Chapter 1

Welcome to SmartDraw

In This Chapter

▶ Introducing business graphics

▶ Considering how business graphics differ from other types of graphics

▶ Finding out what kinds of business graphics you can create with SmartDraw

*W*elcome to SmartDraw, a program that lets you create professional-quality business graphics even if (or maybe *especially* if) you aren't a professional business graphic artist.

Sure, you can use many programs to create business graphics. You may even already own some of them. But most of these programs are limited to just one or two specific types of business graphics. For example, Microsoft Excel can create pie charts, bar charts, and the like. But Excel isn't very good at creating project charts to schedule the various phases of a project. You can use Microsoft Project to do that, but Project isn't very good with floor plans or schematics. AutoCAD is really good with floor plans and schematics, but . . . well you get the idea.

In contrast, SmartDraw is a tool for creating just about any type of business graphic you might imagine. In fact, SmartDraw can create literally hundreds of different types of business graphics, from area charts to yearly calendars. (Sorry. There isn't a business graphic that starts with the letter z — but if there were one, we guarantee SmartDraw could create it!)

This chapter is a gentle introduction to this powerful program. It begins with an overview of what business graphics are all about. Then, it jumps into the basics of working with SmartDraw. When you finish this chapter, you'll have a good idea of the range of business graphics SmartDraw can create, and you'll be ready to use it to create them.

You, Too, Can Create Business Graphics

In today's business world, few people take the time to read 100 words, let alone 1,000. In the era of text messaging, sometimes even just ten words are too many.

That's why we use business graphics. Often, you can find no other way to make your point clearly, persuasively, or powerfully than with a carefully chosen image. Business graphics have the power to convince others and to explain at a glance something that can be difficult or even impossible to express in words.

Now, you may balk at the term *business graphics.* Your first response might be, "Not for me! Fancy business graphics are great for big Fortune 500 companies, but my business is small enough that I don't need 'em."

Or maybe your response is, "Business graphics would be great if I had half an ounce of artistic ability. But every diagram I ever tried to create looks like it was drawn by a third grader."

Or maybe: "I wish I had the budget to hire a professional graphic designer to add some polish to my reports and proposals, but the simple charts I create with Excel will have to do."

Although you may not realize it, you probably use business graphics all the time. And not just simple pie charts you've thrown together quickly with Excel. You've created business graphics over the years, if you've done the following:

- Sketched a few boxes with names in them to show the chain of command in your business. If so, you've drawn an *organization chart,* one of the most common business graphics. (Hopefully, your name was in the box at the top.)

- Planned your office's layout by sketching some lines to represent the walls, then drawn some rectangles to show where you want desks, chairs, and shelves. If so, you've created a *floor plan.* (Hopefully, your office was the one in the corner, with the big window overlooking the lake.)

- Drawn lines through a calendar to show how long it should take to complete various stages of a project. If so, you've created a *Gantt chart.*

- Sketched the steps necessary to complete a task such as filling out and submitting a medical insurance claim, using boxes to represent the steps and arrows to show how one step flows to the next. If so, you've created a *flowchart.*

Then, maybe you've taken the tools that happen to be lying around — typically Word, Excel, or PowerPoint — and dropped a few clumsy rectangles or circles on the page, plopped down some text to explain what the shapes represent, and then scratched out some lines to connect things together.

So you see, you've been creating business graphics all along. But you've been doing it the hard way. You've used crude drawing tools to create things that the tools were never intended to create, and you might have spent most of your time trying to get things to line up or be the right size or color. Then maybe you've added some cheesy clip art or shadow effects in an attempt to make your drawing look halfway decent.

Most of the time, what you end up with is a drawing that barely communicates the message you originally intended, is difficult to make even the slightest change to later on, and looks terrible.

That's where SmartDraw comes in. Unlike most other programs, SmartDraw doesn't consider business graphics an afterthought. The whole point of SmartDraw is to create sensational business graphics — not just graphics that look good, but graphics that, in some cases, practically draw themselves because they have built-in intelligence.

