In 2003, after 20 successful years as an independent computer consultant in the San Antonio area, Matt Alper decided it was time to do something different. He started by calling his Uncle Irvin. In the 1940s, Irvin Alper and his brother Arnold (Matt’s father) had started a business called Alpers’ Jobbing Co. They bought Army surplus goods at government auction and then sold them to the Army surplus retail stores that were springing up throughout the U.S. Eventually the brothers specialized in footwear for the police and military, selling these items through Army surplus and uniform retail shops.

Although Matt Alper had never been involved in the family footwear business, he’d spoken with his dad and uncle in the mid-1990s about selling the company’s footwear online. At first the idea went nowhere. “My uncle said, ‘You’ll never be able to sell shoes over the Internet,’” Alper recalls. By 2003, however, Uncle Irvin had relented a bit and told his nephew to give it a try. Alper registered the domain name CopShoes.com, and Alpers’ Jobbing’s first Internet site was born. Since then, Alper has successfully launched TacBoots.com for military and tactical footwear; MetBoots.com (Met refers to the foot’s metatarsal bones) for occupational and safety boots; and Capsnmore.com for hats and T-shirts.

Updating the Infrastructure
As with any Internet-based business, Alper discovered that having the right technology was essential. “Our Internet connection and our phones are the business,” he says. “We need them up and running with little or no downtime.” In early 2008, Alper was planning the company’s move to a larger space about a mile from its old offices when he realized that the business had outgrown its old phone service as well. “We’re four times larger now than we were three years ago,” he says. “Everything was maxed out—both the space and the phones.”

With the business’s old analog phone system, Alper says, his customer service capabilities were constrained. “When customers called to check the status of an order, we had to ask them for the order number and which of our Websites they had ordered from,” he explains. “The system we had didn’t tell us.”

AT&T IP Flexible Reach solved that problem. Each of Alper’s four Websites is now assigned a different virtual telephone number, or VTN. When someone calls customer service, a representative can look up the order number and, based on the VTN provided, determine the Website from which the order originated. “It saves time and money and delivers better customer service,” Alper says. And because IP Flexible Reach is an IP-based system, it’s a snap to add phone numbers during the peak holiday selling season. “We can have up to 24 phone numbers and 96 extensions, so we haven’t even scratched the surface with our usage right now,” he says.

### Alpers’ Jobbing Co. Facts

- **Industry Focus**
  Four Internet-based Websites selling footwear and casual clothing catering to the needs of police, military and construction personnel

- **Size**
  Fifteen employees working in 13,000 square feet of office and warehouse space in San Antonio

- **Business Needs**
  Reliable high-speed Internet plus flexible, expandable phone service to accommodate high-volume 800-number calls and extensive customer service requests

- **Communications Solutions**
  AT&T IP Flexible Reach allows the company to add virtual telephone numbers as the company grows, and an AT&T T-1 line allows for high capacity. A 10,000-minute block of time for inbound 800-number service helps the company manage calls and monthly costs.
To ensure the speed and reliability that Alper's customers had come to expect, AT&T added a high-speed T-1 line as part of its new solution. AT&T account manager Kirk Fischer explains that the T-1 line—for both voice and data—helps guarantee connectivity as online orders are being placed by customers.

Another important feature for Alper's Websites is an 800 number for toll-free customer calling. While 80% of orders are placed on the Web, Alper realized the importance of providing an 800 number so customers could call to ask questions about sizing or check the status of existing orders. “I thought about the customers’ perspective and what would make things easier for them, not me,” he says. Based on his own experience as an online shopper, Alper also thought it would be helpful to display an 800 number prominently at the top of each Web page.

A Global Clientele
Because an Internet-based business has no geographic boundaries, Alper has been able to build a broad international customer base. “We do business on every continent,” he says proudly, adding that a number of sailors in the Greek Navy are now repeat customers. With a global clientele, a robust toll-free calling plan is a must. Fischer says he recommended a monthly 10,000-minute block of time for Alper’s inbound 800 services. AT&T calculated that number based on the company’s existing 800-call traffic. “We determined it was cheaper for Alper to pay for 10,000 minutes per month rather than risk exceeding a 7,500-minute block and then having to pay for extra minutes,” Fischer explains.

“We can have up to 24 phone numbers and 96 extensions, so we haven’t even scratched the surface with our usage.”
—Matt Alper, Owner, Alpers’ Jobbing Co.

Alper says he is quite pleased with AT&T IP Flexible Reach and was amazed at how smoothly the phone transition went during the company’s move in March: “We shut down at 1 p.m. on Friday and were back up shipping goods again by the end of day on Monday,” he says. “That’s good customer service.”

For more information contact your AT&T Representative or visit us at www.att.com/OnwardSmallBiz.