

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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Even If You Have Just ONE XP Computer Still Running In Your Business, You MUST Give It The Boot—NOW!

My long-time readers have read my countless articles over the past 1 1/2 years warning of the end of Microsoft’s support of Windows XP, and what can happen if you don’t upgrade your XP computers to Windows 7 or 8. For my new readers, here’s a bit of a rehash...



April 8, 2014 signified the end of life for Windows XP. This meant that Microsoft stopped releasing security updates, patches, or system updates that are necessary to protect your XP computers AND your entire network from viruses, malware, spyware, crashes, and theft of personal information. This means that your computer network is now increasingly vulnerable to serious hacker attacks aimed at taking control of your network, stealing data, crashing your systems and inflicting a host of other business-crippling problems you do NOT want to deal with.

In the 5+ months that Microsoft has been releasing updates for their supported operating systems (Windows 7 / 8 / 8.1), there would have been around 50 updates that, if XP was still supported by Microsoft, would have been released for XP. These updates would have fixed new vulnerabilities discovered in Windows XP that would have protected against the types of tactics that we’re seeing from our clients that have the odd XP machine kicking around.

It’s important to note that XP is a target now specifically because it’s no longer being updated and criminal hackers know XP’s are becoming increasingly more vulnerable. With every passing month you use an XP computer, it’s like shooting into an empty net. And don’t be fooled into believing that your antivirus software is keeping your XP protected. The vulnerabilities from XP due to lack of updates cannot be protected against by your antivirus. Relying on antivirus on an XP machine is akin to expecting no one to be able to break into a locked building with broken windows.

The above only covers the risks contained within the XP computer itself. Of even greater concern and risk is that an XP machine can be a launch point for a serious hacker or virus attack from the inside of your network. Here’s how it would work: An infection gets control of an XP machine and now it uses the user who logs onto that computer as its escort to connect to servers and other computers on the network, effectively opening a whack of doors for the infection to run around your entire network and create havoc.

A Cautionary (One Week Old) Tale From One Of Our Own Clients...

Against our better advice, a few of our clients have not yet upgraded all of their XPs. For one of these clients, we received an alert from our 24/7 monitoring tools that there was suspicious activity on their server. We investigated immediately and identified that one of their XP computers which is located on their internal network, was launching an attack against their server. This attack was at a stage where it did not affect the server performance yet, so our client wasn’t even aware the attack was happening when we called to alert them of the attack.

Shiny Gadget Of The Month:



Jawbone UP

UP is a system, wristband + mobile app that tracks how you sleep, move and eat so you can know yourself better, make smarter choices and feel your best. Jawbone UP (and UP24, for those who like Bluetooth capabilities and real-time syncing with the app) helps you understand how you sleep, move and eat so you can make smarter choices; this little wristband keeps you in touch with your body and on top of your health.

The new app displays movement and sleep, details and delivers insights, celebrates milestones and challenges you to make each day better. You can even team up with your friends in the UP app and share your accomplishments!

Because you can achieve anything when you take it one day at a time, the UP Insight Engine suggests daily goals based on your unique patterns. Go further, stay hydrated and sleep better for a sense of accomplishment each and every day. Get your Jawbone UP at www.jawbone.com/up for \$129.99.

However had this attack not been identified by us as quickly as it was, this would have resulted in a significant performance issue for the entire network and their server, rendering their entire staff unable to work for possibly days. Luckily (and I say “luckily” only because they weren’t brought down for days) it “only” cost them upwards of 12 hours of our professional services to clean the infected XP and check each of the remaining computers and servers on the network to verify that they were not infected. “Luckily” this all happened on a Friday afternoon so we got to work Friday early evening and all day Saturday to clean up the havoc that the XP inflicted on the server. As our cleanup occurred outside of our client’s business hours, they didn’t have any downtime. Thankfully. Had the incident occurred earlier in the week, their entire network would have been down for AT LEAST one full day. Still, better than the worst case scenario of being out for days, had our 24/7 monitoring tools not given us the heads up that something was amiss, which in turn enabled us to identify the infection BEFORE it invited ALL of its trouble-making friends and wreak more havoc.

Sure, it would be more lucrative for my company if all our clients left an XP or 2 in production, but believe me when I say I don’t want to see anyone risk their business needlessly. Sure computers aren’t cheap to replace, but they are easy to replace – and a LOT less expensive than thousands of dollars of lost productivity, lost sales opportunities, and computer support bills when that XP runs amuck and brings down your entire network.

