and often a PIN or passcode. If any of these don't match, the request gets rejected and the clock starts over.

List every number you have. Main lines, fax lines, toll-free numbers, the old number that still forwards somewhere. Numbers that get left off the list stay behind, and you find out when a customer can't reach you.

Ask for a scheduled date and time. A port happens at a specific moment. Pick a slow part of the week, not your busiest morning, and make sure someone is available to test when it happens.

Test the moment it moves. Call every number from an outside phone. Check that calls ring where they should, that voicemail works, and that after-hours routing still sends calls where you expect.

Then close the old account. Once everything is confirmed working, cancel the old service in writing and keep the confirmation.

Your number is part of your reputation. Moving it should be boring, and with the right order of steps, it is.

Read online: daniellelemons.com/writing-keep-your-business-phone-number

A Dropped Call Is a Missed Job: The Real Cost of Unreliable Tech in a Service Business

When technology fails in a service business, it isn't just annoying. It's expensive.

A dropped call is a missed job. A voicemail that never gets delivered is a lost customer. A booking tool your team can't figure out is an afternoon of work that doesn't get scheduled.

As Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, I work with contractors, clinics, churches and other service businesses whose phones and systems have to work every single day. Here's how I think about it.

Count what downtime actually costs. Most owners think of a phone outage as an inconvenience. Try a different question: how many calls come in on a normal morning, and what is one of those jobs worth? That number is what an hour of downtime really costs.

Fix the leaks you can't see. Missed calls that never ring through, voicemails that don't reach the right person, and messages nobody can find don't show up as errors. They just show up as slower months. Check where your calls and messages actually go.

Choose tools your team can use. The best system is the one your team uses correctly every day. If booking a job or finding a message takes a workaround, the tool is costing you more than it saves.

Prevent problems instead of reacting to them. Systems that get checked and maintained before they fail keep the phones ringing. It's the difference between a planned fix and a lost day.

No big talk. Just tools that work.

What “Managed IT Services” Actually Means for a Small Business

“Managed services” is one of those phrases that sounds expensive and vague. As Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, where I oversee managed services for VoIP, telecommunications and IT, here’s how I explain it to business owners.

It means someone is responsible. When your phone system goes down or a computer won’t connect, you don’t have to figure out who to call or search for a fix. One team owns the problem and fixes it.

It means help choosing, not just fixing. Most small businesses are stuck choosing between several phone platforms, software tools or internet options. A managed services provider helps you pick the one that fits how your team actually works.

It means support your team can actually use. When someone can’t find a voicemail or figure out how to forward a call, they should be able to ask a person and get an answer. Good support is simple and fast.

It means fewer surprises. Systems get checked and updated before they fail, not after. That’s the difference between a planned fix on a Tuesday afternoon and a scramble on a busy Monday morning.

What to ask before you sign: Who answers when we call? How fast? What’s included in the monthly price, and what costs extra? Get clear answers, in writing, before you commit.

Tech support should be simple. If it isn’t, that’s worth a conversation.

Five Questions to Answer Before Your Business Internet Goes Down

Every business loses its internet connection at some point. A line gets cut down the street, a storm rolls through, equipment fails. The outage itself usually isn't the problem. The problem is the hour everyone spends figuring out what to do.

In my work overseeing managed IT and phone services at DirecTech Connect, the businesses that ride out an outage are the ones that answered a few questions before it happened.

1. Where do your phone calls go when the internet is down? If your phones run over the internet, they stop when it does, unless you've set up a failover. Most business phone systems can automatically send calls to cell phones or another location when the office goes offline. Find out whether yours does, and test it.

2. Do you have a second way online? A backup connection from a different provider, or even a cellular backup, can keep card payments, scheduling and email running. It doesn't need to be fast. It needs to be separate from your main line.

3. Who do you call, and what will they ask you? Write down the provider's support number and your account number, and tape it near the equipment. You don't want to be searching for it on a phone with no Wi-Fi.

4. Which work can't stop, and what's the manual fallback? If you take payments, book appointments or dispatch crews, decide ahead of time how that gets done for a few hours without your usual tools. A paper list and a charged phone count.

5. Who is in charge of telling customers? A short message on your voicemail greeting and your Google listing goes a long way. Decide who updates them, and make sure they know how.

None of this takes long. An hour of planning on a normal Tuesday saves a lot of scrambling when your connection finally goes down.

