

SMALL BUSINESS LOAN OF THE WEEK

Company: MJB Technology Solutions
Amount: \$50,500
Purpose: Start company

By JENNIFER NICKULAS
 jnickulas@manchestexpress.com

A local technology solutions company, headquartered in the Millyard, helps businesses make sure their long-term computer system setup meshes with their business plans.

It's a thought that many business owners don't always consider when they think of company infrastructure, according to Marc Berthiaume, owner of MJB Technology Solutions.

The company, located in the Amoskeag Business Incubator at 33 South Commercial St., was a way for Berthiaume to give smaller businesses the advantage of having an in-house IT person, without actually having one on a full-time payroll.

That's not to say he's limited his recruitment efforts. "Everybody has IT pain," he said.

At medium- to large-sized companies, the information technology department is too focused on keeping things running that it can't focus on specific projects. And in larger companies, more advanced systems require specific documentation and processes to keep everything moving smoothly, he said.

A big difference that sets his company, which has about 15 clients, apart from others such as computer repair shops, is that MJB Solutions doesn't sell hardware or software, he said.

Most of the time, a company's main source of technical information is from a salesperson trying to hawk a new server or hard drive.

"Too many businesses get computer advice from someone trying to sell them something," Berthiaume said. "We look at the big picture and discuss disaster planning as well."

He said people would be

surprised at the number of businesses that don't have a plan for what to do if a fire takes out a business, and its computer system.

"A lot of times, if they can't recover computers, they go out of business," he said.

For example, one of his clients hadn't been backing up its daily data, which should be done every day, Berthiaume said.

His company was called in to fix the acute problem of developing a backup system, and also netted another deal to set up a system to keep the problem from happening again, he said.



Marc Berthiaume, owner of MJB Technology Solutions. (Express Photo/Jennifer Nickulas)

It's sometimes a challenge to convince businesses what a virtual systems pro can achieve for them before a problem actually develops, he said.

But despite that, the business is going well, Berthiaume said.

Berthiaume wouldn't disclose any specifics, but would say that sales and profit are ahead of the original business plan's projection.

"I think there's a huge market for this, especially in the smaller companies that don't have an IT person," he said.

He combined some of his personal savings with the

SBA loan and set up shop in a space tailored for new companies, several of which are Berthiaume's clients.

"It's much more than having an economical place to run a business," he said of the Amoskeag Business Incubator. "We share a small business coach and resources, and all talk to each other."

The Small Business Administration is an independent federal agency that aids and protects the interests of small businesses. It offers different types of loans and financing options for small businesses, often in the form of loan guaranties. The SBA guarantees loans made by banks and other private lenders to small business clients across the country.

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Wall St. moves modestly higher

NEW YORK (AP) — Wall Street finished higher in an uneasy session Monday as retail and homebuilders stocks rose on expectations for more interest rate cuts, but banks and insurers fell on worries about further mortgage debt troubles.

The Federal Reserve has been in rate-cutting mode this year and it is expected to lower the federal funds rate once more either this month or at its next regularly scheduled meeting March 18. And the cheaper cost of money is beginning to register in the stock market.

"A number of sectors like

retail and housing stocks have done better since the Fed acted, and they are leading the market again today," said Steve Goldman, chief market strategist at Weeden & Co. "These stocks are called early bellwethers and they tend to lead a recovery."

But investors continue to grapple with bad news in the credit markets. The stock market fell in early trading and remained volatile even after recovering, with Wall Street clearly concerned by news that American International Group Inc. might have more mortgage debt to write off.

BUSINESS IN 7 PARAGRAPHS

1 SAN FRANCISCO — Yahoo Inc.'s rejection of Microsoft Corp.'s unsolicited takeover bid left investors guessing the next move in a tense mating dance that may hatch a more imposing challenger to Google Inc. The rebuff, formally announced early Monday, wasn't a surprise because Yahoo had leaked its intention over the weekend. AP

2 WASHINGTON — President Bush, acknowledging that the country is suffering through a period of economic uncertainty, called on Congress Monday to do more to help people and businesses hurt by the housing slump and credit crunch during a brief introduction to his annual economic report. AP

3 NEW YORK — Bank of America Corp. and Chevron Corp. will replace tobacco company Altria Group Inc. and manufacturer Honeywell International Inc. in the Dow Jones industrial average, giving the stock market's best-known indicator bigger slices of the banking and energy sectors. AP

4 LOS ANGELES — William Lerach, a former partner at a well-known New York law firm, was sentenced Monday to two years in federal prison for his role in a lucrative kickback scheme. Lerach, 61, was also sentenced to two years probation, fined \$250,000 and ordered to complete 1,000 hours of community service. AP

5 LOS ANGELES — The estate of "Lord of the Rings" creator J.R.R. Tolkien is suing the film studio that released the trilogy based on his books, claiming the company failed to pay a cut of gross profits. The lawsuit claims New Line was required to pay 7.5 percent of gross receipts from the films to Tolkien's estate and the other plaintiffs. AP

6 WASHINGTON — The government is investigating reports of engine fires in General Motors' full-size sport utility vehicles. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a posting on its Web site that it has received two reports of fires on 2007 model year Chevrolet Tahoe SUVs. AP

7 NEW YORK — Oil futures shot higher for the third straight day Monday as concerns about potential supply disruptions overshadowed worries about the cooling economy. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez threatened Sunday to cut off oil sales to the U.S. as retaliation for court orders freezing assets belonging to Venezuela. AP

Postage rates headed up again

Mailing a letter to go up 1 cent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Mailing a letter will soon cost a penny more.

The cost of a first-class stamp will rise to 42 cents starting May 12, the U.S. Postal Service said Monday.

The price of the Forever stamp will go up at the same time, meaning those stamps can still be purchased for 41 cents but will remain good for first-class postage after the rate increase takes effect.

The post office has sold 5 billion Forever stamps since they were introduced last April.

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