

There's an old adage in the car business - Don't wait for something to go wrong before you take a look under the hood! The same thought process should apply to your technology systems. A small "tune up" every once in a while is a good use of time, though it may not be your favorite activity. With summer here, you may have a little more time to assess the use of technology in your business. It seems you can't run a business these days without dealing with issues involving hardware, software, backup systems, servers, network security... and the list goes on.

So is it worth your time? Most of us are comfortable with computers and may have learned more than we ever wanted to know about networking and telecom terms to keep our businesses current. But these days an effective business owner or manager needs to weed through the fluff and find real value for technology investment. Besides picking up the latest iPhone, iPad or Blackberry, there are lots of tools available today that some thought were "bleeding edge" even five years ago: "Voice over IP", "Cloud Computing" "Virtualization", and "Unified Communications" to name a few. Large businesses have been using these technologies for years, yet the perceived value to small to medium businesses (SMB's) hasn't been apparent in many cases.

Many of these innovations are able to free up resources for business and really can save a LOT of money in the long run, not to mention relieve the distraction it causes from running your operation's core functions. Weeding through the "geek speak" can be time consuming and frustrating to deal with but the important thing to remember is that you don't need to overhaul all of your business technology all at once.

Take some baby steps!

- Make sure your antivirus software is up to date and get patches for your essential software.
- Learn how to clean up and "defrag" your company's computers.
- Hire summer help to scan those old paper files into digital. College students need the experience and you need the help.
- Make a data backup plan if you haven't already. What would happen if you lose all those files?
- Review your Contracts. Take a look and see if you have the right plan for your business. Costs for phone lines, internet and TV have been dropping lately.

One example of a sticky subject for most new clients we talk to is faxing. How many faxes does your staff deal with in a day, in a week, in a month? I'm surprised how many businesses are unable to wean themselves from the traditional "hard copy" fax machine even when there are inexpensive solutions that enable them to send and receive faxes via email.

Computer and communications equipment has never been faster, better or cheaper. Affordable technology can really level the playing field giving smaller firms a chance to compete with much larger firms with more resources. With the latest downturn in the economy still bearing down on many smaller organizations, leaders are increasingly looking for "do it yourself" solutions including business optimization and "word of mouth" marketing. For example, are you happy with your own website? Take a look at it from an outsider's perspective if you can; it may be time for some updates and enhancements. Most IT pros will give you a their opinion and tip you off to some inexpensive ways to enhance your web "presence".