Backups: Four Questions Every Small Business Owner Should Be Able to Answer

Ask most small business owners whether their files are backed up, and the answer is yes. Ask where the backup is, when it last ran and whether anyone has ever restored from it, and the answer gets less certain.

A backup you haven't checked is a hope, not a plan. As Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, where I oversee managed IT for small and medium-sized businesses, these are the four questions I'd want every owner to be able to answer.

What gets backed up? Make a short list: accounting files, customer records, contracts, photos, email, and whatever lives on the computer at the front desk. Anything not on the list should be there on purpose, not by accident.

Where does the backup live? A copy on an external drive sitting next to the computer protects you from a dead hard drive. It does not protect you from a fire, a theft, or ransomware that encrypts every drive it can reach. Keep at least one copy somewhere else, such as a reputable cloud backup service.

When did it last run, and how would you know if it stopped? Backups fail quietly. A full disk, an expired password or a changed setting can stop them for months. Someone should get an alert when a backup fails, and someone should look at it.

Have you ever restored a file from it? This is the real test. Pick one file and restore it. If that takes a support call and an afternoon, you've learned something important on a quiet day instead of a bad one.

Backups aren't exciting, and they shouldn't be. The goal is simple: if something goes wrong tomorrow, you know exactly how you get your work back.

What Tennessee Small Businesses Should Expect From a Technology Partner

Contractors, churches, clinics, shops: Tennessee businesses do real work every day, and they depend on technology to do it. Phones that ring. Internet that stays up. A website that brings in customers. When any of it breaks, the whole day breaks with it.

As Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, I spend my days on the other side of that call. Here's what I think every small business should expect from whoever handles their technology.

Reliable systems, not just cheap ones. The lowest monthly price stops looking like a deal the first time your phones go down on a busy morning. Ask what keeps the system running, not just what it costs.

Tools that fit the business. A five-person office doesn't need the same setup as a hospital. A good partner recommends what fits how your team works and doesn't sell you features you'll never use.

Support that shows up. Dropped calls, confusing tools and no-show support are what make business owners tired of their provider. A technology partner should answer when you call and follow through until the problem is fixed.

Someone local who knows your business. When the person helping you understands your business and your area, problems get solved faster and you spend less time explaining.

Tennessee businesses deserve technology that's reliable, affordable and built for them. If yours isn't, it's worth asking why.

Three Things I Check First When a Local Business Website Isn't Bringing in Calls

When a business owner tells me their website isn't bringing in calls, I don't start with the design. I start with three questions. Most of the time, the answer is in one of them.

- 1. Can a customer call you in one tap on a phone?** Most visitors are on a phone. If the number is buried in the footer, or shows up as an image they can't tap, many of them will hit the back button and call the next business on the list. Put a tap-to-call button at the top of every page.
- 2. Does the top of the page say what you do and where, in plain words?** "Excellence in service since 1998" doesn't tell anyone anything. "Residential electrician in Hendersonville, Tennessee" does. Search engines need that sentence to know when to show you, and people need it to know they're in the right place.
- 3. Can you update it yourself?** Hours change. Prices change. Photos get old. If every small change needs a developer, the site slowly drifts out of date, and an out-of-date site quietly tells customers you might be out of date too.

If all three are in place and calls still aren't coming in, then it's time to look deeper: search visibility, reviews, and how the site loads on a slow connection. But start with these three. They're free to check, and fixing them often makes the biggest difference.

Why I Build Your Website Before You Ask Me a Single Question About Price

Most web designers start a sales call by asking about your budget. I start by asking what you actually do—who walks through your door, what makes them call you instead of the guy down the street, and what’s been sitting on your to-do list because your current site can’t handle it.

Then I go build the thing. Not a mockup. Not a wireframe with placeholder text and a stock photo of a stranger shaking hands. A real, finished website—your business, your photos, your words—that you can click through on your own phone before you’ve paid a cent.

I’ve done this 250+ times now, for electrical contractors and family doctors, churches and BBQ joints, a golf reseller and a custom car builder, all across Middle Tennessee. The pattern is always the same: the owner has a story about their business that nobody online can see yet. My job is to go find that story and put it in front of people who are already searching for exactly what that business does.

Here’s the part that surprises people: showing up with a finished product instead of a pitch deck changes the whole conversation. Nobody has to imagine what it’ll look like. Nobody has to trust a mood board. You either love it or you don’t, and if you don’t, you owe me nothing—I build it free, you decide once it’s real.

