

business solutions

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What's Brewing in Manhattan, Kansas?

BLUE VALLEY
tele-communications

NETWORKS PLUS 
INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS. TECHNICAL EXPERTISE.

What You Need to Know About BYOD **3** // Spotlight on Tallgrass Brewing Company **4**

Networking Services from Networks Plus **5**

Dealing with the Dreaded Post-Vacation Inbox **6** // Brian Thomason Receives Award **7**

JUNE
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Whether you resist or embrace it, change happens. Resist, and you may end up falling behind; yet embracing change can be a challenge. In this issue of *Business Solutions*, we look at how change can be a positive thing that often leads to growth.

First, on page 3, learn how companies are managing the recent trend of employees wanting to use their own electronic devices at work. We'll tell you **What You Need to Know About BYOD**, including the potential benefits and pitfalls.

The Business Spotlight on pages 4 and 5 features **Tallgrass Brewing Company**, a business that's experiencing some exciting changes including a network upgrade, a brand new brewhouse, and a brewpub opening soon.

On page 6, we suggest new ways of **Dealing with the Dreaded Post-Vacation Inbox**, to ease your post-vacation transition back to work.

Finally, I'm pleased to share the exciting news that I've been given the **Management Achievement Award by NTCA**. As you'll read on page 7, this award has to do with enabling innovation and change, and I've been honored to help improve such opportunities within our community.

Change is always easier with support, and we're here to support your business efforts! Don't hesitate to contact us to let us know how.

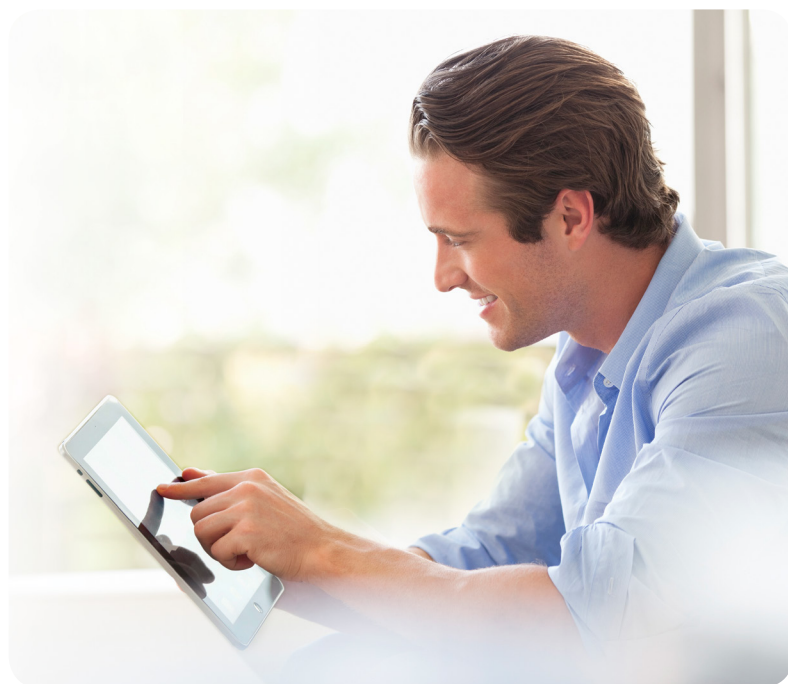
Sincerely,

Brian Thomason
General Manager/CEO
Blue Valley Tele-Communications/Networks Plus



What You Need to Know About **BYOD**

Bring Your Own Device can also bring problems if your business isn't prepared



The desire employees have to use their own laptops, tablets, and smartphones for work is the “single most radical shift in the economics of client computing for business since PCs invaded the workplace,” according to Gartner, a major information technology research firm. Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policies permit employees to bring personally owned mobile devices to their workplace, and to use them to access privileged company information and applications. However, along with the obvious advantages of this arrangement come new concerns over security and bandwidth demands that can challenge businesses not equipped to handle them.

BYOD benefits both employees and employers. A May 2013 survey of six countries by Cisco’s Internet Business Solutions Group consulting unit indicated employees with their own devices said they were happier and reported significant productivity gains. In the U.S., BYOD participants in this survey saved 81 minutes per week, which amounts to just over 70 hours per year.

Security is a Concern

The biggest issue with BYOD is security. Your company data can be exposed by sitting on a remote device, whether it’s Android- or iOS-based. For example, say an employee gets a new iPad or smartphone and wants to use the device to do company work offsite. They might start using a solution like Dropbox to transfer

data from their work computer to their personal device for later use. However, Dropbox may not be secure enough to keep data safe.

If your company has employees using a variety of personal devices, there are ways to provide security both in terms of delivering information and securing the devices themselves. If you don’t have the in-house resources to understand and manage the deployment issues associated with BYOD, consider seeking the advice of IT professionals.

More Bandwidth Needed

Another key issue with BYOD is its effect on bandwidth requirements. A company not using mobile devices is usually only a consumer of bandwidth—browsing the Web and downloading data. But with BYOD, the company becomes a provider of information to users outside of its walls. To accommodate BYOD, your business may need a wireless environment with significantly more bandwidth.

