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## 5 TIPS TO MAKE YOUR HOME-BASED BUSINESS NOT APPEAR "HOMEMADE"

One of the toughest obstacles we face when working from home is making it appear that we're not, in fact, working from home. When clients call and there are kids screaming in the background, pets barking and meowing and timers going off for laundry and cooking, it doesn't appear professional. So, how can we appear more professional?

Tip # 1: Have a clean, professional website with your own domain name.

Do not, under any circumstances, have a "free" website hosted on another domain name with other company's ads all over the place! This is one of the biggest no-no's out there! Decide, instead, that in order to appear professional, you must invest in a professional website. If you aren't skilled in web design, hire someone to do it for you or barter with another home-based business owner who does do web design. Choose a domain name that is closely related to your business's name.

Tip # 2: Invest in a separate phone line or in a distinctive ring tone for that line.

Most phone companies offer a plan where you can have two or more numbers ringing to one phone line with distinctive rings. It's usually better to have a separate phone line in your office, in order to avoid after-hours phone calls from clients. This also enables you to "shut the door" on work when you're not there. Use a professional voicemail message or answering machine message and check the messages often.

Tip # 3: Think about how to display your business address.

How are you going to display your physical location? There are a few different options available. Most home-based business owners will say that they accept meetings by appointment only, to discourage clients from "dropping in" while they're still in their jammies and haven't had their morning coffee yet. If you don't want your customers to know you work from home, two other options are using a P.O. Box or attaching a "Suite" number to your address. If you use a P.O. Box, you will have to give your home address out for packages and anything they want to courier to you, but it does provide anonymity and discourages drop-in visitors. If you attach a suite number to your address in order to make it appear a "business office," make sure you mention to your postal carrier that you're running a home-based business and that's why there's a different address on there.

Tip # 4: Define your office etiquette rules to your family.

What are the rules going to be for your kids and family members when you're on the phone or meeting with a client? Are you going to set a timer so they know when you'll be available? Are you going to have set office hours and not meet with clients outside of those times? Are you going to have a play space in your office? This is especially important if you're going to have small kids playing nearby (quietly) while you work.

Tip # 5: Invest in professional-quality promotional products and marketing pieces.

Don't print off business cards from your printer, unless you have a top-of-the-line printer. Invest in professional-quality business cards and brochures. If you can, have some letterhead printed up, too, for contracts, letters to prospective clients and any correspondence that is business-related. If you're printing promotional products like T-shirts or apparel, coffee mugs, mousepads, etc., check the quality of the products put out by the printer you wish to use. Don't just "price-hunt," look around for the best quality and invest in your business.

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