Once you’re in, the deal is simple: hosting, SSL, daily backups, security, lead alerts to your phone, and an editing panel that’s actually yours—no developer on retainer required to change a phone number. One flat rate, no setup fee waiting at the end.

Twenty-plus years in digital strategy taught me one thing above everything else: a business’s website should work as hard as the business owner does. Most don’t. Mine do, because I build them the way I’d want mine built—see it, love it, then decide.

If you’re a small business owner anywhere in Middle Tennessee and your website hasn’t been touched since a decade you’d rather forget, I’m at daniellelemons.com. Come see what “free build” actually means.

Your Small Business Website Doesn't Need to Look Like a Fortune 500 Brand's

A pattern I see constantly when working with small business owners: they think their website has to look like a Fortune 500 brand's before it can start earning them business.

It doesn't. After more than 20 years and hundreds of projects, I've found that a small business website needs to do three things well.

Load fast on a phone. Most of your visitors are on a phone, often on a slow connection. If the page takes too long to load, they leave before they see anything.

Say clearly who you serve and why you're different. In the first few seconds, a visitor should know what you do, where you do it and why they should pick you. Plain words beat clever slogans.

Make it effortless to call or book. A tap-to-call button, a short contact form, or a booking link, right where people expect it. Every extra step loses someone.

That's the whole game. Every dollar spent chasing polish before those three things are nailed down is a dollar that isn't bringing in customers. Get the basics right first, then make it beautiful.

Why Middle Tennessee Small Businesses Can't Market Like a National Brand — and Shouldn't Try

A national brand can afford to be generic. It has a marketing department, a seven-figure ad budget, and years of runway to let brand awareness compound. A small business in White House, Hendersonville, or Goodlettsville has none of that—and trying to borrow the national playbook anyway is the single most expensive mistake I see local owners make.

I've spent more than 20 years building digital strategy for businesses of every size, and the pattern is consistent: the small businesses that grow fastest are the ones that stop trying to look like Coca-Cola and start acting like the most useful, most findable option in their own zip code.

Here's what that actually looks like in practice.

Be everywhere someone searches, not everywhere someone scrolls.

National brands buy broad awareness because they can afford to. A local electrician, dentist, or restaurant doesn't need to be top-of-mind for a million strangers—they need to be the first result when three hundred actual neighbors search “electrician near me” this month. That means a fast, accurate Google Business Profile, a website that loads in under two seconds on a phone with one bar of signal, and review responses that sound like a real person instead of a legal disclaimer. None of that requires a national budget. It requires attention to the handful of moments that actually decide whether someone calls.

Trust is a local currency, not a slogan.

A tagline works for a brand nobody expects to meet in person. A small business lives or dies on whether the neighbor down the street trusts the name on the truck. That trust gets built through specifics—real project photos instead of stock imagery, real completion timelines instead of vague promises, a phone number that a human actually answers. I tell every client the same thing before we build anything: if a stranger can't tell within ten seconds who you serve, what you charge roughly, and why you're different from the other five listings on the same search page, the site is costing them business, not earning it.

Consistency beats cleverness.

National campaigns can afford a big creative swing because one flop doesn't sink the quarter. A small business usually only gets one shot at a given customer's attention, so the highest-leverage move is almost never the clever one—it's the boring, consistent one. Answer the phone. Post the same hours everywhere online. Keep the website's pricing page as current as the chalkboard out front. I've watched businesses with modest budgets outgrow better-funded competitors simply because they were reliably present everywhere a customer looked, while the competitor was busy chasing a viral moment.

The goal was never to out-market a national brand. It's to be undeniably, locally useful—which, it turns out, is a much shorter path to a full schedule.

Read online: daniellelemons.com/writing-middle-tennessee-national-brand

Why Every Small Business Needs a Written Process, Even a Short One

I began my career in the Army National Guard as an explosive ordnance disposal specialist. That work runs on written procedures, followed the same way every time. Later, as Project Management Operations Director at Blattner Tech Digital Agency in Nashville, I built the project management standards our development teams used on every client project.

Those are very different jobs, but they taught me the same thing: a process that lives only in someone's head isn't a process. It's a risk.

Start with the work you do most often. You don't need a manual for everything. Pick the three tasks your business repeats every week, such as quoting a job, onboarding a new customer or closing out a project, and write down the steps.

