

Bits & Bytes

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



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“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.”

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Good Luck Happens When Preparedness Meets Opportunity

As luck would have it, Smart Sally and Lucky Larry were born minutes apart on St. Patrick’s Day in Luck, WI to first generation Irish immigrants. In a hurry to meet his fate, Larry burst forth without warning, causing Dr. Lecher (busy eyeing Nurse Nancy’s numerous notables) to fumble the catch. Orderly Oscar, thinking of Sunday’s game-winning touchdown, dove across the room and caught Larry inches before a potentially fatal floor impact. Everyone applauded and Oscar, resisting the temptation to spike the baby, did a quick end-zone dance and gently laid Larry in his mother’s arms. Smiling at her newborn, she named him Lucky Larry.



Next door, Sally was taking a more cautious approach. Moments before she emerged, the lights went out and the backup generator failed to kick in. Seeing the room was pitch black, she stopped her delivery and alerted the doctor to her pending arrival with adorable baby noises, which helped him locate and expertly deliver her. The lights came back on, and her mom declared to the astonished onlookers that she was naming her Smart Sally.

Lucky Larry skated through college as a party animal while Smart Sally studied hard and entered the business world with straight A’s. They opened accounting firms next door to each other with Smart Sally growing her business through good marketing and sound business practices. Lucky Larry found fortune at the grocery store where John, the owner of the largest manufacturing company in the state and a victim of identity theft, found with great embarrassment that his credit card was cancelled. Seizing the opportunity, Lucky Larry paid for the man’s groceries and was rewarded with a massive contract from not only John’s company but all of John’s business associates.

Both Lucky Larry and Smart Sally understood that the data used and generated in their businesses was their most important asset. They both bought good computers and servers, and paid someone to set them up and connect them to each other and the Internet. Lucky Larry used his neighbour’s son who was a whiz with computers and worked for peanuts. The network seemed to work well with the occasional lock ups and blue screens of death that everyone has come to expect from Microsoft products. Lucky Larry felt lucky indeed as his employees never had to restart their computers more than once a day and coordinated their coffee breaks with the restarts, the loading of programs and the printing of documents. He noticed during the last few months that the number and length of breaks were increasing, but it was better than having them sit and stare at the “please wait...” message on the computer screen. He put a big screen TV in the break room, which helped his employees relieve their frustrations by watching television. This proved to Lucky Larry to be a great investment.

Smart Sally took a different approach. She contracted with a respected IT consulting company that handled her installation and provided her with managed services to keep the network running like new. Overhearing Lucky Larry bragging about how little he paid for the installation and upkeep of his network, Smart Sally wondered if she was spending her money wisely. It had been a year since the

Shiny New Gadget Of The Month:



Since we talk about “who pays” (employees or employers) when a device goes missing in this month’s newsletter, we thought we would recommend a good device tracking system for laptops this month.

The company that provides Lojack for Laptops, Absolute Software, is NOT the same company that provides the vehicle recovery service you’re most likely familiar with (they license the name). But they do provide a similar service in the sense that they help businesses and consumers track, manage, secure and recover mobile computers and devices.

Once installed, Lojack for Laptops will allow you to geographically locate your lost or stolen laptop. It also allows you to issue a remote command to freeze your lost or stolen computer and/or create a customized message to display on your computer’s screen to help someone who finds it return it to you. If you feel like it’s fallen into the wrong hands, you can remotely erase files on your computer. You can opt to delete all of your files, or just certain file types. The next time your laptop contacts the Monitoring Center, it receives the “delete” command and erases the files you selected.

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computer network was installed and she had never experienced a lock up or needed to restart her computers or servers. She wasn’t sure what the blue screen of death was because she had never seen one. It puzzled her during power outages that shouts and curses could be heard coming from Lucky Larry’s office while her employees calmly continued to work. Though her employees didn’t know much about Oprah or Dr. Phil, they seemed happy with their job and the tools she had provided that made their jobs stress free. She was proud of how productive her employees were and how quickly they completed their assignments. Her network worked as good as new, and her employees could easily handle more work if she only had more clients.

That night luck proved to be a fickle lady. As they slept, fire raged through the buildings where Lucky Larry and Smart Sally had their offices. Nothing was left standing but a solitary staircase to nowhere. Larry, Sally and their employees, all with tears in their eyes, stared in disbelief at the devastation. What were they going to do? What were their clients going to do? Today was payday; W2’s and 1099’s were due next week. All the clients’ records were up in smoke, as were the computers, servers and the precious data they contained.

