

MONDAY'S BUSINESS

It's all about the network

By **BENJAMIN KEPPLER**
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MANCHESTER

On the ubiquitous television ads for a certain mobile phone company, the strength of its network is made clear by having a small army of technicians follow its customers around, even in the oddest locations.

But just as “it’s the network” is the tagline for Verizon Wireless, so too could it be the tagline for Stephanie McLaughlin, a city-based marketing and media consultant who put out her own shingle earlier this year. Since then, her network of contacts around New Hampshire and northern Massachusetts has helped make her foray into consulting a successful one.

“It’s not something where you can pick up the phone and make a sales call. It’s more of a relationship sale,” said McLaughlin of her work. “My network has been my saving grace this first six months.”

Manchester native McLaughlin, 36, decided to make the foray into consulting earlier this year. Prior to that work, she was director of client development for the city law firm of Sheehan, Phinney, Bass & Green P.A., for which she worked about two years.

“I left my last full-time position in the winter, and at that point in time I wasn’t exactly sure what I was going to do,” McLaughlin said. “So I undertook two things — I started working with my career coach and I told my friends that I would do freelancing in the short term.”

McLaughlin had done freelancing work some years ago and knew how that worked. In 2002 and 2003, she created and managed PR campaigns for a variety of clients, including the Canterbury Shaker Village Museum and Tommy Bahama Offshore Racing, a high-speed powerboat racing team.

But she found, after talking with her career coach and doing some freelancing, that those paths fit together.

So, she figured it was time to go out and



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Marketing, media consultant

start her own firm. McLaughlin does business under the name of Savoir Faire Marketing and Communications, and works out of her condominium.

Working from home

It is her condo that serves as a big motivating factor; she bought it last year. Having to make mortgage payments serves as a powerful incentive to work. So far, though, she’s had no trouble doing that.

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Next year’s goals are to raise the public profile of her business and work on building customers demand for her services.

“In general, what I’m trying to do is help business owners identify their goals, whether it be growth or visibility or boosting the bottom line or building credibility and reputation; and working with them to tell their stories to the audiences that need to hear them,” McLaughlin said. “That could happen any number of ways — through media relations

or brochures. There are so many marketing/communications tools to use: Web sites, emerging vehicles like blogs and podcasts.”

One thing McLaughlin must face in the marketplace is dealing with larger shops who can offer a wide variety of services. But, thanks to her network, so can she. If a client requires services like building a Web site, she can hire a friend to handle that aspect. That dynamic works both ways, as people in her network hire her for their own projects. Plus, without expensive overhead, she can be competitive on price.

“Between partnerships and alliances, I can also have the same depth as a larger organization,” McLaughlin said.

Currently, McLaughlin’s clients are all local; for instance, she serves as an advisor to “The Jaw” a student-run publication published by The Union Leader Corp. However, in today’s hyper-connected world, distance has become far less important than before.

Challenge of Independence

Aside from competitive challenges, McLaughlin is also getting used to working outside of an office setting. A self-described extrovert, she misses the daily opportunity to connect with other people.

“The challenges are that it can become a solitary lifestyle. I spend a lot of time in my loft and sometimes need to remind myself to leave the house,” McLaughlin said.

To combat that, she also makes it a point to get out and meet people. And she also enjoys the flexibility that comes with working on her own. It means she can work late into the evenings, as she prefers, while generally avoiding early mornings. And although working on one’s own sometimes means dealing with clients at a moment’s notice, that also has its benefits.

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As for McLaughlin’s long-term plans, she hopes she can grow the business slowly but steadily. Already she has seen her busi-

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Principal, Savoir Faire
Marketing and Communications

ness “grow and plateau, then grow and plateau,” and she finds her continued growth encouraging.

Her end game doesn’t involve the business turning into a large company, but rather something of a boutique shop.

“Long term, I’d love for there to be a point where the business (requires) an office and a couple other talented individuals to join me,” McLaughlin said.

In the meantime, though, she very much enjoys being able to work on projects she likes, and having the flexibility that comes with being one’s own boss.

“It’s wild; I love it,” said the smiling entrepreneur. “I really am loving it.”

“There’s a sense of freedom, but there’s also that sense of responsibility.”