Bits & Bytes

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

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TAG we're I.T.

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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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Inside this issue:

Do You Have Ghosts & Goblins In Your Computers?

7 Warning Signs That Your Computer Is Infected With Spyware

Spyware is NOT harmless; it can be responsible for delivering a mountain of annoying spam, taking over your web browser, slowing down your PC, and serving up "sticky" pop-up ads. In some of the more extreme cases, spyware can actually steal your passwords, financial information, e-mail address book, and even use your PC for illegal activities. Most spyware programs are designed to run undetected by the user, but there are warning signs like…

#1. Your browser has been hijacked. If you open your Internet browser and a strange looking homepage pops up and won't go away, chances are you have a spyware program installed on your computer. You may also discover that you cannot modify your browser settings and that your favourites folder has been modified.

#2. You conduct a search, but another (unauthorized) browser completes it for you. For example, you type a search term into Microsoft IE, but another browser pops up and lists various web sites tied to your search term. This is a surefire sign of a spyware infection. You'll also notice that if you try to remove this program, it comes right back.

#3. Your computer is unstable, sluggish, locks up, or crashes frequently. Spyware programs run in the background taking up disk space and processor speed which will cause serious performance problems.

#4. You constantly get pop-up ads displayed on your screen, even if you aren't browsing the Internet. Some of the ads may even be personalized with your name.

#5. The send and receive lights on your modem blink actively as though you are surfing the Internet or downloading files online, even though you aren't. More than likely this is due to spyware programs sending and receiving information via your computer without your permission or knowledge.

#6. Mysterious files suddenly start appearing on your computer, your files are moved or deleted, or the icons on your desktop and toolbars are blank or missing.

#7. You find e-mails in your "Sent Items" folder that you didn't send.

Shiny New Gadget Of The Month:

Nest Learning Thermostat

The Nest Learning Thermostat is an electronic, programmable, and self-learning wifi-enable thermostat that optimizes the heating and cooling of homes and businesses in order to conserve electricity. And if the company's claims are correct, this smart little device can save you 20% off your energy bill each year.

Nest is built around an operating system that allows interaction with the thermostat via its easy-to-use control wheel or through your iPhone, iPad, Android phone or computer. Control your thermostat anywhere with an easy-to-use interface. This smart thermostat can determine whether or not you're around or whether the sun is shining on the thermostat and instantly adjust accordingly—saving you money. There's no need to program your device either as Nest works to figure out your patterns and schedules to fit you. Since the Nest is connected to the Internet, you can instantly access your device settings or energy history and schedule from any device, anywhere. The company also pushes updates to your thermostat regularly to fix bugs, improve performance and add additional new features.

The Nest thermostat is available online for $249 at **www.nest.com**

If you are experiencing one or more of these warning signs, chances are your computer is infected so you'll want to call us immediately to clean it up. If you are fortunate enough to have a clean bill of health, you'll still want to get a copy of our **FREE Report**:

FREE:"How To Keep Your Computer Safe From Crippling Pop-ups, Viruses, Spyware, & Spam, While Avoiding Expensive Computer Repair Bills"

To claim your **FREE** Report go to **http://www.TechnicalActionGroup.com/guides/** Don't delay. Get the report today...and be worry-free from those computer ghosts and goblins in no time flat!

Cybercrime—What You Need To Know

We recently came across some alarming statistics regarding cybercrime that we would be remiss if we didn't share with you.

Symantec's 2013 Threat Report saw targeted attacks rise by 42%. Half of all attacks were aimed at small to medium sized businesses. There were an average of 166 attacks a day.

Facebook admitted last fall that hackers use stolen usernames and passwords to try to break into at least 600,000 accounts every day. That was how many Facebook attacks that were foiled. Facebook did not say how many attacks succeed. Malware activity has become so pervasive that organizations experience a malicious email file attachment or web link up to once every three minutes.

Cybercrime represents a $2 trillion annual business, representing 15 percent of the global production of goods and services, according to the United Nations. Crime always was a business. Now, the internet has made it possible to bring it directly into your home or business on a scale never conceived of before.

Why me, you say? Why would they attack my computers?

What you need to understand is that "they" are highly organized worldwide crooks. They want to get into your system, so they can get in your bank account and take your money. Then they want to use your computers and servers to get into other people's computers. Your system is but one of millions of computers that act as "robots" to control other systems.

All of this highlights that we are living in a different time and that awareness is now more important than ever. The most effective strategy with hackers and malware has always focused on the awareness of the user.

As always should you have any questions or concerns, call Joe at 416-489-6312 x 204 or **JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com**

5 Things To Look For In A Web Hosting Company

If websites are the new front door to your business, then what does that make your web hosting service? Your hosting service would theoretically be the neighborhood your business is located in. Therefore, even if your door is polished and your website content is good, a poor hosting service will detract customers like being located in the wrong part of town.

Shopping for a web hosting company can be as important as finding the right neighborhood for your business. There are several different types of hosting companies to choose from. You can go with a large provider, pick a local company that will work closely with you, or find a service that incorporates the best of both worlds. Here are 5 things to look for in a web hosting company that will help you find the service that's right for your business.

Timely Support

All websites require maintenance and support. You are dreaming if you think you can buy a website, set it up, and then never experience any downtime from a server. Even the best web hosting companies can only guarantee 99.9% uptime (another thing to look for). The key is to have good support in place to fix the impending problems. Timely support service provided by your hosting company will keep your website up and running and prevent expensive downtime. The more you lean on your website for your business, the more important timely service will be.