This was a hard lesson for our clients to learn (and a bit of a heartbreaker for us to bear witness to), but I just had to share it with my readers to reinforce the potential dangers of leaving XP’s around. I know it’s easy to ignore warnings before anything happens but let this article be a cautionary tale to what IS happening and PLEASE get rid of those XP’s!

Which brings me to my favourite rant...

Urgent Message For Anyone Not On Our TAGuard Peace of Mind Backup and Disaster Recovery Solution

If you are not on our #1 preferred backup solution, please take 2 minutes to read this article as it contains a very important message regarding your company’s backup and your ability to be up and running fast in the event of a data-erasing natural disaster, server failure, virus attack (even if you don’t have XP’s kicking around, it still happens!) or other “digital crisis.” And since September is National Disaster Preparedness Month (it’s a real thing!) I felt this was an appropriate time to remind you about my pet topic.

More than 6 years ago, we discovered a tremendous backup and disaster recovery system. When we first found this solution, I was skeptical that it could deliver protection and security of an enterprise-worthy caliber for a price easily afforded by small business. But after doing a ton of research and testing, we found that this is by far an absolute necessity for all companies concerned at all about securing their computer data.

While many backup systems are “good,” there are a lot of problems with many older, inferior systems. Problems such as:

- ⇒ Not backing up ALL of your critical data off-site.}
- ⇒ If a problem were to disable your server(s), it could cost thousands to restore and would take a few days (minimum) to get you back up and running.
- ⇒ It may not back up open files or do continuous backups; that means you could lose an entire day’s worth of work if something goes wrong.
- ⇒ You have to do something manually in the process, leaving room for human error.

That's why I want to make the switchover a no-brainer for you. **When you replace your old backup system with this one by November 15, 2014, we will:**

1. Waive the setup fee (normally \$400 – \$1,000, depending on how many servers you have).
2. Give you up to 10% off the first 6 months of backup storage fees. And considering this off-site backup is already much cheaper than most, you're going to save a ton of money.

This is not about us making money – it's about YOU having the right backup to make sure you never have to deal with the costs and devastation of being “out of business” and without your data.

Contact Joe Stoll today to get protected! JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com or 416-489-6312 x 204.

Lynda Can Help Your Company Soar

With ever changing technology and all the tools that are supposed to make our jobs “easier”, it seems that more than ever, employees are left struggling to get a grasp on how to use applications and are probably being half as productive as they could be if they knew how to comfortably use the tools, and master them. And because they haven't mastered current applications versions, they're scared to upgrade and consequently not benefiting from the time-saving features that upgraded applications offer (i.e. Sally never really learned how to use Office 2010, so she's dreading having 2013 forced upon her and when it is (and unless you've provided her with professional grade training), she's even less productive than on 2010.

Personal training consultants can be expensive and so too can time away from the office sending your employees to classroom offsite training during the day. This is where on-line training is a great cost effective alternative – in particular Lynda.com. Learn how it can help your business, your staff, and even yourself. You've probably heard of “online” or “video” training”, but do you know how invaluable it could be to your staff's productivity and ultimately your bottom line? Read on to learn how Lynda can help.

Promote Professional Development- Rely on Lynda.com to provide employees with professional growth opportunities 24/7. Help anyone at any skill level pursue their goals, gain new skills, or comply with learning requirements. Books go out of date, off-site training is expensive and inconvenient, and searching on the Internet yields unpredictable results. Change the way your organization learns. Offer the ability to watch thousands of bite-size tutorials for immediate problem solving or comprehensive courses on hundreds of topics from start to finish.

From Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Suite applications to time management, leadership fundamentals, and more, Lynda's vast online library of on-demand instructional videos covers a wide range of software, creative, and business skills.

Close Skills Gaps—Overcome the challenges presented by new technologies, employee turnover, and other factors that contribute to knowledge gaps within an organization. Bring your workforce up to date with the latest software, creative, and business skills.

Lynda.com online training gives anyone at any skill level the ability to grow professionally and help a team, department, company, or agency stay productive. From Microsoft Office and Adobe Creative Suite applications to time management, leadership fundamentals, and more, Lynda's vast online library of instructional videos offers training on hundreds of topics.

Give users the ability to watch comprehensive courses from start to finish or strategic chunks for immediate problem solving. Taught by expert instructors, Lynda is a cost-effective alternative to off-site classes or consultants.

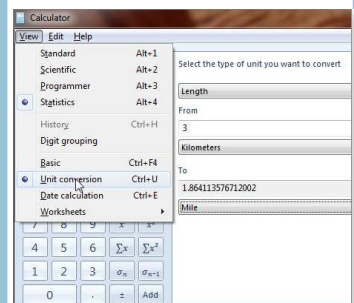
Do Much More Than Simple Arithmetic With Your Windows Calculator

A much overlooked Windows 7/8 tool is the seemingly simple Calculator. It does much more than add/subtract/divide/multiply; Microsoft has effectively hidden the app's many advanced functions under the View menu. There you'll find options for scientific, programming, and statistical calculations.

