

## **Your Priceless Business Tool**

By Karen Nankervis, My Beechworth Secretary

A well constructed and maintained database is one of the most valuable tools any business can have. It can be as simple as a set of index cards, a spreadsheet or specifically constructed in a program like Office Access. It needs to be simple to use and quickly give you the answers you want.

### **Step Two – plan your database to answer your questions**

If you want to send out a newsletter, you'll need to record name, street, town and postcode. Include fields like email, phone, mobile, etc. Party planners would record hostess name, date of party, purchases, etc. Try to

Every business has different needs to ensure that they provide the best possible service to their customers. And they need to be able to access it quickly. If one of your valuable customers rings and wants to reorder that nice perfume they have forgotten the name of, you don't want to spend two hours rummaging through order forms. How impressed will she be if you can tell her the name of it while you are talking to her and then check if she needs any more of the other products she has previously purchased.

### **Step Four – it must be maintained!**

A database is useless if it contains information that is months and sometimes years old. It must be giving you current information to act on. Your latest customers want to receive your newsletter, too, not just the ones from six months ago. Regular time needs to be allocated to input the information either by yourself or your secretary (virtual or on the spot). Do a little bit frequently rather than leaving it and having to spend hours getting things up to date.

### **Remember the saying:**

"The best time to plant a tree was 25 years ago and the second best time is now."

Start today and get your database happening – it's priceless to any business, especially yours!

### **Step One – what are the questions you want answered?**

What information do you need about your business and your customers?

If you operate a shop, do you know where your customers are coming from, what ages they are, what are they buying, are they coming back?

If you run a party plan business, do you know what your customers love, who has been a hostess, who is interested in joining your company and do you want to be able to send them newsletters and specials?

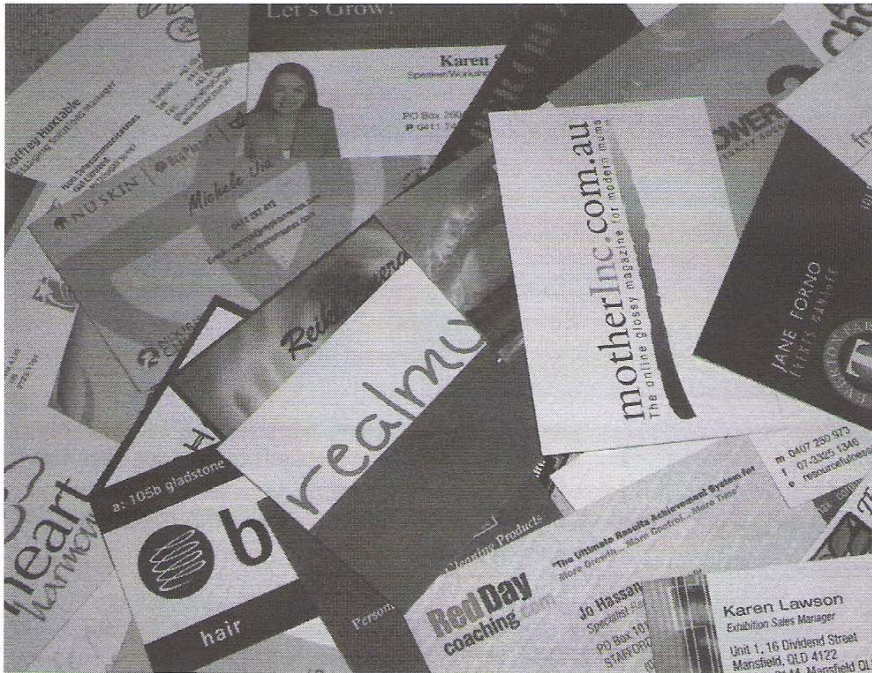
If you run a bed & breakfast, do you know what areas your customers come from, how did they hear about you, what booking system is most effective, how long did they stay and have they told their friends?

think of all the different fields that you can record. Your order form is a great place to start.

And a 'comments' section is handy to record any information that doesn't fit elsewhere.

### **Step Three – the best format for your database**

Computers have made it simple for us to record our information and a spreadsheet can be quickly set up. It can, however, become cumbersome to input and extract large amounts of information on each customer. A database package like Access may be more suitable. If you are not familiar with the options, consult someone who can guide you.



**Karen Nankervis runs 'My Beechworth Secretary'** and works extensively with small businesses as their 'Virtual Business Secretary' and business coach. Contact Karen to discuss your database requirements and her free 'input' offer to Business Mums Magazine readers.  
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