Keep it to one page. A short checklist gets used. A 40-page binder gets skipped. If a step needs more explanation, link to it.

Write it for the newest person on the team. If someone in their first week can follow it, everyone else can too. That's also the test of whether it's clear.

Review it when something goes wrong. When a job goes sideways, don't just fix the job. Ask which step was missing or unclear, and update the checklist so it doesn't happen again.

Let it make you less necessary. The goal of a written process is a business that runs when the owner is on vacation. That's freedom, and it also makes the business worth more.

What Forecasting \$1 Billion Taught Me About Running a Small Business

I spent nine years at Avnet Technology Solutions, one of the largest technology distributors in the world. I rose to Customer Operations Manager, where I was responsible for forecasting \$1 billion in annual revenue and tracking every order from sale through shipment and billing.

Most of the business owners I work with now run companies a tiny fraction of that size. The lessons still apply, and they're cheaper to learn from someone else.

A forecast is a habit, not a document. The number you write down in January matters less than how often you compare it to what actually happened. A monthly check, even 30 minutes long, tells you early when sales are drifting and gives you time to react.

Follow the order all the way to the cash. A sale isn't finished when the customer says yes. It's finished when the work is delivered and the invoice is paid. Many small businesses track the first step closely and lose sight of the rest. That's where money leaks: work done but never billed, invoices sent but never followed up.

Know which handoffs break. Every business has a few points where work passes from one person to another: sales to scheduling, scheduling to the field, the field to billing. Most problems happen at those handoffs. Write down who owns each one.

Small numbers deserve the same attention as big ones. At \$1 billion, a 1% miss is real money. In a small business, one lost customer or one unbilled job can be the whole month's margin. The discipline is the same at any size.

None of this needs expensive software. A shared spreadsheet and a standing appointment with yourself will get you most of the way.

Forty Projects at Once: What I Learned About Keeping Client Work From Slipping

At one point in my career I was responsible for as many as 40 active client projects at the same time. Every one of them had a deadline, a budget and a business owner who needed it done. Nothing teaches you faster which habits keep work moving and which ones only look busy.

Here's what held up then and still runs how I work as Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect.

1. One list, and it's the real one. Work slips through the gaps between systems: a request in an email, a change mentioned on a call, a note on a sticky pad. Every commitment goes into one place the whole team can see. If it isn't on the list, it isn't real yet.

2. Every project has one owner. "The team is handling it" usually means no one is. Each client gets one person who's accountable for the next step and answers when the client calls. That one habit prevents more problems than any software.

3. Review the whole board every week, not just the urgent items. Urgent work finds you on its own. The project that quietly hasn't moved in nine days won't. A weekly pass through every open item, asking what's stuck and who's waiting on whom, catches trouble while it's still small.

4. Write down what "done" means before you start. Most scope fights come from two people picturing different finish lines. A few sentences at the start about what's included, what isn't and how you'll know it's finished save weeks at the end.

5. Forecast honestly, then track it. Early in my career I spent nine years at Avnet. I rose to Customer Operations Manager, responsible for forecasting \$1 billion in annual revenue and tracking every order from sale through shipment and billing. The lesson carries over to any small business: a forecast is only useful if you check it against what actually happened and adjust.

6. Protect response time. Clients forgive a lot if they hear back quickly. They forgive very little if they feel ignored. A fast "got it, here's when you'll have an answer" is worth more than a perfect answer three days later.

None of this is complicated. The hard part is doing it every week, especially when things are busy. That's the job.

Read online: daniellelemons.com/writing-forty-projects-at-once

About Danielle Lemons

Danielle Lemons is Vice President of Operations at DirecTech Connect, a Nashville provider of business phone systems, managed IT services, websites and digital marketing. Since joining in November 2024 she has overseen the company's managed services for VoIP and telecommunications, managed IT for small and medium-sized businesses, and client project delivery.



She has spent more than 20 years leading operations and delivery teams in technology. At Avnet Technology Solutions she spent nine years and rose to Customer Operations Manager, responsible for forecasting \$1 billion in annual revenue. She later led technical project delivery at Tragic Media in San Diego and at Blattner Tech Digital Agency in Nashville, where she served as Project Management Operations Director and Senior Manager of Small and Medium Business Services. She began her career in the Army National Guard as an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) specialist.

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