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# Tri-Lakes Incubator helps small businesses

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Althea Smith, owner of Theapeutic Massage Therapy, runs her business out of the Tri-Lakes Business Incubator building. Photo by Danny Summers

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Danny Summers

If you ever dreamed of owning a small business, and think the fascinating world of social media can be a driving force, then this past Thursday's workshop at the Tri-Lakes Business Incubator was probably just what the doctor ordered.

"We live in the age of technology," said Althea Smith, a small business owner who attended the event. "I don't feel that I am as computer literate as I need to be."

Steve Black, a motivational speaker and senior trainer for the Business Success Training, spent about an hour talking about how to effectively market business on the Internet. Black stressed the importance of social network sites like Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn.

"I don't know if I want to tweet," said Smith, who owns and operates Theapeutic (a play on her name) massage Therapy. "I'm still living in the 90s when it comes to a lot of this stuff."



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Black also focused on how to blog, secrets of getting on the first page of Google, understanding keyword selection, and implementing a follow-up e-mail program.

"It's pick and choose for me," said Lynn Ellen Braley, owner of Fortune Hi-Tech Marketing. "It's not a 100 percent do everything. I have no interest in popping up on Google. But I find Facebook to be a valuable resource."

Smith and Braley have their businesses based at the Tri-Lakes Incubator. They previously operated businesses in the historic downtown Monument area, but moved to the Tri-Lakes Incubator as a way to cut down on expenses and overhead. Braley believes the way business is done in 2011 has changed dramatically in recent years.

"We're not going back to the way we did things in the 90s," she said. "It's how to get out there without saying 'Hey, buy this from me.' It's more 'How are you?'"

Smith, a retired school teacher of 36 years, has visions of "going global" with her business. She is developing a line of flak seed filled pillows and essential oils, among other products.

"My business plan includes more than massage therapy," she said. "To do that I need a Web site and to be more involved in LinkedIn. Maybe even blogging."

The Tri-Lakes Incubator may be one of the best kept secrets under the sun for small business owners in El Paso and Douglas Counties.

"We offer free business workshops throughout the year once to twice a month," said Gene Wright, facilitator of the incubator. "We like to focus on what the business leaders in Monument want."

Located at 14960 Woodcarver Rd. in north Colorado Springs, Tri-Lakes Incubator works with young companies and entrepreneurs on getting their businesses off to healthy starts. By enabling them to create and grow their companies into major primary employers in the region, these companies will contribute high-wage jobs, an outlet for local intellectual capital, and contributions to the local economy.

"We've been in Tri-Lakes for nine years," Wright said. "Whatever is going on with the times, we try to get people going in that direction."

The Tri-Lakes Incubator provides its new businesses with networking, community workshops and seminars, on site business professionals provide confidential advice, and management coaching and monthly training.

"We try to bring in business that are operating out of their garage or basement and move them into our office space," Wright said. "We don't want to overwhelm them. Some go onto graduate and purchase outside space."

The Tri-Lakes Incubator will offer a SCORE QuickSTART Workshop from 6 to 9 p.m. Feb. 9. The workshops are designed to define and evaluate ideas, develop a marketing strategy, identify the best ways to fund startup, and to connect with other entrepreneurs. There is a cost for the workshop. For more information call 481-1260.