Bits & Bytes

Insider Tips On How To Use Technology To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier, And More Profitably

TAG
we're I.T.

Was Your Business Halted From The Power Outages of July 8?
Here Are A Few Tips To Make The Next One A Bit Smoother

"As a business owner , I know you don't have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That's where we shine! Call us and put an end to your IT problems forever."

Joe Stoll, President
Technical Action Group (TAG)
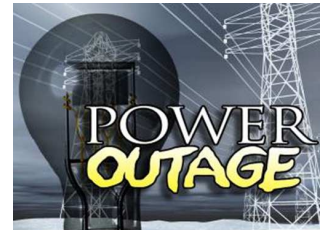JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com

Inside this issue:

We all take it for granted that electricity in our homes and offices is available to us whenever we need it, save for the odd quick blip during a thunder storm.

Toronto (once again) learned on July 8 that electricity can go out for the most unpredictable of reasons – in 2003 it was the blackout of the eastern seaboard. On July 8 it was record-setting downpour of rain over 90 minutes.

TAG's cell phones were singing tunes constantly starting around 6:30 that night. Not from clients themselves, but rather the automated alerts that dozens of our clients servers were unreachable from our monitoring center. Some of these alerts were due to loss of internet, and others were because of loss of power at the client sites.

As soon as we were notified (again, by our automated alerts) that our clients' servers were coming back online, we sprang into action and started our process of checking each server to make sure that they were healthy and functioning as intended. By ensuring that the servers rebooted properly and that all the key services were up and running (email, database, websites, etc), our clients could be up and running 100% the next morning like nothing ever happened.

All of our clients who had lost power due to the storm were functional by 9am the next morning…

…whether they had power from the grid, or generators for those of our clients still affected by the power outages the next day.

If your business would be crippled from an extended power outage even for one day, now is the time, while July 8 is still fresh in your memory, to validate your disaster plan for the technology, AND business continuity; whether that's having the ability to resume your business from alternate locations (i.e. homes or shared office space), or being able to get an alternate source of power if needed (generators). My long time readers know that if there's anything I love, it's an opportunity to harp on disaster planning – so here I go! But before I get on my soap box, know that I'm a realist. I know if you're like **most small businesses you don't have a disaster recovery plan (or much of one) because you're just so busy "running" your business**, leaving no time to take on what can seem like the daunting task of a comprehensive disaster planning and business continuity plan. So here are a few easy to implement strategies that don't take much time, or expense to implement:

When it comes to a loss of business function, you need to consider to causes: power outage in your office; power outage or some other cause for your vendors to be down. Here are some key things to consider in your planning:

Shiny Gadget Of The Month:
The Flip Pal

The Flip Pal Mobile scanner has no wires and scans directly to a SD Card (just like a camera).

Have you ever come across a picture that you wanted to scan but were afraid to take it out of the album because it was stuck? With the Flip Pal, you can leave it in the album and place the scanner right over the picture and get the scan without having to disturb anything.

The scanner has a built in screen so that you can see the scan before you are done.

The Flip Pal is battery powered, compact and lightweight. It produces high quality digital scans in 300 or 600 dpi and can scan in color. The scanner only weighs 1.5 pounds which makes it easy to carry around.

The software that comes with the Flip Pal allows you to take a number of scans and digitally stitch them together into one large picture.

The Flip-Pal retails for $149.99 USD.

http://flip-pal.com/

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1. **Determine your core business functions you cannot be without for even one day**. Maybe it's your website because that's your main communication venue with your customers, or your website is how your customers buy from you. Maybe it's your phone system,. Maybe it's your email. Or an order management / dispatching system. Once you determine these core functions, your next step would be to determine how these roles will be fulfilled and by who or what. For instance at TAG, our phone system is a key way our clients communicate with us. If our phone system should be unavailable (and this has happened), we use a service from bell call "single number reach" which allows us to redirect our main number (at a moment's notice) to mobile phones. Internet is key to us as well since our Help Desk and server monitoring system is located in a data centre. So if Rogers internet goes down, we can failover to Bell. Because all of our key systems are located in data centers, they have multiple service providers and generators as well so even if our power was lost in the our office on July 9, our key applications would have still been available to us from our homes thanks to the redundancy of data centers.