Parking Service

When managing your brand online, it's best practice to buy all the URL extensions with your company's name (.com, .net, .org, etc.--to be clear, etc. is not a URL type), along with misspelled domain names, hyphenated versions, and more. This tactic will help to protect your brand from market confusion and block competitors from buying similar looking URL's to distract from your message. Once you have purchased these addresses, you will want to find a web hosting company that will host them and keep them safe (aka, parking). If your market is local, you may not have to be overly concerned about URL parking.

Content Management Systems Capabilities

Content Management Systems (CMS) give you the capability to edit your website and make simple changes without having to hire a professional web designer for every little edit. There are many CMS platforms available, you will want to make sure your hosting provider is compatible with at least a few of them.

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The Best Personal Financial Software

If you have a lot going on with your financials, it's good to have solid software backing you up. Even if you don't have a lot of money, you might use something to keep track of your personal bank accounts, bills, and of course…taxes.

Using a computer to manage your finances is essential if you have a small business or even your personal finances. There's a lot of commercial options available for like Mint or arguably the most popular – Quicken. And some people just use Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.

If you don't want to spend your hard earned money to manage your money, there are free programs too like GnuCash or Microsoft Money Plus Sunset Home and Business.

Here are some other popular user choices:

YOU NEED A BUDGET

www.youneedabudget.com/

QUICKEN

www.quicken.intuit.ca/personal-finance-software/index.jsp

MICROSOFT MONEY PLUS SUNSET DELUXE

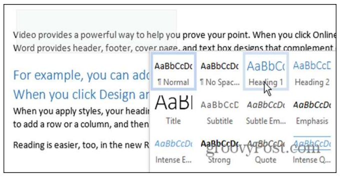
(My wife has been using the expired MS Money for years—she loves it, as a lot of loyal users do)

www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=20738

Outlook Tip:

How To Disable The Microsoft Office Live Preview Feature

When Microsoft launched Office 2007, it added a new feature called Live Preview. It allows you to hover over different formatting options in your documents to see how they will look. If you're moving from an older version of Office, you might find this feature disorientating and annoying. Luckily it's easy to disable.



Video provides a powerful way to help you prove your point. When you click Online
Word provides header, footer, cover page, and text box designs that complement

For example, you can add
When you click Design ar
When you apply styles, your headir
to add a row or a column, and then

Reading is easier, too, in the new R

Disable Live Preview Office 2010 & 2013

Click File > ***Options*** and under the General button uncheck "***Enable Live Preview***" — here you can also disable the Mini Toolbar if you don't like it either.

Disable Live Preview Office 2007

Click the Office button and go to ***Options***. Then select ***Popular*** in the left column and uncheck ***Enable Live Preview***. Personally, I find the Live Preview feature to be quite helpful, especially in Word. But if you need time to get used to it or if you simply don't like it, it's easy enough to disable.

5 Ways To Secure Your Business

When it comes to computers and other similar systems, many business owners know they have to think seriously about security. However, they often lack the time or funds to actually take the necessary steps to ensure their systems are as secure as they should be. The fact is that security can be as costly or as affordable as you make it out to be. There are certainly numerous security related steps you can implement that won't cost a fortune.

Here are five low-cost things you can do to ensure that your business is secure.

1. Communication is key Many companies take adequate steps to ensure that their systems are adequately protected. The thing is, many security breaches come from within the company. If your employees keep passwords written on pieces of paper that they leave lying around their desks, this is a security issue. It is a good idea to agree with employees where to keep important information and ensure they follow these rules.

Beyond that, if you implement security changes or new systems e.g., new virus scanning software, it is important that you talk to your staff to ensure they know how the system works and how they can use it. You would be surprised at how much effective communication can help to minimize security issues, and best of all? It's free!

2. Educate your staff One of the more common security issues comes from spam and malware found in emails. It is a good idea to educate your staff on how to spot these different types of emails and other malicious websites, as well as how to avoid them. It is worthwhile ensuring that your employees know their roles when it comes to security too. If you have a receptionist who you believe is responsible for ensuring the office is locked at the end of the night, take steps to ensure that this person understands their responsibilities. The same goes for computers your staff use: If they are responsible for conducting security scans let them know this. While this may take some time, the cost is low to free.

3. Keep track of your keys To ensure the security of your IT systems and your physical office, you should keep control of your keys. That is, both the physical keys and those associated with your software (the codes you enter to verify software and unlock full versions).

Keep track of which staff members have a key to the office and if possible number them. The goal here is to know where your keys are at any given time, and if a staff member changes employers make sure you ask for them back. Many software keys or licenses are single use only. If you invest in software and an employees steals this along with the key, you will likely have to purchase the software again. A good tip is to keep software keys secure and separate from the software itself. The best part about this step is that the cost of doing this is minimal.

4. Keep your software updated Hackers can be a lazy bunch. They will often target those with out of date software, because it's usually easier to hack. To reduce the chance of being hacked, you should take steps to ensure that your software is up-to-date. This includes your virus and malware scanners, as well as browsers and even software you don't use. Get your staff to perform a 'software audit' on their computers on a regular basis. This means going through their computer and properly uninstalling software that they don't use, while also taking time to ensure their system is completely updated. This step is easy to implement and will cost you next to nothing.

5. Keep important systems off site Many small to medium businesses keep their servers on site. While this is convenient as your systems are right there and easily accessible, this could also create a security issue. One way to minimize this is to work with an IT partner who can host your systems or servers off site or in the cloud. While this involves some cost, working with an IT partner could save you profits and productivity in the long run, as good providers will ensure that your systems are secure and working properly. However, as with all things "Cloud", speed of your internet access (bandwidth) can make this solution cost prohibitive. Alternately, make sure your equipment is locked in a secure area of your office.