Even less known is a units-conversion screen associated with each type of calculator (see Figure). You can make quick conversions in 11 different units of measurement, ranging from Angle to Weight/Mass. A related **Date calculation** quickly gives you the number of days or the years/months/weeks/days between any two calendar dates, starting with the year 1700.

The Calculator app included with Windows 7 and 8 lets you do units conversions and other advanced calculations.

Clicking the Worksheets option lets you calculate mortgages, vehicle leases, or fuel economy.



Scam Alert! Be Aware of "Domain Registry of Canada"

A couple of our clients received a Domain Name Expiration Notice in the mail recently from a company purporting to be the "Domain Registry of Canada". The letter informed our clients that their domain name registration was set to expire on a specific date. The letter set out an authentic looking url with our client's name and a cost savings table for 2 and 5 year renewals or the url. The renewal prices were fairly reasonable at \$70 for two years, and \$160 for 5 years.

Our clients (smartly) sent the letters to us for direction. We verified who our clients had their domains registered with and as no one had them registered with "Domain Registry of Canada", we did some additional digging which revealed that the Better Business Bureau received more than 30 complaints about the "Domain Registry of Canada" in the last 3 years. Likely that's only a tiny fraction of the number of people they attempted, and successfully scammed because businesses are too overwhelmed with the day to day to question the authenticity of the letter, and they don't even know all the domains they own.

Always send any renewal notifications, expiry notices, or anything tech-related that asks for a call to action, whether in the way of payment, or activation, to your IT provider for review. We are in a much better position to confirm its legitimacy, saving you from potential scammers, hackers, or in this case, plain old scammers after your money.

Ease IT migrations- Rely on Lynda during technology initiatives. When it's time for a software migration, our vast online library of instructional videos can help anyone at any skill level quickly get up to speed with a wide range of new tools including email, operating systems, and mobile devices. Extend training across teams, departments, or your entire organization. Turn users into power users and ease the burden on your IT help desk.

Give employees comprehensive courses they can watch from start to finish or bite-size tutorials for immediate problem solving. Share custom course playlists to suggest or assign individualized learning paths. Taught by expert instructors, Lynda.com online training is a cost-effective alternative to off-site classes or consultants and can help ensure a successful software rollout.

<http://www.lynda.com/>

Don't Stoke The Flames— Build A Firewall



It's no secret that the Internet is full of dangerous activity. Too many people think their networks are safe without any kind of protection. We don't mean to say that the Internet isn't safe, but that it's only as safe as you make it for yourself. In order to keep your small business safe, you should implement protective software, like a firewall. A firewall can help keep your company safe from online threats, and believe us when we say that a bit of protection goes a long way.

What Do They Do?

A firewall analyzes the data packets that flow in and out of a network, and acts as a security measure against anything that could damage your computer. Essentially, it's a barrier between your computer network and a threat that is deemed unsafe and insecure. In most cases, this network will likely be the Internet. Firewalls come in a variety of strengths. They're able to investigate strange network traffic, validate connection and data packets, check that application data is real or not, and perform a cavity search on all messages flying in and out of a network. They're constantly being updated to combat threats, but that doesn't make them invincible.

What Don't They Do?

The firewall might be able to stop some dangerous activity, but there are a lot of other things that firewalls don't stop. For those who want to take advantage of this protection, it's important to understand what firewalls can block and what they can't block. Malicious software such as viruses, spyware, adware, and phishing scams are able to walk straight through the flames and burn your computer. They also can't help you against infected email attachments and they don't block spam, which is both annoying and counterproductive.

So, What Can I Do?

One security solution that we can offer your company, as well as a strong firewall along with other powerful security tools, is a Unified Threat Management (UTM) solution. Whereas most firewalls that come with a PC only offer meager protection for the computer it came installed upon, a UTM solution is a network tool that will provide your business with a secure firewall designed to protect every computer on your network.

UTMs come in different shapes and sizes depending on how many computers you have on your network and what the network traffic looks like. Technical Action Group can equip your business with a UTM that will fit your company's security needs, and we can even provide your business with a free network security audit to locate the holes in your current firewall. You can think of TAG like a firefighter for your technology, extinguishing the worst digital fires so that your business doesn't get burned! Contact Joe Stoll at JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com or 416-489-6312 x 204 to learn more.