

Entrepreneur's Business Start-Ups®

SMART IDEAS for NEW BUSINESSES



SWEATING THE SMALL STUFF: Launched with just \$5,000, Andrea Arena's concierge business now makes millions meeting clients' many demands.

PHOTO COURTESY: 2 PLACES AT 1 TIME INC.

CONCIERGE SERVICE

"Can you imagine, every day, feeling like everything you do is to help somebody? It's rewarding," says entrepreneur Andrea Arena. In more ways than one: The corporate concierge service she founded in 1991 rang up sales of nearly \$3 million last year. Today, Atlanta-based 2 Places At 1 Time Inc. boasts 119 employees in 66 locations in the United States and Canada.

2 Places' early days were simple enough, says Arena, 32, who worked as a hotel concierge in college. "I didn't have any equipment," she recalls.

The good news was, she didn't need any. She rented computer time and printed advertising fliers at Kinko's, then flied church parking lots on Sundays and up-town corporate parking lots during the week.

Arena labored solo, running errands for entrepreneurs from

CONCIERGE SERVICE TOOLS

GEAR GUIDELINES: Standard office equipment, including a computer (with database software to track client projects and vendors), a printer, a fax machine and basic office supplies will get you started. Total cost: \$2,500

WHAT SHE SPENT: Andrea Arena's initial \$5,000 investment went for attention-grabbing marketing packages designed to entice local newspapers to write about her. Although she used a manual tracking system for clients at the start, she recommends start-ups buy off-the-shelf accounting and project management software.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: National Concierge Association (www.conciergeassoc.org, 312-782-6710)

her home, until the big score in 1992: She landed a contract with Arthur Andersen Consulting, which provided her with an on-site office.

Today, all 2 Places' corporate clients, including Motorola and 3Com, provide on-site offices for the company's concierges, who provide services ranging from errand-running and buying clothes to dealing with home-repair people. The company no longer relies on fliers—or any other type of advertising. "Typically, companies call us," Arena says. "[Corporations are] finally recognizing the importance of a work-life balance."

The hottest markets for concierge services right now are individuals and corporations, followed by office buildings, says Holly Stiel, author of the self-published *Ultimate Service: The Complete Handbook of the World of the Concierge* (\$40, 800-78-HOLLY). Stiel, founder of Mill Valley, California, concierge services firm Holly Speaks, says the concierge industry appeals to so many entrepreneurs because start-up costs are low and the combination of services you can offer is entirely up to you. She says the essential qualities for success in this business include a willingness to serve, creativity and the ability to multitask. Says Stiel, "[You can't be] easily riled when clients demand everything be done at once."