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Talking About Technology: Seven technology mistakes to avoid

By Marc Berthiaume

Many executives take for granted the technology needed for their businesses. They may listen to friends who recommend certain software, or think their home computer is right for the office, or decide to spend less on technology because they have a lot of expenses.

What's missing? What's missing is this: Technological issues should be tops on the list of business owners' considerations. Avoidance can lead to low productivity and profits.

Following are ways to avoid the seven most common technology mistakes that business owners make.

1. Set goals for what the technology should accomplish — completion of operational tasks or fulfillment of customer orders, for example. They must consider related technology issues like user training, impact on staff, data backup and technology costs so educated choices are made and costly mistakes avoided.

2. Avoid installing computer hardware and software without consulting a tech professional. The role of the business owner should be company leader, not technology leader. You should hire knowledgeable tech professionals who have experience with companies like yours and work together with them, apprising them of specific needs and making sure technology goals are met. It's also wise to appoint an information technology manager or work with a technology adviser to oversee day-to-day and future technology needs. Such professionals have the expertise to manage technology and avoid expensive errors.

3. Don't fail to understand the impact of new technology on staff or consider necessary technology training. Many businesses implement new technology without much warning to users. Inevitably, the result is confusion, resentment and loss of productivity. Smart business owners ask staff what technology they need and how they intend to use it. New technology is accepted quickly and easily if users have input.

4. Don't underestimate costs. New technology usually costs more than the price of hardware and software. Business owners should consider planning and management costs, staff training, tech professionals' fees, software licensing fees and costs of operations and maintenance.

5. Above all, don't neglect backup and documentation. This cannot be stressed enough. As mentioned in a previous article, backup and documentation are crucial to disaster recovery. They're also important when implementing technology systems. In the technological world, things beyond our control can corrupt systems and lose data. If data is backed up, catastrophes are avoided. Backup testing ensures that the process works and data can be restored. Accurate technology documentation safeguards the continuance of necessary tasks like payroll and reports. Documenting these processes enables a staff member to perform tasks in another's absence.

6. Purchase a reputable anti-virus solution and update regularly. Computer viruses can wipe out systems and put companies out of business. New business owners should update regularly — it's usually quick and easy. The cost of fixing systems damaged by viruses is high, not to mention the high cost of the downtime caused by the viruses.

7. Carefully choose a Web host and/or choose a Web design solution that can be easily changed. Excellent service and tech support are key to choosing an Internet service provider. Business owners should ask for



references and ask questions before making a choice. An ISP should have knowledgeable techs to provide solutions to complex (shopping carts) or simple (deleting e-mail accounts) Web site needs, as well as fast response to problems so your site is always up and running — and your customers always have access. Remember: The Web hosts who provide unsurpassed service are the ones who are most successful.

As for Web design, of course you need a good-looking layout and interesting content to convey your brand image. But also make sure the Web designers are capable, affordable and accessible for site overhauls or simple updates. If you plan to make changes in-house, they should know this and design the site with an easy-to-use program.

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