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INSIDE

SMALL BUSINESS

A boot camp teaches smaller entrepreneurs to embrace the digital age

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SBTI pulls small businesses into the digital age

■ The Small Business Technology Institute teaches entrepreneurs digital tricks that can boost productivity.

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Stranded on the airport tarmac last week — far from the nearest wireless hot spot — Andrea Peiro booted up his laptop and connected to the Web through an EVDO card that allows him to piggyback on a cellular connection.



PEIRO "I booked my rental car and responded to five or six e-mails that I would have had to address once I was at the hotel," he says. "It's as if I'm at the office

almost from anywhere, including the seat of a plane."

As the founder and CEO of the nonprofit Small Business Technology Institute, Peiro, 37, travels the country teaching entrepreneurs just how such digital tricks can boost productivity.

In Miami last week, Peiro gave a one-day crash-course on technology at the Trump International Sonesta Beach Resort in Sunny Isles Beach. The workshop was sponsored by Intel, drew about 90 entrepreneurs and covered everything from inventory management to sales to network security.

HURRICANE ISSUES

But this being Florida, hurricane issues were at the top of the list.

"We had 400 to 500 percent more questions related to business continuity issues and

data availability issues," Peiro said.

He started the organization in 2003 after a career in California technology start-ups opened his eyes to the fact that many small businesses are not fully embracing the digital age.

"Technology has gone from being a competitive advantage to being a competitive necessity," he said.

While the price of sophisticated hardware and software continues to plummet, many entrepreneurs are still using their computers for basic bookkeeping tasks and occasionally as a marketing tool — churning out brochures, e-mail campaigns and websites.

According to Jupiter Research, small business investment in technology over the past two years has remained about flat. Companies with fewer than 25

employees spent an average of \$18,500 on technology last year, while those with fewer than five employees spent about \$5,000.

POWERFUL TOOLS

What those small businesses may be missing out on, said Peiro, are powerful connectivity and data-crunching tools that can help them run their business more intelligently.

Programs like SAP's Business One — an enterprise resource planning program, or ERP, that allows small businesses to compile and manipulate sales, inventory and marketing data — can take the pain out of decision-making.

"Small businesses tend to manage themselves in a non-analytical way, while the world is moving toward data-driven management," he said. "The costs of customer acqui-

sition, the costs of doing business, these are all data-driven management tasks."

And programs like WebEx's WebOffice Workgroup allows multiple workers in multiple locations to collaborate on the Web.

"Small businesses need to be nimble, ubiquitous and doing a lot at the same time — they wear multiple hats," he said. All of that makes the ability to work from multiple locations a necessity.

Before such software tools were only available to corporate titans, said Peiro. "Corporate America has been running on those applications for the last 25 years. Without that software Corporate America wouldn't be Corporate America."

For more information about the SBTI, visit their website at www.sbstechnologyinstitute.org