And SmartDraw isn't limited to just one kind of business graphic. It's designed to create dozens of different kinds of business graphics. When you learn how to use the core set of drawing tools presented in the first eight chapters of this book, you'll be able to draw just about any kind of business graphic imaginable.

Comparing SmartDraw to Other Drawing Programs

Before we get too far into how SmartDraw works and what you can use it for, we need to point out some key differences between SmartDraw and other kinds of drawing programs.

To start, realize that SmartDraw is designed to create business drawings, not artistic or technical drawings. The best known examples of artistic drawing programs are Adobe Illustrator and CorelDraw. These programs are designed to be used by professional artists and photographers to create professional-quality art. Adobe Illustrator and CorelDraw are sometimes used in business to create the more artistic variety of business graphics, such as company logos, flyers, posters, and so on. But their primary purpose is artistic, and their primary users are professional graphic artists.

The best known technical drawing program is AutoCAD, made by Autodesk. Drafting and computer-aided design (CAD) programs are designed to create precision technical drawings that represent real-world objects, such as buildings, bridges, or roller coasters.

Give me a vector, Victor!

One useful way to classify drawing programs is the distinction between bitmap and vector drawing programs. SmartDraw is a vector-based drawing program.

Here's the skinny:

✔ A *bitmap* drawing program is a program that treats graphics as a big collection of dots called *pixels*. Bitmap images are also referred to as *raster images*. Adobe Photoshop is the best-known example of a bitmap graphics program.

✔ A *vector* drawing program is a program that treats graphics as actual shapes rather than as a group of pixels. The program keeps track of all of the characteristics that make up each shape in a drawing, such as the type of shape (for example, a circle, rectangle, line, and so on), as well as other properties like the exact size and position of the shape, the shape's color, and so on.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both types of drawings. Bitmaps are usually best suited for photographs and other types of artistic drawings. Vector images are best suited for business graphics and technical drawings.

The key difference between a bitmap drawing program and a vector drawing program is that when you draw an object in a bitmap program, the drawing doesn't keep track of any information about the object except the pattern of pixels required to display the object. For example, a bitmap drawing program doesn't know that a circle is actually a circle or that a line is actually a line. Instead, everything in the entire image is just a big blob of dots.

In contrast, a vector drawing program is essentially a database that keeps track of information about all the various shapes that make up the drawing.

An important consequence of this is that you can easily scale vector drawings. With a bitmap image, the picture becomes coarser the more you zoom in. If you zoom in far enough, the image becomes a big blur of dots. In contrast, you can enlarge (or reduce) a vector drawing as much as you want and it still remains perfectly clear.

Note that the distinction between bitmap and vector drawing programs isn't absolute. In particular, vector drawing programs can include bitmap images embedded within the drawing. You learn how to incorporate bitmap images into your SmartDraw business graphics in Chapter 8.

Both of these types of drawing programs require great artistic or technical skill. And they both have a long learning curve to master. Plop a typical computer user down in front of a program like Photoshop or AutoCAD and he or she will spend hours just trying to figure out basic things like how to draw a simple rectangle or how to select an object that appears to be sitting in plain view. These are powerful programs, but they're anything but easy to use.

SmartDraw doesn't fit into either of these two categories. Although you can use SmartDraw to create drawings that are artistically pleasing and encompass some degree of technical precision, SmartDraw has an entirely

different purpose than Photoshop or AutoCAD. SmartDraw is designed to create a wide variety of commonly used business graphics, diagrams, and charts using lines, simple and complex geometric shapes, and other ready-made objects that you can simply drag and drop onto your drawings.

Here are some of the key features that set SmartDraw apart from other types of drawing programs:

- **SmartDraw comes with hundreds of predefined drawing templates that you can start from to create just about any kind of business graphic.** And we really mean hundreds — it has more than 1,900 templates in all. In fact, one of the most challenging aspects of using SmartDraw is choosing the perfect template for your drawing from among the vast array of templates.