Lucky Larry called his neighbour’s son at college seeking advice. What he heard chilled him to the bone. The wiz kid had trained an employee, which Larry fired two months ago, to exchange a tape each day with one from a pile of tapes on top of the server. Larry felt a migraine coming on. His luck had finally run out. He called his clients and explained that the fire and subsequent loss of their data wasn’t his fault. Larry heard words he’d never heard before coming across the phone and was told to expect a call from their lawyers.

Smart Sally prayed for better news as she called her IT consultant. What they told her sounded too good to be true. They were doing off site backups each night and all her data was safe and ready to be restored. They even offered to arrange overnight delivery of a server and work stations. By using disk images stored off site they could quickly configure the new machines and have her company back up and running within 48 hours. They also offered to fax her insurance company detailed descriptions and replacement cost of all the equipment destroyed. Sally called her clients to advise them that there would be a slight delay, but they would have payroll processed within 48 hours and the W2’s and 1099’s would go out on schedule despite the devastating fire. Sally received a call later that day from Lucky Larry’s unlucky clients who heard she was already back in business. They transferred their accounts to her stat. Smart Sally couldn’t believe how lucky she was.

Are you a Lucky Larry? **Call us before March 31st, tell us you want to become a Smart Sally and we will perform a FREE 27-Point Problem Prevention Audit** and design an action plan to make your network healthy and keep it that way! Call Joe Stoll at 416-489-6312 x 204 or JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com

ALERT! New PayPal Fraud!

A couple of our clients called us last month about an e-mail they got that looked like it was from PayPal. It said: **Dear PayPal Member: Attention! Your PayPal account has been limited!** *As part of our security measures, we regularly screen activity in the PayPal system. We recently contacted you after noticing an issue on your account. We requested information from you for the following reason: Our system detected unusual charges to a credit card linked to your PayPal account. Reference Number: PP-259-187-991*

The e-mail was perfect. No misspelled words, it even had two good links to the real PayPal. But we checked further, because we smelled a rat. We called PayPal and was told it was a fraud. PayPal will never address you as “Dear PayPal Member”; they will ALWAYS use your name.

The moral of the story is: using common sense is the best defense against becoming a victim of these scams. If it looks suspicious and makes you wonder, follow your intuition or call the vendor the scam purports to be to confirm the legitimacy of the e-mail or phone call.

When An Employee Loses A Laptop Or Phone, It Could Cost Your Business A LOT More Than Replacement If You Aren't Prepared



Here's a little quandary for you to consider: If you have employees using company-owned laptops, phone or other devices, who's responsible for replacing them if they get lost, stolen or damaged? This is a sticky question and one that needs to be addressed BEFORE the employee walks into your office to sheepishly admit he's left his laptop at Starbucks or in a cab last night.

To answer this question, you should speak with your insurance company and lawyer.

Next, decide what your policy is going to be on this topic and communicate that in writing to your employees. It should outline what care they should take with company-owned mobile devices as well as the consequences of losing or damaging them. Yes, the term "policy" makes us all cringe, but it's important to make sure you and your employees have a written understanding of what your expectations are, as well as what their responsibility is.

A BIGGER Loss To Consider

The cost of replacing a lost device is actually insignificant compared to the bigger cost and risk of the data it contains. Of course this opens up another can of worms all employers need to think about – security on mobile devices. And since some employees are using their OWN devices, you'll need to think through what the rules are for company owned AND employee owned devices.

But one thing is for sure: if you and your employees are storing sensitive information like passwords, credit card information, client or patient data on mobile devices, extra care MUST be taken to ensure the security of that data if the device is stolen. As always, if you need help in determining what your policy should be and how to secure mobile devices, give us a call.

How To Get More Done By Unlocking The Secrets of Microsoft Office



I read somewhere that the average Microsoft Office user uses less than 10% of the features available to them in the software. If that's true, then Office is a treasure trove of shortcuts, tools and features just waiting to be unleashed. Of course, we don't know what we don't know – which is why most people never invest in training to learn these features and tools and make shorter work of various projects. To quote an old axiom, "We're too busy chopping trees to stop and sharpen the axe."

