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Upcoming Events

CT Thanksgiving

Join us for a Thanksgiving Lunch Open House. We are collecting donations for a local food pantry. Please help us by bringing non-perishable food items or a cash donation.

Date: Thursday Nov. 19, 2009

Time: 11:00pm -1:00pm

5 TECHNOLOGY DECISION MAKING NUGGETS



Scott Hirschfeld

Making IT decisions is a challenge we all face as business owners and managers. Technology is always changing, business needs change, and predicting the future needs of a company can be difficult.

Here are 5 nuggets of truth that I have found essential over the years when evaluating technology decisions.

Think long term, but not too long term. As we all know, technology changes almost daily. This makes the process of choosing a solution more difficult. Technology improves and prices go down. There is a productivity cost of replacing and upgrading and a productivity loss due to failing to replace technology. There is a balance to knowing what the right high-tech versus price trade-off is.

One of the areas where this trade-off is emphasized is in purchasing tape backup equipment. Because this technology changes rapidly and tape drives are still very mechanical, it is sometimes smart to buy a smaller tape drive with the anticipation of replacing it at 2.5 or 3 years old. The tape drive options for the initial purchase might be \$1300 for the lower capacity that will last the company for 3 years, and \$4000 for the higher capacity that will meet the data needs of the company for an anticipated 4 or 5 years. However, after 3 years, the technology cost

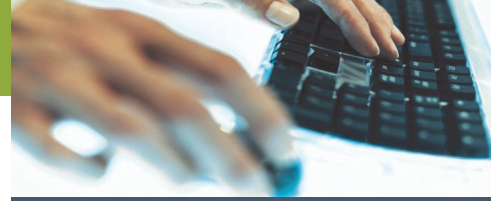
of the larger drive will have dropped to \$1600 and will be faster and more efficient. It actually makes sense in this case to buy small and plan to upgrade later.

A word of caution here, "buy small and upgrade later" is most often the wrong choice. Buying on the high end of the technology spectrum usually improves productivity, reduces costly labor to upgrade, and means less interruption to the work process.

Your people are your most important and your most expensive asset. Those of you who look at the dollars spent each month know that the bulk of the monthly outflow of dollars usually goes to keeping our employees. And, most of you probably recognize that employees are really what drive a company and keep it moving and growing. In spite of this realization, we often don't think in terms of how to make our employees as productive as possible.

Manufacturing companies talk about being "lean" and doing things efficiently. Often "lean" only affects the production process and we forget to carry this way of doing business into the office as well. Much of what technology does for a company enables the employee and improves their efficiency. If the manual process of doing things is





lengthy, it is time to look for technology to automate. If we can use technology to save each employee just 20 minutes per day, it will save 86 hours per year and if we use a very conservative average of \$25/hour for employee cost with benefits, that means we have saved over \$2,164.00. This just underlines the need to make sure your technology is not slowing down your most valuable asset! How much is your old outdated equipment or lack of technology costing you in employee time?

Professionals need professional grade tools.

A carpenter friend of mine was recently helping me with a project at my house. As we talked and worked, he told me that one of the newer things in the carpenter's world are titanium hammers. These hammers run from \$90 to about \$300. It seems strange that carpenters find value in these hammers, particularly when you can buy a good steel hammer for about \$35. So where is the value? The titanium hammer is lighter and allows the carpenter to work more quickly. It actually reduces the time required to drive a nail. It also reduces stress to the hand and arm because it transfers the blow more directly to a nail. All of this does not matter to the occasional home project user, but to a professional who uses a hammer daily, titanium is rapidly becoming the tool of choice. Titanium saves time and saves on stress to the carpenter's body.

This example illustrates the benefit of professional grade tools for professional users. Our employees who sit at their desk all day are professional computer users. The keyboards, PCs and network that they use are their tools. Do we give as much thought to the tools that they are using as the carpenter gives to his? Are we asking them to build a house with a \$19.95 Skil saw when the right tool is a \$500 professional grade compound sliding miter saw? It may be time to evaluate the tools your users have and look for more efficient ones. It may also be time to consider whether the tools they have are maintained properly, particularly if the equipment has slowed down over time. You may be losing money in employee productivity and not even be aware of it.

Support is critical and has more than one angle. There is a question that comes up

frequently in the technology world. It goes something like, "Does it really matter if I don't have the latest in software or the latest equipment?" This can be a complex question, and the answer is most often "Yes, it matters".

What kind of support can one get for the old software and does it matter? If the software is your line of business software, it likely will matter. If you cannot get help when you have a glitch, real trouble can result. If the software is your server operating system, it is a gamble. It is likely your support provider can still work on it. But, what if a tough problem comes along and outside support is required? Or what happens to the skills of your support people over time if nobody is using the software anymore? If it is business critical, staying up-to-date is essential and also provides a great deal of peace of mind.

The other angle here is that as we continue to use older technology it becomes less compatible with other software that we may need to add, more difficult to share information with other companies, and harder to keep our own employees engaged. There is a real benefit in all these areas to staying up-to-date.

Cutting edge is good, bleeding edge hurts.

So this one is easy! And it is one of my favorites. Being at the forefront of technology can really give your company an edge over the competition. In most cases, it will make your people more efficient, reduce your expenses in the long run, and help maintain a progressive, on the ball, company attitude. However, almost nobody wants to be on the bleeding edge. Make sure that someone else has forged their way through the new technology you are considering first, and make sure you trust the provider to get you through the tough spots in implementing a new solution.

Scott Hirschfeld is Vice-President of CTAccess/Computer Technologies of Wisconsin, Send him a note! Let him know what principles guide your technology decisions and if this article was of value. If you would like help evaluating where you are and laying out a technology plan, please contact Scott. scotth@ctaccess.com or 262-789-8210

EYE ON IT Cool Tools

Pandora really isn't a tool, but it is cool. It is a personalized internet radio station. You tell Pandora your favorite songs or artists, and it creates a station that plays just that. Your kind of music. You can listen to Pandora on the web or on the go. You can create up to 100 unique stations depending on what music you might feel like listening to. QuickMix plays you a mix of all the stations you have created. You can rate songs and bookmark favorite artists and songs. Or tell Pandora you are tired of a song or ban an artist. Use the thumbs up or thumbs down to tell Pandora to play a song again or not to play it again. You are limited to 40 hours of free music per month or upgrade to Pandora One for \$36 yearly for unlimited, advertising free music. Check it out at www.pandora.com

SOFTWARE Monthly Picks



Attach Plus is a great tool for generating and attaching a PDF or ZIP file to your email. You can use the Attach Plus print driver to email PDF snapshots from any application with printing capabilities. Easily password protect and encrypt sensitive documents for the highest level of security. You can choose to attach your document to a pre-existing email message or create a new mail message. If you need to email documents from more than one application in the same email, no problem. Attach Plus allows you to quickly and easily email confidential information. For more information on Attach Plus email info@ctaccess.com.