What’s ahead for BYOD? In a word, growth. Gartner expects that nearly 50 percent of employers will demand that employees provide and pay for their own devices for work purposes by 2017. So, if you haven’t yet started planning for BYOD, do it ASAP.

To discuss your company’s bandwidth needs as they relate to BYOD, call Blue Valley Tele-Communications at 877-876-1228.



Tallgrass Brewing Company

Enjoying growth and expansion while keeping quality top of mind

The idea for Tallgrass Brewing Company began in 2006 when avid homebrewer Jeff Gill and his wife, Tricia, decided to start a microbrewery. They relocated to Kansas, and by 2007 the brewery had a home — Manhattan, Kan. — and a name inspired by the Tallgrass Prairie that surrounded it. The first beer, Pub Ale, was brewed in August 2007.

Rolling with the Changes

Since then, the brewery has experienced various forms of change and transition. Recently, it outgrew its old location and moved into a new, larger facility. Controller Kristi Harmer says, “Our previous brewhouse was 15,000 square feet with a 15-barrel brew house. The new location is four times that size with a 50-barrel brew house. We have tripled our capacity, so this move will help us expand and grow.”

The new location is currently equipped with a production area, canning and packaging machinery, and a production area where the fermentation process takes place. It also features a lab, which Harmer describes as, “the center of the brewery where it all happens.” She adds, “It’s the core of what we do.” The facility will eventually offer tours and a tasting room, where visitors can sample the products.

In addition, the brewery will soon be partnering with another

local business to open Tallgrass Tap House in the historic downtown district of Manhattan, Kan. Harmer explains, “It will be a restaurant/brewpub where we can test new brews to get them into the marketplace.”

Other, smaller changes preceded these shifts. About six years ago, the company switched from bottles to cans, which are easier and more cost effective to ship. This switch was so important that it led owner Jeff Gill to post a “canifesto” on the company’s website (see tallgrassbeer.com/tallgrass-brewery/canifesto), describing why cans are better than bottles. For starters, they keep beer tasting fresher, longer. They’re also portable, better for the environment, and more fun.

Another shift involved Tallgrass limiting its distribution to 13 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Customers Appreciate High Quality

Customers are wholesalers and distributors in these states, and they appreciate Tallgrass because, says Harmer, “They know what they’re getting. Craft breweries are springing up all over the place, and some are not as consistent with their products. We offer quality and consistency to our customers.”

In fact, extensive testing is completed throughout the brewing, fermentation, and packaging process. Samples from every batch are stored, monitored, and taste-tested. Formula adjustments and quality improvements are made based on these results. The brewery constantly evaluates and improves its quality control systems, and is committed to investing in the people, equipment, and training to enhance its beer quality and safety.

The 35 employees that work at Tallgrass appreciate the brewery as well. Harmer observes, “We have a relaxed, fun, casual environment, and try not to take ourselves too seriously. At the same time, employees feel rewarded because we work hard to get the job done.” Jobs at the brewery range from administration to sales to packaging and, of course, brewing the beer.

New Network Improves Security

Tallgrass became a customer of Networks Plus when the owners of the two companies started talking. Gill explained where the company needed to go and what its needs were, and Networks Plus responded with suggestions that shaped the services Tallgrass receives today.

From a risk standpoint, we now have protection against viruses and better security.”

— KRISTI HARMER, CONTROLLER, TALLGRASS BREWING COMPANY

Harmer notes, “We didn’t have a platform before. Anyone could download anything and software changes had to be made to each computer individually. Now we have new hardware and centralized IT management. From a risk standpoint, we now have protection against viruses and better security.”

Networks Plus assisted by offering initial suggestions, and setting up the solution that Tallgrass selected. Harmer says, “I made a list of everything that needed to be done, and they did it. The installation process couldn’t have gone more smoothly.”



BVTC/Networks Plus Business Consultant Chad Hiltgen adds, “Tallgrass is experiencing rapid growth and has embraced technology as an essential tool to further that growth. The company’s use of technology will help it control costs, bring real-time science to the production cycle, and track canning, shipping, and sales. The recent infrastructure upgrade has improved network security, mobility, performance, and efficiency.”



NETWORKS PLUS OFFERS FULL RANGE OF SOLUTIONS AND HIGHLY TRAINED STAFF

Technology plays a huge role in the daily operation of all businesses. Yet, says BVTC/Networks Plus Business Consultant Chad Hiltgen, “A lot of them don’t know when they need technology services.”

Networking services from Networks Plus can help companies improve network performance, security, business efficiency, communication, and disaster recovery. Networks Plus provides a full range of products and solutions for all businesses. Hiltgen adds, “We’re also very excited about the opening of our new colocation and advanced data center, which will enable businesses to explore networking options.”

What sets Networks Plus apart, according to Hiltgen, is its quality of service, highly trained staff, and commitment to customers. He notes, “Our Business Consultants meet with customers at their premises to find just the right products and solutions.”

To learn how Networks Plus can help improve your company’s IT systems, call 800-299-1704 and set up an appointment with a Business Consultant.