Of course, not all training is created equal and you DO want to make sure you are getting the biggest bang for your buck; so the first thing you need to determine is, which software applications do you use the most? Word? Excel? Publisher? Next, you need to determine your learning style. Are you good at self-study or do you prefer to have someone walking you through the lessons? There are many self-study and online courses to choose from.

A great free on-line resource is at <http://office.microsoft.com/en-ca/training/>

Tools to Drive Productivity Using Your Smart Phone

AppBox Pro

Why You Need It:
A virtual Swiss Army knife for your phone, **AppBox Pro** offers a number of utilities -- alarm clock, flashlight, currency converter, games, loan calculator, unit converter, even a random number generator -- to fit almost any scenario. It also includes Google services such as News, Docs, Calendar and Reader.

Features:
Five icon sets, 12 backgrounds, 11 button styles

Available For:
iPhone

Price: 99 cents

JuiceDefender

Why You Need It:
The only problem with all of these cool apps is their effect on your smartphone's battery life. The answer: **JuiceDefender**, which disables mobile connectivity and other energy-sucking components until you need them.

Features:
Homescreen widgets, default Easy Mode

Available For:
Android

Price: Free

Thanks for the Kind Words....



"I wanted to write a quick e-mail to thank you and your organization for the outstanding support, dedication and commitment you all displayed in helping Global Royalties achieve what I believe to be an outstanding "go-live" date at our new site.

Over the last couple of months, weeks and days, not only have you exceeded expectations, you remained supportive and understanding through the implementation of the various critical systems at Global.

Joe – you and your team were instrumental in the "zero-issue" day today – not one data or server issue to be reported and when you consider the scope of "transplanting" our systems from Traders to Watline – it is very impressive. I would like to specifically mention the efforts of Mike – he does a great job of representing your organization and is always willing to go above and beyond!

Brian Peski
Global Royalties Ltd.
(formerly of)

The Pros and Cons of Switching to VOIP



Since Alexander Graham Bell made the first phone call to his assistant Watson, the phone has come a long way. And now thanks to Internet technology, it's possible to make phone calls over the Internet using VoIP technology or voice over Internet Protocol (IP).

While there are a number of advantages to a VoIP system over a standard phone system, the biggest reason companies switch is to save money. It's not uncommon for a company making a lot of long distance calls to save 50% or more on their phone bill. Of course, there's no guarantee of this since there are a lot of different VoIP systems and the amount of money that you will save really just depends on which system you buy – and in some cases, no savings will make up for poor sound quality or dropped calls. So what are the pros and cons?

The upside is that most business class VoIP systems will offer you the same features you're used to with your current phone system, including call forwarding, call waiting, conferencing, voice mail, and (depending on what your current phone system is) additional features like the ability to share data, applications and even transmit video in addition to voice so that you can see and hear the person that you are talking to.

Of course, there are some downsides you need to consider before jumping on the VoIP bandwagon. The biggest problem with VoIP systems is the sound quality. In some cases, it's a bandwidth issue that will cause problems, but it's not the only one. Since the voice data is being broken up into a series of packets and transmitted over the Internet, there could be moments of silence, broken voice patterns, echoes, delays and static sounds. Sound quality is the #1 complaint most VoIP users have about the service.

Another issue is that VoIP systems cannot be used if there is a power or Internet outage. A traditional phone can function during a power outage because the phone company transmits electricity over the phone line. This electricity is used to power the phone (cordless phones being the exception). That way, even if the power goes out, the phone will usually still work because the phone's power is coming from a different source.

The Lighter Side...Classic Irish Story

In a court in Killarney, deep in Munster, Ireland, this conversation is reported to have taken place:

Lawyer: 'At the scene of the accident, Mr. O'Shea, did you tell the Garda officer that you had never felt better in your life?'

O'Shea the farmer: 'That's right, sir.'

Lawyer: 'Well then, Mr. O'Shea, how is it that you are now claiming you were seriously injured when my client's car hit your cart?'

O'Shea the farmer: 'When the Garda arrived, he went over to my horse, who had a broken leg, and shot him. Then he went over to Darcy, my dog, who was badly hurt, and shot him. Then the policeman came across the road, gun still in hand, looked at me, and said, 'How are you feeling?' I just thought under the circumstances, it was a wise choice of words to say: 'I've never felt better in my life.'

