

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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The Most Shocking Security Threat To Your Small Business—Are You At Risk?

Hopefully by now you realize you need to keep a close watch over the security of your servers, PCs and other devices (or you’re smart enough to hire us to do it for you). Either way, cybercrime is BIG business, and small business owners are seen as the low hanging fruit by attackers who are looking for easy-to-steal financial data, passwords and the like. Some do it for profit, others do it for fun.



But there’s a much bigger threat to small business data security that can not only portend to leak your information out to the masses, but can also corrupt or erase data, screw up operations and bring everything to a screeching halt. What is it? Surprisingly, it’s your employees.

“Human error” is the #1 leading cause of data loss, system failure and virus attacks. In some cases, it’s an innocent “Oops! I deleted it.” Other times it’s a malicious act of revenge from a disgruntled employee who didn’t get the raise they wanted, simply feels taken advantage of, or is quitting. Recently, a disgruntled employee working for oDesk, a third party content management firm, leaked Facebook’s highly detailed rulebook for flagging inappropriate posts. This document contained shocking guidelines regarding sexual content, death and disfigurement as well as racially charged content. Apparently, sexual acts should be blocked, but crushed heads are okay.

The above incident, while a problem, is a mild case. Often employees seeking revenge will steal and post client data, financials or other competitive information online. In some cases, they sell it. Other times, employees delete critical files to either cause harm to the organization or to cover their tracks. And when it’s your client’s data that gets stolen or compromised, you have a major PR nightmare to deal with aside from the costs and problem of recovering the data.

At a minimum, first, make sure you back up all critical data remotely. Second, monitor employee’s usage of data. Simple content filtering software can detect not only when employees are visiting inappropriate sites, but also detect if they delete or alter large amounts of data--all signs that something could be amiss. And finally, it’s worth a little bit of money to find a good employment attorney to help you craft various policies on using and accessing confidential information.

Shiny New Gadget Of The Month:



Route All Your Calls From Various Phones To One Device:

Whether it's a standard desk phone, mobile device or Skype, fumbling between phones can be a thing of the past with the Plantronics Calisto 835.

At about \$200, this desktop speakerphone device uses Bluetooth to connect to your cellphone, USB to hook up with your computer, and the wall socket to link to your phone line. When a call comes in from any of your devices, it's instantly routed to this easy-to-use speakerphone that sits on your desk.

The backlit screen is bright and responsive, giving the Calisto a flashy, futuristic feel. It comes with a clip-on microphone that allows you to take calls while freeing your hands to type or to walk around your office.

How To Keep Your Cell Phone Costs To A Minimum When You Travel

If you're like me when travelling (for work or pleasure) you need to stay tapped into your business and family from wherever you are. And you don't want to spend a fortune doing it. If you've ever come home to a whopping cell phone bill, read these steps to learn how to minimize the pain. Plan your communication strategy in the following areas:

TEXTING

Alert your circle: If you are travelling outside of Canada, advise any heavy text communicators that you are travelling, and not to text you via normal methods. Instead, use an application that leverages a data plan or wi-fi such as Viber (an app available on iPhone and Android), Skype (Android, iPhone, Symbian) and ask your contacts to do the same. Keep in mind that Skype and Viber will not work unless you are on wi-fi or have a data plan.

Buy a texting plan for the area that you will be travelling to. Make sure you check the prices before you leave as some plans are atrociously expensive.

E-MAIL

Leverage wi-fi whenever possible. Bear in mind that you always want to make sure it's a reputable source (see my blog for more info about wi-fi'ing safely):

<http://www.technicalactiongroup.com/how-to-keep-your-laptop-secure-when-using-wi-fi/>

Get a data plan through your internet provider or if you'll be out of country for an extended period of time, investigate getting a smart phone from that country so you can use local data plans that should be far cheaper than an extended plan you buy in Canada.

Be selective about downloading attachments. If possible, wait until you are back in your hotel or office, and download the attachments while connected to wi-fi or cable.

PHONE CALLS

Get a voice plan before you leave. Again, if your stay out of country is extended, it may be worthwhile to purchase a phone in that country so you can access their local phone plans.