- **SmartDraw is a *vector-based* program.** It keeps track of the individual shapes that make up a drawing rather than the individual dots that make up a picture. (For more information, see the sidebar, "Give me a vector, Victor!")

- **SmartDraw requires very little artistic skill to create great-looking drawings.** Throughout the program, you'll find features designed to help you create drawings that look professionally drawn. Most of the time, all you have to do is drag and drop predefined elements onto a predefined template and apply predefined formats and themes.

- **One of the most important features of SmartDraw is its built-in intelligence — that is, the *Smart* in *SmartDraw*.** Most graphics programs are little more than digital versions of an artist's tools: canvas, paint, brushes, easel, and so on. The tools are great, but you're on your own to use them to create something worth looking at. In contrast, SmartDraw contains intelligence that actually helps you draw your graphics. It's almost as if a skilled graphic artist is sitting next to you, nudging your mouse in the right direction as you create your graphics.

    You'll see plenty of examples of this intelligence throughout SmartDraw. For example, when you create an organization chart, the software takes care of the tedious task of connecting the boxes to each other with lines. All you have to do is drop the boxes onto the page in their approximate locations; SmartDraw snaps the boxes into the exact right spot, then automatically draws the connecting lines.

- **SmartDraw is less expensive than other graphics programs.** Last time we checked, Microsoft Visio sells for about $400; Adobe Illustrator about $600; and AutoCAD LT — the simplified version of AutoCAD — is nearly $1,000. In contrast, you can purchase SmartDraw for under $300.

Knowing What You Can Do with SmartDraw

SmartDraw is a powerful program that you can use to create any type of business graphic you can conceive of. If you haven't opened SmartDraw yet and looked at the list of templates in the left-hand panel, you might want to try it now. You find the following categories:

Accounting & Finance	Human Resources
BPM & Six Sigma	Landscaping
Calendars	Maps
Cause & Effect	Marketing Charts
Certificates	Mind Maps
Charts	Network Design
Decision Trees	Org Charts
Education	Project Management
Engineering	Retail & Planograms
Event Planning	Simple Diagrams
Family Trees	Software Design
Financial & Estate Planning	Storage Design
Floor Plans	Storyboards
Flowcharts	Strategic Planning
Flyers	Timelines
Forms	Web Design
Gantt Charts	

This list doesn't even include the subcategories that are found within most categories. For example, you'll find seven subcategories under Human Resources, including Employment Forms and HR Scorecards. And under Marketing Charts, you'll find 34 subcategories, including Affinity Diagrams, Competition Matrix, Competitive Analysis, Marketing Trends Summary, Strategy Maps, and Venn Diagrams.

In short, SmartDraw can create almost anything you can imagine, and probably quite a few things you never imagined. You'll probably never use more than a handful of these diagrams, but even that handful — especially the core business graphics — have the power to radically improve the way you do business.

In the following sections, we show just a few of the most commonly used templates, just to give you a feel for the types of business graphics you can create with SmartDraw.

Flowcharts

A *flowchart* is a diagram that graphically shows the steps that must be followed to complete a procedure or task. Flowcharts, also known as *process charts,* were the foundation of SmartDraw version 1.0 in 1995, and the flowchart tool remains one of its most powerful and distinctive features, even today. SmartDraw simply excels at making flowcharts.

If the very idea of a flowchart makes you cringe, relax. It's true that flowcharts are often used for complicated and technical applications such as managing an oil refinery or launching the space shuttle. But flowcharts aren't just for mind-boggling applications like those. Every business has processes. And even if your company's most complicated process is mailing a package or taking a phone call, a flowchart is often the best way to document and improve that process.

SmartDraw comes with more than 40 templates for creating various types of flowcharts. Figure 1-1 shows just one example.

Flowcharts are so powerful in SmartDraw that Chapter 11 is devoted to them.

