



GREG SMITH
DOING BUSINESS

Build an effective social media presence

In today's world, it is essential that your company has a strong social media presence. Given that well over 90% of businesses utilize a variety of platforms to market their products or services, it's essential to find the right strategy and a way to stand out from the competition.

First, it's necessary to decide which social media networks will best reach your desired target audience. Using a social media platform that your customers don't begin to understand or will never access, obviously, won't drive sales. For many, Facebook is the best place to start simply given the sheer volume of users (over a billion daily). Instagram and Pinterest are additional options.

Engaging with customers by fostering an open-ended dialogue helps create organic conversations. Inform them about an industry-related topic, share ideas and even ask for advice or allow them to share an opinion about your products and services. While it's important to remain professional, you can also show your sense of humor and post a picture of your favorite four-legged friend. Make it real.

Interesting photos of what's happening at your business (even a sneak preview or behind the scenes photos) are a great way to attract attention. It's not always necessary to accompany the photo with text — a compelling photo just keeps that top of the mind awareness rolling. Find creative ways to demonstrate your expertise through "how-to" content — informative videos are a great way to accomplish this.

Be down to earth. It doesn't always have to be about you ... take advantage of National Observance Days to create interesting posts. These can be used to raise awareness or to simply have a little fun. And who doesn't need a little levity these days? International Peach Pie Day, Polar Plunge Day, Festival of Sleep Day ... you get the picture.

If customers are looking for a product or service you cannot provide, it's a great opportunity to offer recommendations for other businesses — perhaps those with whom you shop personally. This helps build trust with your customers and will foster valuable business-to-business relationships.

Always be gracious. Take the time to show appreciation to your customers and remember that not everyone is going to love you. If someone has a complaint, acknowledge their concern and express how providing exceptional service is always your goal. Contact them offline to explore options to resolve the issue and, of course, if someone is being vulgar or socially inappropriate, the delete and block buttons are at your ready.

The bottom line is social media is an excellent, affordable and effective way to market and brand your business. Whether you undertake this yourself or employ the services of a professional, finding ways to set yourself apart from your competition and engage your clients to increase revenue is a key part of your continued growth.

Greg Smith is the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center in La Grande.

CORRECTION

The Page B1 story "As COVID hits again, businesses plod along," published Thursday, Sept. 9, gave the incorrect job title for Clint Lion. He is a data coordinator.



A Zippy Fiber technician works on a cable in this undated photo. The company is working to make its fiber optic internet service available to everyone who wants it in Union and Wallowa counties, said Dan Miller, a Zippy spokesperson, in September 2021.

The Observer, File

Filling a critical need

Zippy Fiber helping small towns get in the fastest lane of the information superhighway

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The need for fiber optic internet service in Union and Wallowa counties is growing due to factors like the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is a need Zippy Fiber is taking a big step toward addressing.

Zippy Fiber is launching a drive to make its fiber optic internet service available to everyone who wants it in La Grande and Enterprise, where it already offers some fiber optic

service, plus in Cove, Elgin, Imbler and Joseph, according to Dan Miller, a Zippy spokesperson. Zippy's goal is to make its fiber optic internet service available to 38,000 homes, apartment complexes, businesses, schools and other sites across Union and Wallowa counties.

Miller said Zippy hopes to reach this objective within a year.

"Every single person who wants fiber optic service will have a chance to get it," he said.

Zippy Fiber, a telecommunications company, purchased the Pacific Northwest portion of

Frontier Communications on May 1, 2020. Since the purchase, Zippy has focused much of its efforts on bringing fiber optic internet service to small rural communities in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana.

"It will fill a critical need," Miller said.

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the need, Miller said, by increasing the number of people who use the internet to do school work, receive health care or work remotely.

The pandemic has boosted awareness of the fiber optic void in rural areas but has not changed Zippy's focus.

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Got food? Insecurity takes a dive in last year

Food insecurity fell since 2020, but still higher than pre-pandemic

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

SALEM — Thirty-eight million Americans lived in food-insecure households last year, a 9% increase over the 2019 level of 35 million, according to a report from the USDA.

About 7.5% of U.S. households with children — 3 million families — didn't always have enough adequate, nutritious food for their kids last year. That's up 6.5% compared to 2019, the agency found.

"Food insecurity" is measured as not having enough food over a seven-day period.

Prior to last week's report, COVID-19's impact on food insecurity had been measured only anecdotally and in smaller samples. This is the first complete federal data available formally documenting the full extent of hunger and food hardship.

"While hunger was already a massive, systemic problem in all 50 states before COVID-19 hit the U.S., domestic hunger surged during



Tom Houck readies his forklift to pick up the first pallet of food to be delivered to the Northeast Oregon Regional Food Bank's new distribution center in Island City on Monday, Aug. 23, 2021.

Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

the pandemic," said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, a nonprofit that tracks and addresses

hunger in the U.S. In the midst of the crisis, USDA's domestic food aid spending also

reached a historic high of \$122.1 billion in 2020

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All in the name of 'science'

Researchers take 15 days to potty train calves

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**
AP Science Writer

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — Turns out cows can be potty trained as easily as toddlers. Maybe easier.

It's no bull. Scientists put the task to the test and 11 out of 16 cows learned to use the "MooLoo" when they had to go.

Just like some parents, the researchers used a sweet treat to coax the cows to push through a gate and urinate in a special pen. And it took only 15 days to train the young calves. Some kids take quite a bit longer.

"The cows are at least as good as children, age 2 to 4 years, at least as quick," said study senior author Lindsay Matthews, an animal behavioral scientist at New Zealand's University of Auckland who worked with colleagues on the tests at an indoor animal research lab in Germany.

What started with a half-in-jest question on a New Zealand radio talk show about the very real problem of livestock waste resulted in a serious study published in the journal *Current Biology*. And it wasn't just a "wow, this could be fun" academic question. Massive amounts of urine waste is a serious environmental issue, Matthews said.

Urine contains nitrogen, and when mixed with feces becomes ammonia, which is an environmental issue with acid rain and other problems, Matthews said. It can also taint the water with nitrates and create the airborne pollutant nitrous oxide, he said.

And cows do pee a lot. A single cow can produce about 8 gallons of urine a day, Matthews said. In 2019, nitrous oxide comprised 7% of all the U.S. greenhouse gases, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

"I am not surprised they can train calves to urinate in set locations, but I am surprised no one has demonstrated this before," said Duke University animal cognition scientist Brian Hare, who wasn't part of the research. "The critical question is can it and will it scale?"

If it could be done, toilet training animals makes it easier to manage waste products and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, said Donald Broom, a professor of animal welfare at the University of Cambridge in England.

There are a couple caveats to this experiment.

No. 1, they gave diuretics to the cattle to get them to urinate more because they had limited time to run the experiments under ethics guidelines.

And No. 2, they didn't do No. 2. They only trained cows to use the MooLoo to urinate, not defecate.