Use a free voice application such as Viber or Skype. Keep in mind that Skype and Viber will not work unless you either are on wi-fi or have a data plan. Also note that if either you or the other person use Skype or Viber when not on wi-fi, this will impact your / their data usage.

INTERNET AND THIRD PARTY APPLICATIONS / APPS

Be very careful about the frequency and timing in which you surf the internet and use apps such as Google Maps, Trip Advisor, weather, iTunes, etc. Do these things in a wi-fi spot whenever possible to minimize cellular data plan charges which are always much more expensive when you are outside of Canada, and can eat into your plan pretty quickly.

A FINAL CAUTIONARY TALE

While travelling through Europe recently, a friend of mine made every effort to minimize roaming charges by not texting, not using the internet and turning off her e-mail when not around a wi-fi spot.

A month after returning to the office, she got called in by her boss with the shocking news that she had the highest cell phone bill in the company at over \$1,200 dollars for the 3 weeks in which she was travelling.

They were both horrified particularly since she believed she was doing all the rights things to prevent this. After some investigation, she realized Google Maps was the culprit which she used as her personal navigation system throughout Europe.

It's hard not to use Google Maps, it's a great app. To prevent this, do your searching while on wi-fi and write down the instructions. Depending on the make and model of your smartphone, there are settings that you can adjust to either disable calls, texting, or data while you travel so that you don't risk a surprise phone bill while you are roaming and away from wi-fi.

Google's New Privacy Policy: What You Need To Know



On March 1st, Google implemented a new, unified privacy policy that affects the browsing history and information Google has on you, both past and present. Prior to this change, your Google history of the searches you made and sites you visited was not shared with Google's other services, particularly advertisers. Naturally, Google is one of the biggest media and marketing companies in the world, and your preferences and search information is pure gold from a marketing standpoint. Marketers armed with that information would know exactly what products and services to display to you as you use the search engine.

However, your search history can reveal a lot about you including details on your location, interests, age, sexual orientation, religion, health concerns and more. If you want to keep Google from combining your web history with the data they have gathered about you in their other products, such as YouTube or Google Plus, you may want to remove all items from your web history and stop your web history from being recorded in the future. To do this, sign into your Google Account and go to the "History" section, then select "Remove All History."

Of course, clearing the web history in your Google account will not prevent Google from gathering and storing your preferences, searches and information and using it for internal purposes. It also does not change the fact that any information gathered and stored by Google could be obtained and used against you by law enforcement.

With web history enabled, Google will keep these records indefinitely; with it disabled, they will be partially anonymized after 18 months, and certain kinds of uses, including sending you customized search results, will be prevented. This brings up a whole other topic of what kind of information should you post about yourself (or store) online. Facebook is another site that gathers tons of personal information about you, including your location, date of birth, friends and family, age, preferences and much, much more. In the future, I believe that cyber security will become an increasingly important issue for all of us.

Back To The Phones

I think e-mail has moved us from the "information age" to the "too-much-information age"! The problem with e-mail is that it is grossly abused by spammers, "cc" addicts, and joke forwarders. With all this competition for a person's attention, the days of an instant reply to your e-mail are gone.

Recipients have dozens of other messages in line before yours, and unless the tag line is fascinating, your message could be deleted along with many others or sent to a folder to only be forgotten. I've found that if you ask two questions in an e-mail you are likely to get an answer to just one, and inevitably it addresses the question you care about least. Similarly, if you ask multiple people a question in an email, often nobody responds. That's why telephones are looking more convenient than ever to communicate with people. When you reach your party, the information you exchange could help you avoid several email exchanges. Even if you are routed to voice mail, the number of messages you are competing against will be far fewer than the e-mail queue. Plus, the sound of your voice can indicate the importance of the call, and eliminate confusion and misunderstandings often caused by e-mails. E-mail is here to stay, but often you can save time using the phone. Sometimes what's old is new again.

How To Spring Clean Your PC And Other Devices

Just like your house needs some freshening up for the spring months, your computers and other devices can also use a good sweeping from time to time.