Organization charts

Everyone has seen an organization chart — those diagrams that show the management structure of a company with a box for each employee and lines to indicate who reports to whom. Many of us have suffered the thankless and tedious task of drawing them. SmartDraw can't remove the thankless part from the task, but it can definitely help with the tedious part. Figure 1-2 shows an example of an organization chart — an *org chart,* as SmartDraw calls them.
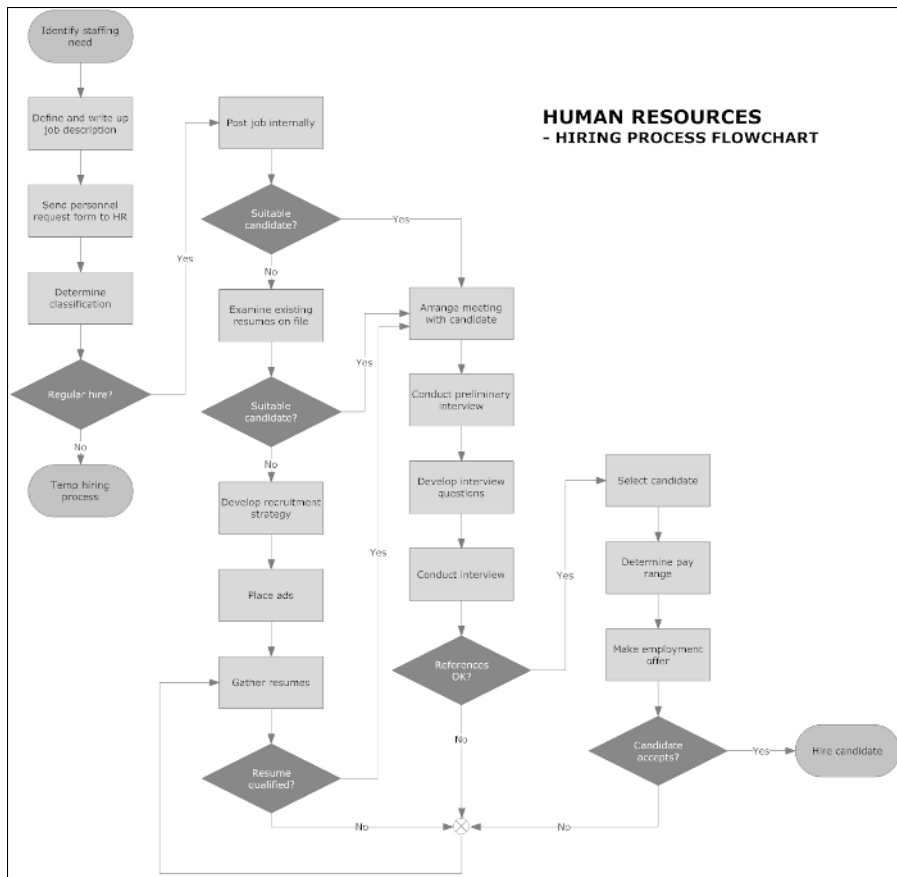
Figure 1-1:
A flowchart.

The best part about creating organization charts in SmartDraw is that SmartDraw practically does all the work for you. SmartDraw automatically takes care of drawing the lines that connect the boxes to one another and indicate the working relationships. You can drag boxes around the page, and SmartDraw automatically adjusts the entire chart to match the new configuration.

TIP

One especially nice feature is that you can drop photos of employees into the chart and SmartDraw attaches them to their boxes. You can even zoom, crop, resize, and edit the photos right in the chart.

