

30th Annual Franchise 500[®] | Best marketing ideas ... ever

Entrepreneur[®]

JANUARY 2009 | ENTREPRENEUR.COM

FRANCHISE

500[®]

HOW TO:

RESEARCH A FRANCHISE

UNDERSTAND AN FDD

FOLLOW THE TRENDS

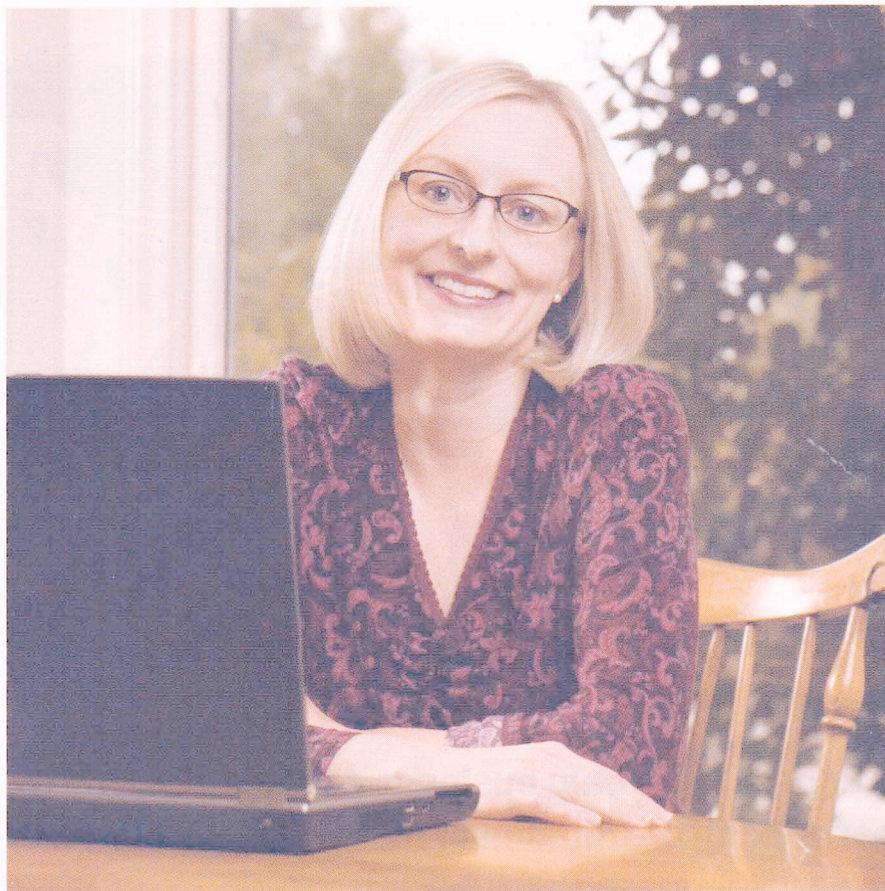
AND MEET THE MAN BEHIND

THE No. 1 FRANCHISE

\$4.99



0 71658 02542 4 01 >



Should you ban tech gadgets from meetings?

By Chris Penttila

When managers at Adaptive Path looked around the room during meetings, they saw employees sneaking peeks at their BlackBerrys and surreptitiously surfing their smartphones. "It seemed like people would show up for meetings, but they were only halfway there," says co-founder and co-president Jesse James Garrett, 37. "They were distracted." Distraction was leading to delays at the San Francisco experience strategy and design firm. Employees didn't catch the whole conversation, leaving managers to fill in the blanks and arrange multiple meetings to make basic

decisions. By the spring of 2006, Adaptive Path's management team decided that enough was enough: It prohibited technology from meetings where important decisions would be made, including board meetings.

The reaction was mixed. "Some people felt it was long overdue," says Garrett, "and for others, it forced such a shift in their behavior that it was hard to adjust."

Carl Honoré, author of *In Praise of Slowness*, isn't surprised by this trend,

which he feels is as much about regaining creativity as it is about attentiveness. "It was this explosion of creativity that allowed us to invent these gadgets," he says. "But now we're finding that the gadgets, because we're misusing them, are backfiring. They're actually eroding our creativity."

The decision of whether to ban technology depends on the meeting and who participates, says Sue Fox, author of *Business Etiquette for Dummies*. You might allow technology at informal gatherings, for example, but permit only laptops at formal meetings—as long as the laptop is only used for note-taking or making presentations. "It's never appropriate to allow texting, making phone calls or answering e-mails if it has nothing to do with the meeting," Fox says.

Having an agenda can help employees adjust, says Julie Morgenstern, author of *Never Check Email in the Morning*. Taking short breaks during long meetings so people can check their messages also helps. "This way, everyone is checking their messages at the same time," she says.

Now, Adaptive Path takes regular breaks for meetings longer than one hour. Garrett thinks going techless has given the company's 36 employees more breathing room. "It's embedded in the culture now," says Garrett, whose company brought in about \$10 million in sales last year. "Having people's attention has been really valuable."

If you think employees are tuned out now, just wait until today's tech-tethered teenagers sit through your meetings while surfing, tapping, Twittering, IMing and generally annoying you with technologies yet to be created. Attention spans will grow even shorter over the next decade, and managers will have to address the real source of the problem. "It's not the technology," Fox points out. "It's the people using it."

Chris Penttila is a freelance journalist whose work has also appeared in *The Costco Connection*, *Oregon Business* magazine, *QSR Magazine*, *TheStreet.com* and other publications. She lives in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, area, where she manages two kids, a husband and a feisty cat when she's not writing.