2. **Select a Backup Power Source**. If all of your core systems are hosted in your office (email server, order processing system, CRM, your website) and you couldn't work from anywhere if the power in your office was out for an extended period of time, consider buying a generator in advance that you can spin up during an extended power to outage to power your core functions. One of our clients, a very busy courier company had the foresight to plan for such an event and were able to stay fully functional as an organization thanks to their generators for 1 full business day.

3. **Give your Key Staff the Ability to Work From Home.** Whether it's VPN or through remote desktop, allow your key staff to be able to complete their core tasks from home or another location if their homes don't have power either.

While we are not susceptible to the destructive elements that the US is, we all learned that are aren't completely immune to freaky weather and with the climate changing quickly, there is probably more to come. If you would like any no-obligation advice on disaster planning for your business, call Joe Stoll at 416-489-6312 x 204 or e-mail JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com.

Are You Making These Summertime Mistakes With Your Servers?
How To Ensure The Heat Doesn't Fry Your Servers (and Your Data!)

With the "dog days" of summer upon us, many business owners are looking for ways to keep their company's sales and profits HOT, while keeping their IT expenses COOL. But if proper attention is not given to your server and network equipment during the summer, all that heat outside can actually cause serious damage to your server, causing your system to crash and burn – literally!

Excess heat IS a big problem for all computer equipment including laptops and PCs. But since your server is carrying the load, overheating will cost you more in electric bills and problems. And once a server gets too hot and blows out, it weakens components so that they are more susceptible to failure forever afterward, not just during the particular moment they overheated.

9 Steps Every Business Owner Must Know To Prevent A Server Crash That Their Network Support Company Might Not Be Doing

⇒ Tidy up the server room; a neater room will increase air flow.

⇒ If you have more than one server, arrange them in a row so that the cold air comes from the front and is expelled out the back It's best to get your technical support provider to do this for you.

⇒ Keep the doors to the server room closed and seal off the space to prevent dust buildup which can contribute to electronic equipment overheating.

⇒ Make sure cold air reaches all the equipment.

⇒ Have a redundant A/C that is specifically designed for computers.

⇒ Buy a rack enclosure where the cooling is built in to the bottom of the rack.

⇒ Keep the temperature at no more than 77 degrees.

⇒ Use blanking panels over any empty spaces on your server rack.

⇒ Consider virtualization so you are generating a lower amount of heat in the first place.

"I'm Just a [*Insert Your Title Here*] Who Can't Say No"

Whether or not you're familiar with the song from the classic musical Oklahoma, I find that this is an applicable title in the world of today's entrepreneur and busy executive. Macro-multitasking is just as significant a problem as the garden-variety, moment-by-moment multitasking. Macro-multitasking is the splitting of one's attention across many different projects, businesses, ventures, causes, and even careers.

No matter how talented a person is, he or she will always be constrained by the truth of time. The truth of time is that there are only 24 hours in a day. When those 24 hours are filled up with too many different activities, these activities always end up competing against each other, no matter how worthy they may be. People fail to understand that by saying "yes" to one thing they are by default saying "no" in a small degree to every other activity in their life.

Let me offer two main categories of people who can't say no and one suggestion to help those in each of those categories:

1. **Can't say no to others** - Some of the nicest and most selfless people that I've met are successful business owners and executives. People often approach these business leaders and ask for help. And, more often than not, they selflessly donate their time. However, when business leaders spread themselves across too many causes, they fragment their attention in every other area of their life. Instead of being of service, they end up shortchanging themselves and their loved ones. Maintaining focus often requires the skill of saying "no" in a polite and diplomatic manner.

