

How Small Businesses Can Use Information Technology to Improve their Performance

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What are the benefits of using Information Technology effectively?

- Improved profits
- Improved customer service
- Improved vendor relations
- Improved employee morale and satisfaction
- Reduced overtime
- Faster training of new employees
- Improved quality of life for the owner/manager

Goals for Technology:

- A system that handles all transactions - quotes, orders, shipments, payments, etc.
- Files/databases of all customers, employees, vendors, leads, prospects, etc
- Ability to quickly answer a question about any transaction or customer, vendor, etc.
- Ability to analyze results over time
- Right hardware, software, & business practices
- Security protection from viruses, spyware, and theft
- Disaster Recovery Plan (Business Continuity Plan) including data backup offsite
- Relationship with appropriate technology service provider
- Effective Internet use

Software

- Office Suites
 - Microsoft Office
 - Corel WordPerfect Office
 - Sun Microsystems Open Office(Star Office)
- CRM, Contact Management
 - ACT, Goldmine, MS Outlook, MS Business Contact Manager
- Accounting Software
 - What is accounting software?
 - Software that takes care of your accounting and the rest of your business
 - A complete information system for your business that also does your accounting
 - Choices
 - Basic accounting products (Quickbooks, Peachtree, MYOB)
 - Mid range (BusinessWorks)
 - High End (ACCPAC, MAS90, MAS200, Great Plains (Microsoft))
 - Most of the Accounting Software products have industry specific versions
Some examples:
 - Construction
 - Retail
 - Manufacturing
 - Wholesale
 - Many of the Accounting Software products have products that can be added on or linked to the base product for a specific industry

- Vertical Market Software
 - Software designed for a specific industry or similar industries
Some examples:
 - Medical
 - Dental
 - Industrial Distribution
 - Construction
 - Plastics Injection Molding
 - Legal
 - Retail Sporting Goods, Shoes, Apparel
 - Interior Design
- Custom Software
- How do you decide what is best? Where do you look?
 - Web sites:
 - www.accountingsoftwareworld.com
 - www.aicpa.org/pubs/jofa/sep2003/johnston.htm
 - CTS offer directories for a fee at www.ctsguides.com
 - Accounting, Manufacturing, CRM, Medical, Small Business
 - Their Small Business Guide covers:
 - BusinessVision
 - Netledger Advanced Accounting
 - BusinessWorks Gold
 - QuickBooks Pro
 - Microsoft Business Solutions
 - Small Business Manager
 - Peachtree Complete Accting plus Time & Billing
 - MYOB Complete Accounting
 - Professional Societies sometimes publish lists or directories of software
 - Magazines or Journal of professional societies
 - Steel Fabrication
 - Construction
 - Industrial Distributor
- Internet search on "software surveys"
- How do you evaluate products and software companies?
 - Software sales rep or reseller gives you a demo
 - Obtain a demo or evaluation copy and try it
 - Ask for 5 references from businesses that do what you do and are the same size
 - Call the 5 references and ask a series of questions - see Reference Checklist
- Who will install and support the software?
 - You or your staff
 - Software company
 - Software reseller
 - Consultant who is recommended by the software company

Computer Hardware

- desktop vs. notebook
notebooks - road warrior, desktop replacement or both
- monitors crt vs. flat panel
viewable size issue
- data storage dvd 4.7gb
dvd double recording to 94.gb
combo drive with dvd burner & cd burner
- hard drives pc internal speed 5400 rpm 7200 rpm 10000 rpm
- file servers mirrored hard drives
- network attached storage (NAS)
Quantum
Snapserver
Snappliance
Adaptec
- flash drives, thumb drives, memory stick
- pc purchase strategy that I use for clients:

buy only business class pc's
buy with 3-year warranty with on site next business day parts/labor
replace after 3 to 4 years, or, replace the hard drive

Technology Service Providers

Network Specialists

- Install & maintain network file servers, network operating systems, network components, & network cabling
- May also sell equipment and network operating systems like Microsoft Windows 2003 Server or Novell Netware
- May also sell, install & support pc's
- May also sell, install & support commonly used software:
MS Office
MS Exchange (network email)
- Normally configure and support data backup, system maintenance & upgrades

PC Support Tech Specialists

- Install, maintain & support personal computers and office software
- Do not have the training or skills to install & support network file servers

Custom Software Developers

- Design, program and install custom software
- Will often design & program custom software add-ons or modifications to commercial software products

Systems Integrators/VARS/Resellers

- Sell, install & support a package of related products:
- Some software product(Accounting, Retail, Medical, etc)

- Have a sales reseller agreement with the software company
- Also sell, install & maintain network file server and any other technology components the customer may need
- They are just like the Network Specialist but include some specific software product
- Will often offer training and software modifications for the software
- May have multiple software products:
for example, I have worked with a firm that is a reseller for these products:

Software Trainers

- Offer installation & training for a specific software product
- May also offer support

Web Designers

- Will design, install & maintain web sites
- May not have the skills to develop web sites with an interactive database

Web Developers

- Will design, develop, install & maintain web sites that have an interactive database

Multimedia Developers

- Focus on design and development of web products that have a multimedia content such as motion & sound
- Used for training, education & product support

Technology Firms

- Firms may offer a single focused service, or, may offer several services and and several different skill sets on staff

Data Backup

- backup to tape, cd-r, cd-rw, dvd-r
- take backup media offsite
- remote backup service like eVault & LiveVault

Disaster Recovery Plan/Business Continuity Plan

1970 disaster recovery - recover computer files

1980 disaster presentation - prevent disruption, fire, theft

1988 continuous availability - keep system running during a disaster

1990 business continuity planning - plan for space and people needs as well as computer processing during a disruption to keep the business running

Security

Virus protection

- Norton Internet Security, McAfee, CA
- pc based
- network version

Spyware protection

- Webroot Spysweeper
- Computer Associates PestPatrol
- Spybot Search & Destroy
- Adaware

Firewall either hardware or software

Acceptable use policy

Internet Issues

web options

online brochure

content site

e-commerce site some optios: Shopfactory Pro, Yahoo Small Business

message or discussion board to create an online community

email

use your domain name in your email address, jv@vangsness.com.

shows that you have a domain name and maybe a web site, and many people will go to web site just by seeing your email address

Other

voice over IP

calls through the internet

example: Skype at www.skype.com

on line meetings

Webex, Groove, Verosee

remote access
or remote support

PC Anywhere
gotomypc
win xp option
Windows terminal services

Resources

Web sites

www.news.com
www.smallbusinesscomputing.com

Newspapers

Chicago Tribune James Coates article on Mondays
New York Times
Wall Street Journal On Technology, Walter Mossberg on Thurs in Sec B

Books

Information Technology for SMB's

Technology Solutions for Growing Businesses

Author: Ray, Ramon

Managing Information Technology in Small Business: Challenges & Solutions

by Stephen Burgess (Editor)

Backup & Business Continuity Planning

Contingency Planning and Disaster Recovery : A Small Business Guide

by Donna R. Childs, Stefan Dietrich

The Backup Book: Disaster Recovery from Desktop to Data Center

by Dorian Cougias, E. L. Heiberger, Karsten Koop

Internet Marketing for Small Business

Low-Budget Online Marketing

by Holly Berkley

Small Websites, Great Results

by Doug Addison