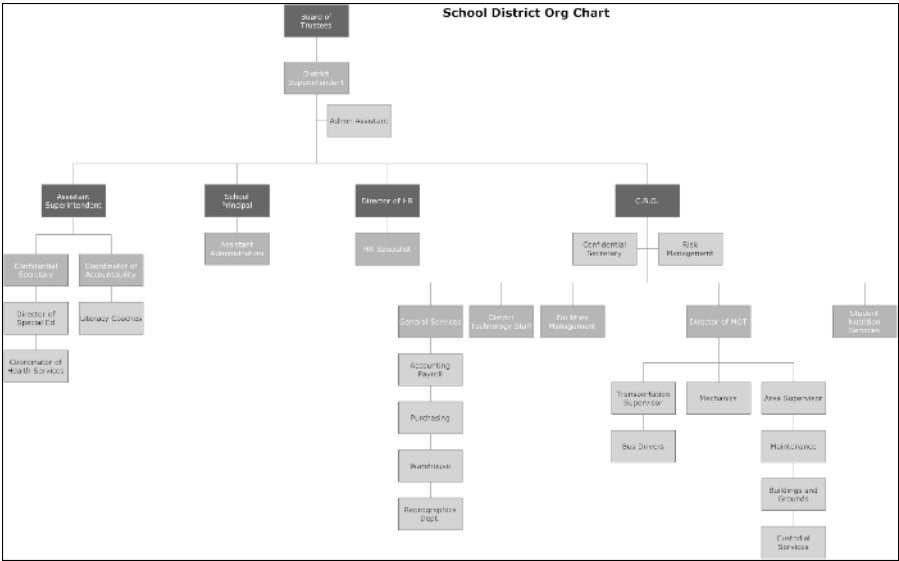For more information about creating organization charts with SmartDraw, see Chapter 12.

Figure 1-2:
An organi-
zation chart.

Project (Gantt) charts

A *project chart,* also known as a *Gantt chart,* is a kind of horizontal bar chart used to track the schedule of a project. If you're a professional project manager and spend several hours every day crafting Gantt charts, you should probably invest in expensive software specifically designed for project management, such as Microsoft Project. But if you just need to create an occasional Gantt chart, there's no need to invest in a separate program. SmartDraw is very adept at creating Gantt charts like the one shown in Figure 1-3.
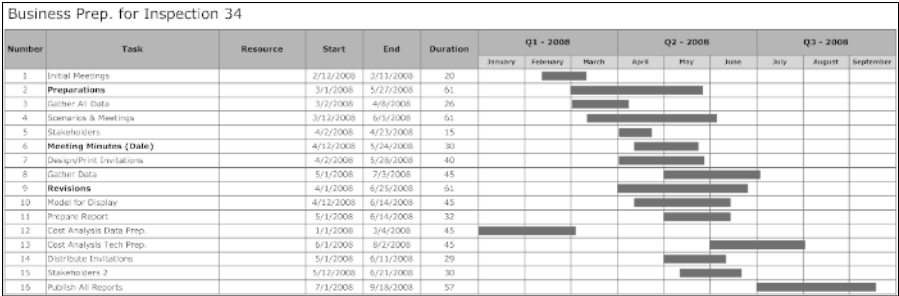

Figure 1-3:
An Gantt
chart.

The horizontal bars on a project chart represent tasks. The horizontal axis of the chart represents time. The length of the bars on the chart shows how much time each task will take, and it identifies when the task will start and when it will end. You can add special symbols to the chart to represent milestones or dependencies, and of course SmartDraw has ready-made libraries of these symbols.

The beauty of a project chart is that it lets you see, at a single glance, the status of all the various tasks in a project that are happening simultaneously. Project charts are continuously updated to reflect the current status of each task, so you can see which parts may be falling behind, or even (in some alternate universe, perhaps) ahead of schedule.

For more information about using SmartDraw to create Gantt charts, see Chapter 14.