For only \$99, we will have a trained expert perform a "Spring Cleaning" of your computer or network to make it run faster and with fewer problems. For only \$99 per PC or \$149 per server, we'll come onsite to perform a system maintenance check to:

- ⇒ Detect and remove hidden spyware
- ⇒ Check your privacy settings, firewall and network security
- ⇒ Perform various system checks and maintenance to speed up your computers and network
- ⇒ Block annoying pop-up ads and check your online security settings
- ⇒ Check for system errors, conflicts, or other problems
- ⇒ Verify your data backups

Normally we charge \$395 per server and \$199 per PC for this maintenance service, but it's yours for only \$149 and \$99. But you have to hurry...this special is only good through the end of May, so contact Joe Stoll today to arrange a date!

416-489-6312 x 204

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Thanks For The Kind Words...



“We were in need of extensive advice regarding all aspects of our computers, internal network, internet services, website development and e-mail services. Joe and his team are extremely knowledgeable, courteous and prompt.

We are very pleased we made the decision to choose The Technical Action Group. If you are looking for hassle-free IT solutions, take the time to talk to TAG”.

Reverend Craig Burton,
Superintendent, Eastern
Ontario District
The Pentecostal Assemblies
of Canada

How Small Businesses Should Budget For IT Expenses

A question that seems to come up a lot lately with clients and prospects, in some form or fashion, is “How should I properly budget for IT expenses?” While this is a great question, there are a lot of variables that determine the answer, so I can’t provide a “one-size-fits-all,” simple answer. However, below are some general guidelines that should help you figure this out:

| Category | Item | Unit | Quantity | Unit Price | Total |
|---------------|-------------------------------|------|----------|------------|----------|
| Hardware | Desktop PC | Unit | 10 | \$500 | \$5,000 |
| | Server | Unit | 2 | \$2,000 | \$4,000 |
| Software | Office Suite License | Unit | 10 | \$100 | \$1,000 |
| | Security Software License | Unit | 10 | \$100 | \$1,000 |
| Services | IT Support (Monthly) | Hour | 100 | \$50 | \$5,000 |
| | Network Maintenance (Monthly) | Hour | 50 | \$50 | \$2,500 |
| Miscellaneous | Printer | Unit | 5 | \$100 | \$500 |
| | Network Switch | Unit | 1 | \$1,000 | \$1,000 |
| Subtotal | | | | | \$20,000 |

Hardware Refresh

No one likes the cost of a network upgrade, but it IS necessary approximately once every 3 to 4 years. PCs and servers older than that tend to run slow, crash frequently and generally become more expensive to fix and support than to replace. Therefore, your budget should include an IT refresh of all equipment every 3 years to be on the safe side.

Maintenance

There is no “set it and forget it” when it comes to network maintenance. With cyber criminals becoming more sophisticated and aggressive, you MUST constantly monitor and update your network against cyber-attacks, malware, data loss, etc. A good general rule of thumb is between \$100 and \$300 per month for each server (depending on the complexity of the server) and \$25 to \$75 per month per PC for the complete suite of “best practice” preventative maintenance activities that will keep your servers and PC’s as stable, reliable and secure as possible, and make sure your backups are working.

These activities include (to name just a few) 24/7 monitoring of server and computer health, antivirus updates, spyware scans & deletion, temp file deletion, hard drive optimization, patch management, monitoring and regular testing of your backup system, etc.

Data Backup

Another expense you must account for is backing up your data to an offsite location (often called “cloud backup”). Since all businesses generate MORE data year after year, the backup will grow. Start by assessing the growth of your data over the last couple of years to uncover a trend. From there, forecast those additional expenses going forward at the same rate (don’t expect this to stay static year after year).

Expansion

Another factor for your IT budget is upgrading software, line of business applications, CRM systems and accounting packages that can no longer support your growing company. As your company grows, systems, processes and data become more complex requiring more sophisticated (and often more expensive) software and systems. Make sure you are looking ahead year upon year to see this coming and to properly budget for it. There’s no “magic” formula for this because the timing and cost of your upgrade is unique to your company, situation and what you are trying to accomplish.

IT Support

Many of our clients opt for our Professional Care Plan as an easy way to budget for day to day IT support. This program allows you to pay a fixed, monthly fee for unlimited remote computer support (we resolve over 90% of computer issues remotely).

For a no-obligation estimate on any of the above items, feel free to contact Joe Stoll at JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com or 416-489-6312 x 204.