Ashton
TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

TECHMinutes
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Your Small Business Technology Information Source!

This Issue:

Our Top Tweets

@AshtonSolutions Enjoying ourselves at **#WoodlandTwilight @holdenarboretum** All tho it's just a little warm!

@AshtonSolutions Good thing **@Twitter** told us it was **#CowAppreciationDay** The Ashton team likes cows! Want to know why? Here ya go! **https://t.co/IFeQvEMprV**

@AshtonSolutions Seems our **#Insurance** guy is looking for a gig as our social media intern! Thank you, David David Keller **@dkeller135** Be Sure to **#Follow @AshtonSolutions #Tech #Business #Cleveland**

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Hackers Target Municipalities and Why That's a Problem for Your Business

On March 22, 2018, a remote-triggered ransomware called "SamSam" demanded a one-time payment of $51,000 be made to restore the city of Atlanta, Georgia's, data. Despite an operating budget somewhere in the neighborhood of $625 million, Atlanta's municipal leaders refused to pay the fine. The "hostage situation" has cost the city over $2 million already with an expected $9.5 million more likely to be spent restoring and re-enforcing the municipality's network and infrastructure. This doesn't take into account downtime and the significant amount of data lost in the hack. Whether or not you think it's a good idea to not pay the ransom, if a whole city - especially one as large as Atlanta - can effectively be crippled by a single hack, you better believe that your business has to get serious about its cybersecurity efforts.

The situation in Atlanta, where months later they are still foraging through the rubble, is a cautionary tale for everyone; and by in large, you are seeing that everyone is taking this threat seriously. With WannaCry, Not Petya, Locky, and Crysis all hitting the business community in 2017, it has become evident to a lot of business owners that they only thing standing between a fate where they are paying some dissident group for their own data, and one where they are insulated from this hell is their ability to act on the cyber security strategies they've created for their business. Today, we will go into why these attacks keep happening and provide you with some of the best practices organizations like yours are going to have to implement (and stay on top of) if you don't want to be just another victim of hackers looking to make a quick buck.

Managed Services Can Provide a Lot of Value

How does your business manage its technology solutions? If you're like most small businesses, you likely have limited technology maintenance, and not necessarily due to any fault on your part. Small businesses have limited budgets and resources available to them, making technology maintenance less accessible. Thankfully, managed services are here to make sure that you never settle for less than what your organization needs.

In terms of managed services for technology maintenance and management, you might be surprised by how diverse and wide the breadth of services offered actually is. There are IT services for just about any resource that your business would want to take advantage of. We'll walk you through some of the best and most valuable that any organization can leverage.

Server Management
Servers require intensive care, as does the rest of your business' computing infrastructure. If you're not a trained technology expert, you probably shouldn't be handling servers, as the slightest issue could set off a chain reaction that leads to unprecedented downtime and data access issues. Unfortunately, hiring individual trained IT professionals can be expensive, and you could be limited by your geographical region as well. Managed server hosting can eliminate the need to host servers on your infrastructure. A managed service provider can host them off-site in a secure location where all of your data can be accessed

"Technology is a word that describes something that doesn't work yet."
- Douglas Adams

4 Ways Cloud Computing Can Help Your Business

The cloud has brought with it a plethora of benefits for small businesses, so many that organizations often are under the impression that the cloud can solve even the biggest issues. While we can't speak for each and every business out there, we can say with confidence that regardless of your organization's size, it can benefit in some way, shape, or form from a little bit of cloud implementation.

We'll discuss some of the most common ways that businesses take advantage of cloud computing.

File Sharing

File sharing is one of the biggest reasons why a small business might choose to make the jump to the cloud. It enables cooperation through a centralized environment dedicated to file sharing, and it allows businesses to access important information without being on-site or in the office. This extra flexibility can be a major benefit for businesses that have a limited time to get work done, and since

it connects users to the tools and information they need to keep busy no matter their location, productivity can skyrocket.

Communications

Other businesses are also taking full advantage of the cloud to create powerful cloud-hosted communication infrastructures. A business can save a lot of money by investing in a cloud-based Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system, or a cloud-based email solution. By working with the cloud to create your ideal communications infrastructure, your organization can put together a feature-rich solution that is both more flexible and functional overall. For example, a VoIP solution can have a lot more features than your standard landline. A business can implement a customized VoIP solution with all the necessary features of a traditional phone system, plus some. You can fully leverage messaging, conferencing, and other types of enterprise-level phone services at a much more affordable and less wasteful cost.