Mind maps

If a mind map sounds like something from Star Trek, don't worry; you won't have to put your head in a scanner or anything. (Although that could be a real timesaver. Maybe a future version of SmartDraw will include this as an option!) A mind map is just a visual way of organizing your ideas. See Figure 1-4.
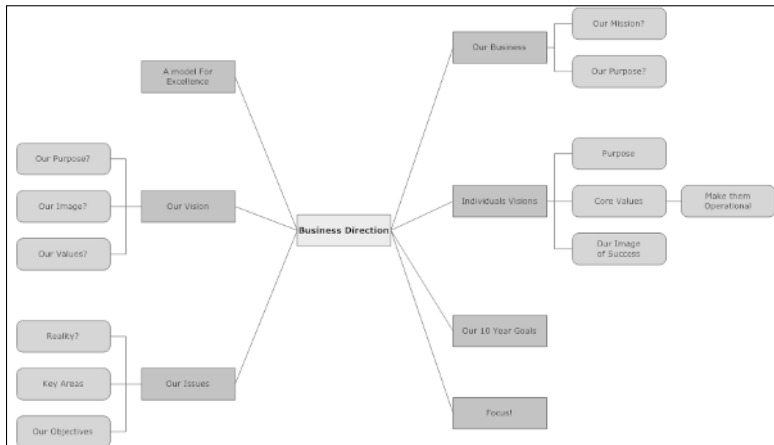

Figure 1-4:
A mind map.

A *mind map* is the visual equivalent of a text outline, the kind where you have main topics, followed by subtopics, followed by sub-sub-topics, and so on down the line. The benefits of sketching a mind map rather than writing a text outline is that the mind map engages the creative side of your brain and can often reveal new perspectives or solutions that you wouldn't have noticed within the linear constraints of a text outline.

As you would expect, SmartDraw has built some nice intelligence into its mind maps. For starters, you can easily convert a mind map to a text outline — a real timesaver for creating presentation bullet points or a table of contents! And you can also easily convert a mind map into a Gantt chart.

For more information about creating mind maps in SmartDraw, see Chapter 14.

Bar charts and graphs

When most people think of business charts, they of think of the basic bar chart or pie chart. Naturally, SmartDraw excels at creating these types of charts. Figure 1-5 shows an example of a bar chart and a pie chart created with SmartDraw.

Figure 1-5:
Examples of
bar charts
and pie
charts.
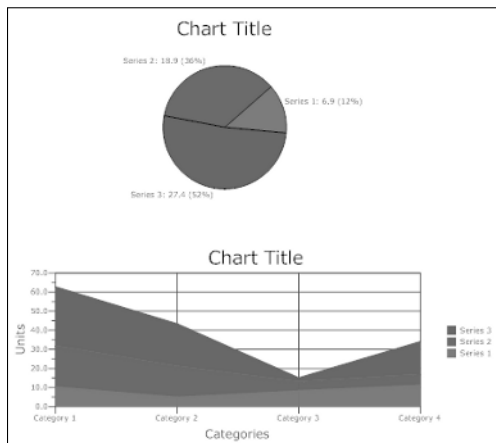
An Express Charts feature lets you simply type numbers into the bars, or pie slices, and the chart remakes itself to match your figures. You don't have to create a spreadsheet or data table first.

SmartDraw can make the following variations on these basic data charts as well:

- Area chart
- Layered area chart
- Stacked bar chart
- Line chart
- Relative value chart

One of the most interesting features of SmartDraw for creating bar and pie charts is its ability to substitute images or clip art for the bars or pie segments. This can lead to visually engaging charts, such as the one shown in Figure 1-6.

For more information about creating bar and pie charts, see Chapter 10.

