

What Value Do You Place on Technology?

By Alan M. Buckwalter

In the 1980s many businesses survived with minimal technology, but that's certainly not true in today's market. The average office technology toolkit contains one or more computers, a fax machine, scanner, copier, mobile phone, PDA or other type of smartphone ... and more.

Can you imagine running a small business without these basic tools? Could your business survive without them? Probably not. This is not surprising, but what is surprising is when you ask many business owners to quantify their technology budget, they don't often know the answer. The same executives or office managers can typically tell you their budget for advertising, travel, dining, legal (and other professional services), and even office supplies. So, why don't they know their technology cost? In many cases, it's because technology was not included in the business plan.

A Feb. 2007 article from *NJ Entrepreneur.com* states, "A well thought out business plan is essential to every successful business. A complete business plan should include sections for finance, personnel, marketing, production and technology. Technology

can improve the results of every other element of your plan."

Unfortunately, many small businesses treat technology as an afterthought. It



may be given a low priority or treated as a discretionary expense. This approach can hinder progress and efficiency, *increase* operating expenses and create barriers between clients and vendors. Andrea Peiro, president of the Small Business Technology Institute, San Jose, California says, "Many small-business owners are slow to adopt technology because of the expense and the time it takes to learn and install new systems. That's a mistake. Technology has moved from a plus — a competitive

advantage — to a requirement."

An excerpt from "Tackling Technology in Your Business Plan" from *Inc.com*, Sept. 2000 states, "Every business

needs technology. Even if your company makes old-fashioned chocolate chip cookies, you'll rely on technology to handle most routine business operations, from maintaining financial records, to processing orders, to staying in contact with suppliers and customers. Because technology is so central to running a business today, you need to plan what technology you will use and how you will use it."

Consider the most common uses of technology: email, faxing, scheduling, document and spreadsheet processing, office collaboration, contact management, book-keeping, accounting

and other functions, all of which can often be satisfied with off-the-shelf-products. "Vertical" applications, or technology devices, geared toward a particular industry (e.g. medical, legal, accounting, etc.) are also becoming readily available as demand increases. The availability of custom solutions, for those small businesses that need them, is also on the rise and requires planning to implement.

Technology has introduced a wealth of business benefits, including efficiency

and scalability, and is increasingly cost effective. If you teach a computer a task once, it doesn't require additional training to repeat the job over and over again. A by-product of this is data retention. Data is power. Maximizing your time, with the help of a computer to help analyze your information, is essential. This should also be part of your plan.

Planning out your business technology strategy includes setup, configuration and maintenance. Historical data has shown that more than 40 percent of small businesses have left this responsibility to the business owner. The owner's time could be better spent growing the business and meeting with clients and prospects.

Studies have shown that, on average, 50 percent of small businesses do not adequately backup their systems, and of those that do, more than 80 percent never test them. Should you lose your data, not having a tested backup system could have devastating effects on your business. It could mean lost time and money while recovering information.

Starting, owning and managing a small business isn't easy. To be successful, you must make use of the best and most cost effective resources that you can, within the company's operating budget. This is true for all aspects and at all stages of the business. You probably wouldn't ask your plumber to manage your finances, so when it comes to technology, it is important to spend adequate time and get some professional help developing and executing your plan.

The decisions you make when planning and implementing technology in your business will have great impact on its success. Technology, however, is often the last area we consider when planning for the future. To avoid making this mistake, seek help from a qualified professional.

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Tips for Improving Personal and Professional Communication

By Paul Anovick

Does the expression, "What we've got here is a failure to communicate" from the 1967 Paul Newman movie "Cool Hand Luke" resonate with you? If so, you're not alone. Many of us find communicating a challenge at times. Imagine the struggle you might have getting a teenager to listen to reason, or getting your prospect to understand why he should move forward with a project.



Explaining or trying to persuade a teenager or prospect might not get them to understand your situation. If you really want them to consider your point of view, try the following below.

Let others talk. My favorite acronym is WAIT—Why Am I Talking? By letting others speak first we can learn about them and their communication style. Do they speak in short sentences or do they ramble? Are they controlled and unexpressive, or are they animated with their hands and facial expressions? These clues can help you learn the best way to communicate with them. By allowing others to speak first, your comments will be more effective and better received.

Listen. God gave us two ears and one mouth; I suggest we use them proportionately. Try to listen well and absorb the information. Good listeners don't jump to conclusions, and they listen for ideas, not just facts.

Create an open atmosphere. Notice the first two steps pertained to receiving, not sending. Communication is a two-way process, sending and receiving. Many focus only on the sending portion. In order to be a great communicator, build a climate of openness and trust. Do this by establishing mutual respect, and the results will follow.

Non-verbal communication. Eye contact, smiling, and nodding your head let someone know you are paying attention. Repeat what the other person says by saying, "If I understand you correctly..." Seek first to understand, and then to be understood.

Do unto others as they would do unto themselves. Keep this twist on the Golden Rule in mind when communicating. Realize the cultural, multi-generational and personality differences of the people you're speaking with.

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