

focus is on-site computer services for small businesses.

Forde found the company's reputation and the services it provides to its franchisees just the ticket he needed. In addition to the network of fellow franchisees, he has ready access to a clearinghouse of business and marketing plans, and access to preferred products he can resell to his clients at a savings to them.

"They don't tell you how to run your business, but they provide you with a wealth of information and a recognized name," he says.

Forde's franchise gives him a guaranteed territory in which to advertise and the ability to provide services to any business that calls him or to whom he is referred outside that territory. At present, Forde has little competition from other Computer Troubleshooter franchises on the South Shore.

"Quincy is my territory, but there is nobody closer than Plymouth and Mansfield," Forde says.

When he started, Forde advertised heavily and sent direct mail to fellow Chamber members. Now, he can rely more and more heavily on referrals and repeat business.

In addition to having a strong identity within his home community, he said his strong business background and a hefty cash reserve that he could tap into while waiting for his business to take off helped him to be patient and methodical in getting his business off the ground.

"It really paid off to have a business plan in place," he said. "You can't just open an office, put in a phone and wait for it to start ringing."

Forde says starting your own business "is not for the faint of heart," but he is running ahead of his five-year plan. He's almost ready to hire the first of the three-to-five people in his plan and has started subcontracting out work.

"Subcontracting allows me to have a higher level of technicians without having to pay them a weekly salary and benefits," he explains.

The future looks brighter than ever, he says. He hopes to build his way to \$500,000-\$750,000 in small business sales and rely on employees to handle the residential customers. He identifies software development as his growth area for the next five-to-10 years.

"I don't have the time to do it now."

## Lori Johnson, Your Best Image

Lori Johnson, owner of Your Best Image, has been changing personal and corporate lives for the past 15 years. Her career in the image makeover business may seem surprising for those who knew her in her role as an engineering designer and corporate manager, but all of her job choices have involved a good eye for design and an artistic touch.

"I didn't go from punching numbers to creating images," she explains. "I have always had a passion to help people feel better about themselves and succeed."

That passion to make positive changes convinced her that she could make a living using her creativity, motivational instincts, and entrepreneurial spirit.

Making the jump from the corporate world to the life of a sole proprietor in a relatively unknown profession was a leap of faith.

Image consultants weren't commonplace 15 years ago. Today, shows like "What Not to Wear" and "Queer Eye" have changed things.

"Although what you see on TV is never reality, at least it got the term 'image consultant' out there," she says.

Johnson traces the roots of her success to a high school job working for a boutique owner who taught her every aspect of his business. Johnson also credits her determination, vision, and a hard business sense.

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Lori Johnson  
Your Best Image

"I had startup costs and no check coming every Friday, as I had when I worked for someone else," she explains. "I didn't want to take out loans and get into debt I wasn't sure I could repay, so I spent my corporate 401(k) savings and built up some credit card debt. I am proud to say that debt is gone and I am saving for retirement."

Johnson's Randolph-based business has evolved. Not only does Johnson need to stay on top of changing trends in the fashion world and corporate culture, she also added services to meet new business practices. With the rise of Internet-based communications and sales options, today she



**IT'S MORE THAN IMAGE:**  
Lori Johnson spends as much time reviewing her clients' Web sites, as she does their attire.

Photo/Gretje Ferguson

spends as much time reviewing her clients' Web sites, blogs, and electronic newsletters as she does on their attire and traditional print materials.

It was a change that started with her own business. Johnson used the Internet and her Web site to leapfrog from a local phenomenon to a national business.

"I have always used my Web site as a promotional and information tool," she says. "The new buzzword is 'branding.' You want to project the right image for your print material and your Web site based on your goals, target market, and core values." That is true, she says, whether you are a multinational corporation embarking on a major promotional effort or an individual creating a profile on an online dating service.

Johnson compares the role of image consultant to a project coordinator. She networks tirelessly so she can connect her clients with the professionals necessary to turn the image she envisions into reality.

## Michael Saunders, Freedom Boat Club

A South Shore harbormaster once described a boat as a hole in the ocean into which you could dump all your money. Mike Saunders found a way to turn his passion for boating into a money-making proposition.

Saunders had been making big money in software sales and development but grew tired of the commute. He longed to work

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