**Figure 1-6:**
An image
chart.
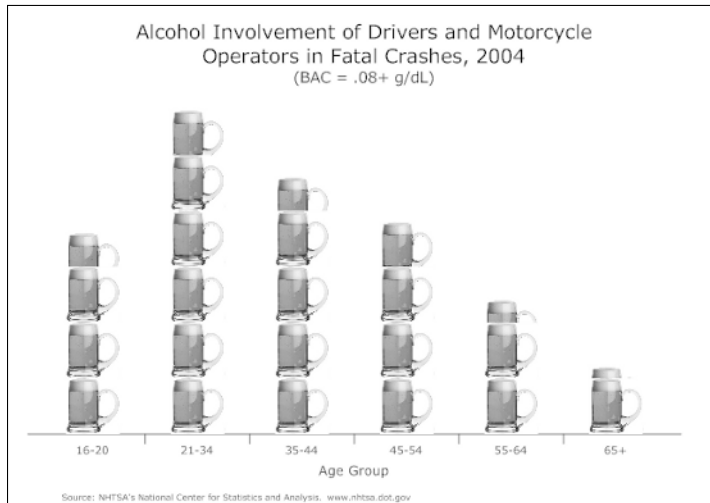
Floor plans

A floor plan is one of those things that nearly everyone needs to make at one time or another — whether you're rearranging office cubicles, redecorating a room, or moving to a new building and trying to decide if your old furniture will fit. But the software traditionally used to create floor plans, such as AutoCAD, tends to be very expensive and difficult to learn.

Fortunately, SmartDraw has more than 50 templates specifically for creating floor plans. Figure 1-7 shows a floor plan created with one of them.

SmartDraw provides libraries with hundreds of ready-made objects for floor plans, including furniture, light fixtures, plants, windows, doors, and even technical stuff like plumbing and wiring. And SmartDraw's floor plan templates have all the smarts you need to draw perfect rooms, walls, and buildings to place it all in.

Figure 1-7:
A floor plan.
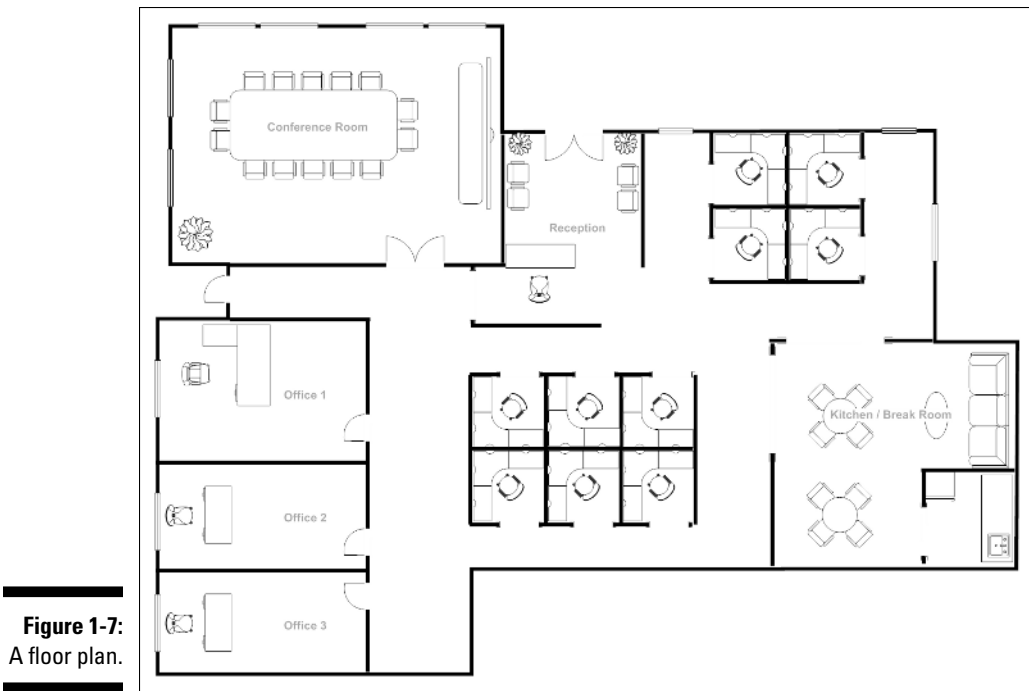
Your floor plan need not stop at the walls of your building, either. SmartDraw can help you with landscape plans as well, so you can design anything from your home garden to your company's office campus, right down to the last shrub and sprinkler.

If you want to find out more, you're in luck. Chapter 13 is devoted to teaching you how to create floor plans with SmartDraw.