



## Small Business: Home-based owners can break out of isolation

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Being a home-based business owner comes with a lot of perks, but it can also bring a feeling of isolation.

To be sure, there's no office politics to deal with, but you lose the energy and camaraderie of a traditional office setting.

So it's important to make time for outside interaction with clients and colleagues.

In the winter especially, when you tend to be inside more, isolation can become even more of a problem," says Karen Hammons, author of "Bringing Success Home" (Home Business Success Press; \$9.95) and CEO of Home Business Success International Inc., a coaching and training firm in Peachtree Corners, Georgia.

"It's a detriment when you start looking at it as four walls and you," explains Hammons, who encourages home-based business owners to routinely get out of their home office.

Attend meetings or networking events, she suggests. And if you don't have a networking event or organization to go to, consider creating your own.

"You can put together a small group of home business owners to meet regularly," Hammons says.

That's exactly what Marla Seiden, president of Seiden Communications Inc. in New Hyde Park, recently did.

She created the Home Business Mastermind Group, made up of about 10 home-based business owners who meet monthly.

"I was thinking there are other people like me with similar challenges and issues," says Seiden, who is home-based herself and owns a presentation skills training and public relations agency.

The group has had two meetings, she notes, adding she's trying to keep it small so everyone can have a voice.

"It's bouncing ideas off people in a similar situation and discussing challenges and business topics of interest," says Seiden, who tries to schedule an activity daily that gets her out of the office.

This can include connecting with a person or networking group and grabbing a cup of coffee first thing each morning, she says.

Face-to-face contact is important, notes Paul Edwards, co-author of "Home-Based Business for Dummies" (Wiley; \$19.99) and partner at Paul & Sarah Edwards LLC, a consulting firm in Pine Mountain Club, California.

He suggests getting involved in at least one to two groups where you can make contacts and connections. Look for groups either in the type of business you have or where your customers belong.

Also look to groups online via social media such as LinkedIn, he adds.

Recognize what you're looking for, Edwards says. Identify what you're missing (e.g. tips, moral support, feedback) and look for activities that provide you with that, he suggests.

When you first start working from home this can be hard to do, says Donna Pagano, president of Traveling With Donna Inc., a travel agency in New Hyde Park that is home-based.

There's an adjustment period, she notes.

"When I first started working from home, I had my computer and I was facing the wall," she says. "I said, 'I can't work like this anymore.'"

Have a room with a view. Now she's in a room with lots of windows. "It's important to see outside," says Pagano, a member of Seiden's new group.

Build in breaks. Pagano takes 15 minutes off in the morning and again in the afternoon, plus a lunch break, and she hits the gym three times a week.

This kind of physical activity is important, says Hammons, who suggests home-based business owners start or maintain an exercise program.

"In the winter we tend to just hibernate," she says.