

P-Tech2.0

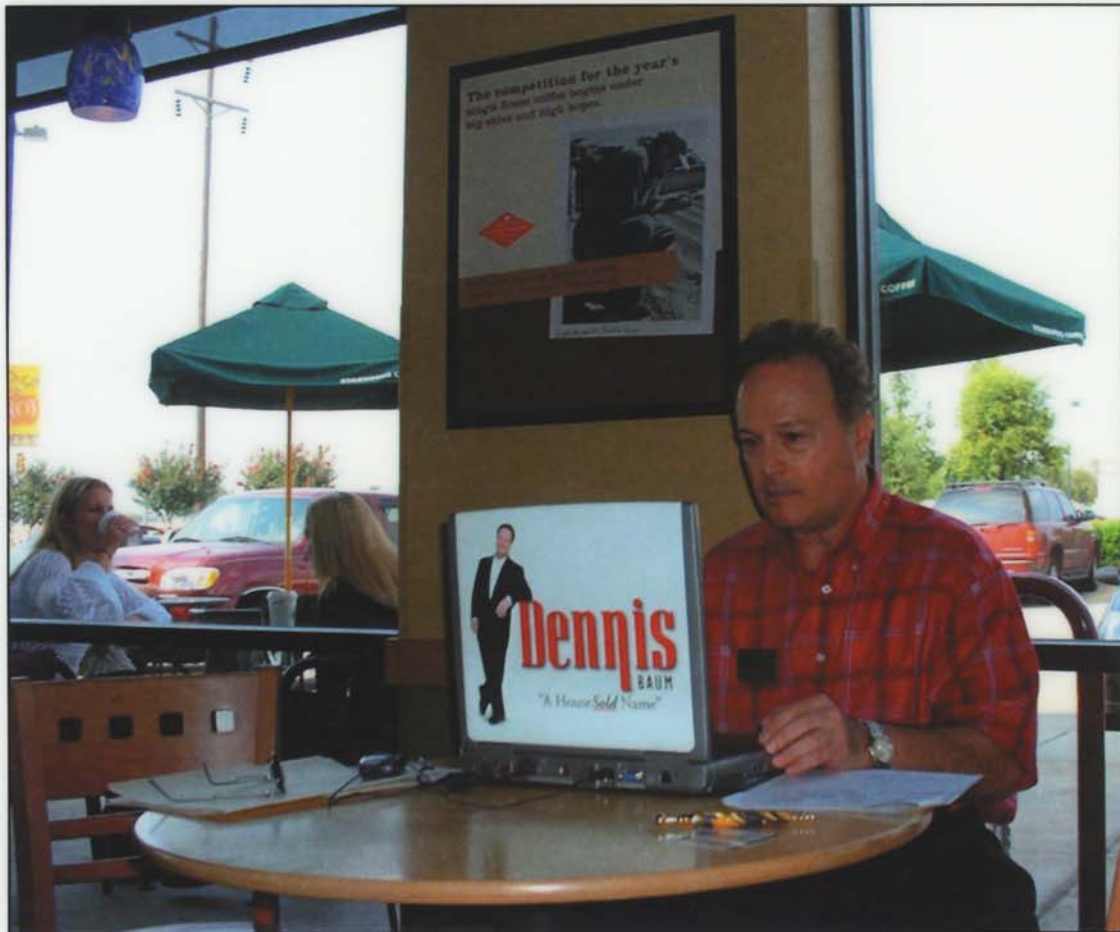
COMING NEXT WEEK

Smile and say 'moblog'

The prevalence of camera-equipped cellphones has given rise to "moblogging," the instantaneous updating of Web diaries with video and snapshots.

THE GEEK LIFE

Here's Dennis



AMY CONN-GUTIERREZ/Special Contributor

With a prominent ad on his laptop, Dennis Baum pops into coffeehouses to conduct business via Wi-Fi and gain prospects.

Real estate agent is his own roving billboard

By CRAYTON HARRISON
Technology Writer

Dennis Baum has found a new use for wireless Internet hot spots — free advertising.

A real estate agent and social butterfly, Mr. Baum discovered that life untethered from an office desktop could help him find new clients. He put an advertising sign on the back of his laptop, displaying his logo in coffeeshops and restaurants around the Dallas area.

Mr. Baum, 53, takes phone calls and uses the Web at whatever Wi-Fi hot spot he can find, normally one of five Starbucks coffeehouses in his vicinity. Occasionally, he'll do work in the café area of a Borders bookstore.

"When I'm sitting in Starbucks

on a Saturday morning about 9 o'clock, I am looking at 20 people standing in line," Mr. Baum said. "Everybody in line is standing there giving me this eye contact out of the corner of their eye while they're waiting."

To Mr. Baum, wireless computing presents an opportunity for any ambitious salesman to go out and meet people.

"This is the future," and he'll soon have hundreds of imitators with their own catchy laptop signs, he predicted.

Mr. Baum is image-savvy, contracting with a signmaker to distribute his logo — a photo of himself leaning against his name in big letters — in his front yard, in an e-mail newsletter, on business cards and on his vehicle. The Dallas resi-

dent calls his logo the "Leaning Dennis."

Business hasn't boomed because of the sign, but he's struck up a few conversations that could lead to something, he said. And that is the essence of sales work — one contact leads to another, and eventually a deal appears.

"I can sell a lot more houses to people that I meet at Starbucks or Borders than I can to the other agents sitting around my office," he said.

Mr. Baum keeps his Starbucks expenses as low as possible, forgoing the lattes and espressos and settling for black coffee.

Working in a Starbucks is noisy, especially when the espresso machine hits the hot steam. But there is still novelty in telling a client or prospect that you're calling from your coffee shop office, Mr. Baum said.

Laptop battery life can also be an issue. Mr. Baum normally knows how long he's going to be in

the café and gauges whether he'll need to be near an electrical outlet. Competition for tables near the outlets can be fierce during heavy-traffic hours, so he's considered buying a backup battery.

One Starbucks location near Mr. Baum's real-life office in North Dallas didn't have accessible electrical outlets for laptop users. He complained to the company and got a free cup of coffee, but the lobbying effort hasn't altered the store.

Still, wireless Internet hot spots are proliferating rapidly enough to keep Mr. Baum in business, and the service is getting cheaper, he said. He pays \$29 a month to T-Mobile for the subscription that allows him to use Starbucks' networks, so he's thrilled about local Atlanta Bread Company locations offering free wireless Internet access.

"We're just going to see more and more of it," he said.

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