Option: Ask for requests via e-mail. There are two main reasons why e-mail is such an effective tool to protect the person who can't say no to others.

⇒ It is too easy for someone to make a verbal request of the business leader in the spur of the moment. The leader who wants to be everyone's friend has difficulty saying no face to face to the individual, even when they know that they probably shouldn't get involved. Asking for an e-mail puts responsibility on the person asking for help.

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Outlook 2010: Print Only One Page Of A Message

There are times when you'll need to print a long e-mail, but you may not need all of the pages. Here's how to save ink and paper by printing only the page or specific pages you need.

- Open your Message in Outlook 2010. Go to **File >> Print.**

- Next select the printer you want to use and then click the **Print Options** button**.**

- In the **Print Options** window under **Page Range,** select pages. Then type in the page numbers you want. For example, if I have a four page email and just want to print the first and fourth page, I type **1,4** in the Pages field. If you wanted a series of pages you'd type **7-12**. Then click the **Print** button.

- If you only want to print out one page of a message, just type in the page number.

That's it! Now you'll only get the pages printed out that you specified. This is a great way to save time, money, ink and paper.

2. Can't say no to yourself – The classic serial entrepreneur has great difficulty limiting himself or herself to the project at hand. These business leaders are constantly spinning new ideas and new ventures and seeing opportunities around every corner. While these opportunities may be valid, they are not valid all at the same time. The truth of time limits their ability to act on all of their desires. The entrepreneurial type has to recognize that they are causing these problems for themselves when they undertake too many projects simultaneously.

Option: Store ideas away for review. When new ideas come to mind, ignoring them is neither practical nor profitable. However, neither is taking immediate action on every single "next big idea." Instead, store those ideas away in a specific location set aside for just those ideas. But storing them away isn't enough. By implementing a system of regular review, you allow yourself to put off but not forget great ideas. Set a recurring appointment with yourself to review the list and decide if now is the right time to embark on a new adventure.

Guest article provided by: Dave Crenshaw is an author, speaker and CEO coach. He has appeared in TIME magazine, Forbes, SIRIUS XM Radio, and the BBC News. His first book, *The Myth of Multitasking: How 'Doing It All' Gets Nothing Done*, has been published in six languages and is a time management best seller. His latest book, *Invaluable: The Secret to Becoming Irreplaceable*, is also an organizational behavior and motivational bestseller. For videos and articles from Dave, visit www.DaveCrenshaw.com

The 3 Biggest Mistakes Business Owners Make With Their Computer Network That Cost Them Time, Money and Aggravation

Want to avoid the most common and expensive computer problems most business owners experience? Then read on! We've compiled a list of 3 things you should be doing to save yourself a lot of time and money, by avoiding a big, ugly computer disaster.

1. Have an automated off-site back-up system in place. I cannot stress the importance of this enough. Having an off-site back-up of your data will be the equivalent of wearing a seatbelt in a major accident. You don't think much about it until you need it, and then, you will thank your lucky stars you had it in place.

2. Centralize your data on your server. At one time, servers only made sense for large organizations because of their high cost and complexity. But today, there are very affordable and easy-to-implement server systems designed specifically for any size small business. Depending on your business needs, your server can be in your office or hosted in the cloud. A server will not only speed up your network, but it will also make backups easier, allow secure remote access to allow you and your employees to work from home or on the road, and make it much easier to share documents, databases, and printers.

3. **Keep your anti-virus software up-to-date, and perform weekly spyware scans.** Almost everyone understands the importance of anti-virus software, but many businesses still do not perform weekly spyware sweeps. Spyware can cause a host of problems that include slowing down your systems, pop-up ads, and even identity theft.

Want An Easy Way To Make Sure You Aren't Making These 3 Mistakes (And More) In Your Business?

Thanks to or managed IT services for small business, we take full responsibility for managing your computer network! This service dramatically reduces expensive, frustrating computer disasters and give you the peace of mind that your data is safe and secure.