Hosted email allows for a lot of benefits that you simply wouldn't be able to achieve if you hosted your own email server in-house. You can completely cut out the unnecessary costs of hosting and

maintaining your own email server, while also improving security and functionality through message encryption and instant messaging integration.

Storage

Cloud providers all over the world offer services to their users that include countless gigabytes of cloud storage. Since this is so affordable, not just individuals, but businesses as well, try to take full advantage of cloud storage services. The issue that many businesses face in this regard is the idea of their data being hosted in a public cloud storage system that doesn't give them as much control over their data as they would like. This is why so many organizations prefer to host their own private clouds on-site, or in a collocated data center where control isn't an issue.

Cloud storage is great for businesses because the data can be accessed anywhere at any time, giving the business a considerable amount of mobility and flexibility that adds up in the long run. The apparent lack of security is generally in regard to how employees access...

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(Continued from page 1)
remotely and maintained by on-site staff.

Security Management

Network security is one of those tricky parts of managing a business that requires a lot of industry-specific knowledge. Because of this, network security is something that a lot of businesses fall short on, as they either don't have professional staff on-hand who know how to secure specific kinds of data, or they simply don't perceive themselves as vulnerable. This is very far from the truth. If you don't take steps toward keeping your business secure now, you could regret it in the future. This is why we urge you to consider implementing security best practices now,

while you still can. Outsourcing this responsibility to a managed service provider is an excellent way to make sure that patches and other security augments are managed and maintained properly.

Help Desk Management

Even if you have an in-house team, they likely don't have time to get to every little bit of technology maintenance and management, let alone help all of your organization's employees work with their own devices. In cases like this, it's helpful to have an outsourced organization that you can rely on to pick up the pieces that your in-house team can't get to. This includes helping others within your business with any issues that they might be having with their devices. Think about how much time your

employees could save if they had a single number to call for anything related to their technology troubles.

Overall, the biggest value point that you can get from managed services is the cost vs. value. You actually wind up saving money in the long run by working with a managed service provider, as the value received from working with an outsourced provider ultimately winds up paying for itself compared to investing in adding new salaries to your budget. Ashton Technology Solutions can help your business with just about any managed services you'll need.

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(Continued from page 1)

Reasons for Ransomware

The obvious one is greed. Hacking groups that have the knowledgeable personnel want to extort money from people who can (and will) pay it. There have been extensive studies done in the effort for law enforcement and security professionals to understand just what makes cybercriminals tick. Most black hat hackers don't start hacking to cause chaos, they started doing it because they were curious and when it becomes obvious that companies and organizations have major security holes in their networks, instead of stopping, they crack the network open and see what they can find. Some even start benevolently sharing the information with companies, but contempt for prideful IT administrators who wouldn't admit to vulnerability for fear of looking bad at their jobs, can get the curious hacker to retaliate. Once the money starts flowing in, the individual can justify their decisions.

People do worse for money, right?

But why ransomware? Well there are a few factors that have evolved malware into ransomware. Firstly, the relevance and general unregulated cryptocurrency market. Since there is no real oversight in cryptocurrency, and Bitcoin holders have total anonymity it makes it ideal for hackers to demand. Secondly, abundance of code. Ransomware-as-a-Service offerings on the dark web allow malevolent parties to gain access to code that only a short time ago, required professional coders to write. Thirdly, modern day operating systems don't have the runtime detection capabilities that could stop ransomware execution. Lastly, and probably most importantly, is that users have not been properly trained on how to protect themselves when opening attachments.

Security has been getting better, but with hackers facing uncrackable encryption rolled out by IT administrators and cybersecurity professionals, they have become increasingly skilled at deploying social engineering tactics and phishing techniques. Today, it can be difficult for the average computer user to ascertain

that they are looking at a phishing email with a spoofed email address, giving hackers new avenues to infiltrate or get their malicious code onto networks.

What Can You Do?

There are several strategies you can take to keep your network free from ransomware. They include:

- **Back up your data:** In keeping regular backups of your system and changes in data offsite, you are essentially protected against any type of ransomware situations. Sure, you may deal with a bit of downtime, but talk to your IT professional about your recovery options to ensure that if something terrible happens, your business won't lose any critical data.
- **Educating employees:** Ransomware is often deployed the same way a lot of malware is, through email attachments, downloads, and through...

