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# Connections go mobile in a networking town

## Online business card system finds receptive audience



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**NEW PORT RICHEY** — Mobile technology is changing the way people network. This is especially evident in Tampa Bay, where networking events abound.

Tech startup SavvyPhone aims to be at the forefront of that change with its online business card system SavvyCard.

Inspired by the effectiveness of word-of-mouth referrals, SavvyCard is not intended to replace physical business cards, but to offer users a way to track referrals, said [David Etheredge](#), co-founder and CEO.

"It will be a while before people stop using printed business cards," Etheredge said. "Where the SavvyCard fills a need is when the user is passing on a third-party referral."

Customers are member organizations and companies that provide member organization services.

SavvyPhone has signed clients the **Greater Brandon Chamber of Commerce** and Tampa Bay Business Owners, which will roll out the technology in February and March respectively.

Local introductory pricing includes a set-up fee starting at \$1,500, an annual licensing fee starting at \$1,500, as well as fees for training and support.

Designed to work on web-enabled devices, a SavvyCard has the same contact information as a regular business card but functions as a "mini website" that shows up on search engines.

"We looked at mobile devices — smartphones — to figure out how we can take that personal

face-to-face referral and use the power of smartphones," Etheredge said.

## **Changing dynamic**

SavvyCard is one of a growing number of mobile technology options available for making connections in a business setting.

Technology and social media have become tools for building networks and searching for jobs, said [Gary Henning](#), district president of IT staffing company **Robert Half Technology**.

Mobile devices are part of that equation, especially in networking situations.

"Everyone seems to be carrying an iPhone, Blackberry or Droid these days, so it's not surprising that mobile technology is making its way into the job search process," Henning said.

QR codes – barcodes embedded with a web address, text or other information – have found their way into job searches, for example. Jobseekers may place them on resumes or business cards to direct people to online resumes or portfolios.

It's a way for IT professionals to show employers they're up on the latest trends, Henning said.

## **Networkers' perspective**

Tampa Bay area networkers reported increased use of technology in the "field."

[Jessica Rivelli](#), founder and president of Working Women of Tampa Bay, said she stopped using printed business cards a year ago. With the number of events she attended and cards she exchanged, her business card collection was stacking up.

Now, she refers people she meets at events to her website, LinkedIn or Twitter.

The availability of electronic alternatives is "more important than ever because there are so many people out there in the networking space," Rivelli said.

Mobile technology is taking the place of traditional exchanges of information, said [Derek Dyer](#), president of Consensual Text, a web application for text message marketing, appointment reminders, and "text-to-donate."

Consensual Text, launched in 2012, offers plans starting at \$30 a month. Customers can use the service at trade shows, job fairs and other gathering places.

New technology continues to digitize networking, such as the Bump App for iPhone and Android, which allows users to exchange information by "bumping" mobile devices.

Mobile devices are "turning into your wallet, turning into your business card, turning into a lot of things," Dyer said.

## **FINDING FUNDING**

SavvyPhone raised about \$300,000 in friends and family capital in six weeks. The company has since raised another \$150,000, or 10 percent of its goal for early stage capital.

Tampa Bay doesn't have the active angel network of cities like San Francisco, Austin or Boston, Etheredge said, and navigating that funding gap has been a challenge.

— Margaret Cashill

Margaret Cashill's beats include technology, hospitality, retail and restaurants.