Dealing with the Dreaded Post-vacation Inbox

There are ways to keep email from souring your sweet getaways

The relaxed state you bring to the office after your vacation can quickly disappear the minute you see your overflowing email inbox. Try these strategies before, during, and after your time away to reduce your email stress.

Be Proactive Before You Leave

About a week before you leave for your vacation, let your most important business contacts—clients and team members with whom you interact on a daily or weekly basis—know your vacation schedule. Include the dates you'll be out as well as your availability by email or phone. If you'll be out of reach and someone else will be handling projects for you, let these contacts know and pass along the colleague's contact information.

This proactive step will not only help reduce the number of emails waiting for you upon your return, it will also reassure clients their business is being taken care of in your absence. In addition, it tells your contacts that if they have a pressing need, they should mention it now.

Set Boundaries While You're Away

In order to carve out time to actually enjoy your vacation, you need a way to manage incoming emails. There are a couple of options here. You can set up an "out of office" message that includes:

- The date you will return to work
- What people can expect regarding a reply from you — if you'll be checking emails and replying occasionally, for example, or only replying when you return
- The name and contact information for the colleague who will be covering your essential job responsibilities
- Words like "personal vacation" or "out of town with family" to reinforce that you're on a true vacation and not a business trip

Another option is to have all your email messages automatically forwarded to the colleague who will be handling your work while you're away. This alternative saves your correspondents the extra step of having to send a separate email to that person.

Be Discerning When You Get Back

If your schedule permits, create a "buffer day" by telling business contacts you'll be back in the office one or two days after you're actually back. This will give you some time to get caught up on email and other tasks.

When you finally do go through those hundreds of messages in your inbox, sort by sender instead of by date, which will help you find and tackle the most important messages first, and easily delete those that are no longer relevant.

With a little forethought, you can successfully tame the technology beast and truly enjoy your time off.





Left to right: James Dauby, Brian Thomason and Shirley Bloomfield at the Management Achievement Award presentation

Brian Thomason

Receives Award from NTCA

Peers recognize Thomason's leadership, innovation, and contributions

BVTC / Networks Plus (BVTC/NWP) CEO Brian Thomason recently received the Management Achievement Award at the Rural Telecom Industry Meeting and Expo, hosted by NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, in Phoenix, Ariz. Thomason was selected for this award by a panel of industry judges from across the nation.

NTCA Champions Rural America

NTCA is the premier association representing nearly 900 independent, community-based telecommunications companies that are leading innovation in rural and small-town America. NTCA advocates on behalf of its members in the legislative and regulatory arenas, and it provides training and development; publications and industry events; and an array of employee benefit programs.

In an era of exploding technology, deregulation, and marketplace competition, NTCA's members are leading the IP evolution for rural consumers, delivering technologies that make rural communities vibrant places in which to live and do business. Because of their efforts, rural America is fertile ground for innovation in economic development and commerce, education, health care, government services, security, and smart energy use.

Thomason's Leadership "Instrumental"

Shirley Bloomfield, chief executive officer of NTCA presented Thomason with a plaque. "NTCA's Management Achievement Award is the highest honor bestowed upon current executives in the independent telecommunications arena," said Bloomfield. "This award, designated by Brian's peers in the industry, recognizes his leadership, spirit of collaboration and innovation, and contributions he has made to industry."

Bloomfield went on to state that Thomason's leadership has been instrumental in showcasing and deploying innovative uses for broadband and other technologies. "This is probably one of the biggest components leading to [BVTC's] 2013 designation as a Smart Rural Community award winner."

Thomason commented, "Anyone who has the opportunity to be in a leadership role can only hope for the chance to be involved in something that is bigger than them." He credited the BVTC/NWP board of directors, employees, and patrons for their support, saying, "This award is not so much for me as it is for all those who have collectively helped reshape our organization into something bigger than we could have hoped. Receiving this award is definitely one of the highlights of my 35-year career and I am humbled by the recognition."

In addition to being the CEO/General Manager of BVTC, Thomason serves as CEO of One Point Technologies and Blue Valley Tele-Marketing. In addition, he is on the Board of Directors of Kansas Fiber Network. With many years of experience in the telecommunications industry, Thomason has been positioned to lead BVTC into several new and exciting technological projects that enhance the quality of life for rural Kansans.



We're Your
Business
Solution!



IT Support & Consulting

Our certified consulting team is highly knowledgeable and can provide PC repair/maintenance and network troubleshooting performed on-site or through a remote access method. You can choose contracted number of hours of on-site maintenance or troubleshooting of your equipment or network. We also offer advanced solutions management and engineering of your business network.



Managed Services

Leave your IT troubles to us, so you can get back to doing what you do best. We'll show you the simplest and most affordable way to keep your IT network in top form with 24/7 support.



Data Storage

It's crucial for your business to have a disaster recovery plan. Did you know 40-60% of small to medium size businesses won't survive a data calamity? Don't let a system failure shut down your business! Call us today to see how we can store your data in a secure location and protect that data 24/7.