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Seamless Access and Its Role in Your Business' Productivity

Productivity is crucial to every workplace. If your employees are not properly leveraging their opportunities to be productive, then they are ultimately costing your business a considerable amount. Thanks to technology solutions, you can help your employees stay productive in numerous ways--chief among them being access to crucial data and applications.

The first technology that might make you think of productivity is access to the cloud. Thanks to the cloud, many businesses are taking advantage of services that might not otherwise be accessible without using a desktop or similar device. We'll walk you through some of the

ways that your business can take advantage of the cloud and other access technology to improve productivity.

Cloud-Based Productivity Suites

Most businesses need access to certain applications in order to be productive, often including a word processor, slideshow creator, and spreadsheet software. If you store them on your internal network, it might be difficult to access them if you haven't already taken measures to enable such access. One of the ways you can do this is by storing any critical applications and data in a cloud-based environment. Any allowed devices will be able to access data in the cloud, as well as open any applications that are stored on your infrastructure--all by simply accessing them through a web-based dashboard. This allows employees to work hard, even when they aren't in the office, as well as being able to do so on devices which they are most

familiar with. This allows them to get even more done in the same amount of time.

Seamless Access Has Its Toll

While it's especially important that your business employees have anytime-anywhere access to assets, the question of security will always remain an issue for your business. With more devices than ever before accessing your business' data, it's critical that you take measures to secure it. One of the best ways to do so is by implementing a virtual private network for remote data transmission. A VPN provides your employees with a great way to access data in a secure fashion. Essentially, any information sent to or received by your mobile devices through a VPN has to...

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Ashton TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

BaaS Lets You Take Decentralization for a Test Drive

One of the biggest problems with emerging technologies is the fact that it can be very hard to tell if they will actually provide any benefit to a business without taking the risk of implementing it. This leaves many businesses in a catch-22 of sorts: they lose money by not implementing a new solution, or they lose money because the new solution wasn't a good fit.

Damned if they do, damned if they don't.

The latest example of this has been blockchain technology. The practical uses for blockchain in the business environment are varied and wide-reaching, but practically-minded business owners have to be hesitant to fully commit to deploying it without some point of reference into how it will benefit their operations.

This makes a lot of sense, especially when some numbers are taken into consideration. Blockchain is still new enough for many organizations to be wary of diving in and adopting it. In fact, the 2018 CIO Survey conducted by Gartner indicated that only 1 percent of CIOs had adopted blockchain technology into their business operations, with only 8 percent having any plans to do so in the near future. On the other side of the coin, 77 percent said there was no interest to investigate a blockchain strategy, let alone develop one.

Furthermore, among those who had adopted blockchain or were soon to, there were indications that doing so is no simple task. 13 percent say that the IT department of their organizations had to change, 14 percent reported a need of a culture change within IT, 18 percent claimed that it was difficult to find staff with the skills to work with the blockchain, and a full 23 percent attributed blockchain to needing the newest skills to be developed out...

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Technology Basics: Wizard

The word "wizard" may not seem to have much to do with computing, besides calling someone a "computer wiz." However, there is a particular type of program that serves a very similar purpose, referred to as a wizard as well. We'll examine it in today's blog.

What a Wizard Does
Be honest - what first comes to mind when you hear the word "wizard?" Most likely, an old man with a beard, robes, and a pointy hat, waving a wand around and casting spells. These characters often serve as mentors, serving as a guide and a resource.

This is the same purpose that the wizard program serves on your computer. Like Dumbledore instructed Harry Potter and Gandalf pointed Frodo Baggins in the right direction, a software wizard walks a user, step-by-step, to the successful completion some task or goal. This goal is usually the installation and configuration of a program, or possibly running a scan.

What Makes a Wizard?
A software wizard typically breaks up whatever process it applies to into steps, each step represented by a separate page. This allows the wizard to ensure each step...

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At Ashton Technology Solutions, we don't think of ourselves as computer guys, geeks or techies. Instead, we're problem solvers in the business of helping clients leverage technology for lasting business results. We just happen to have some serious technical skills as well. Of course we can talk geek with the best of them, but that's just the starting point for what we do, not the heart of it.

While we do take pride in delivering the most technically elegant solutions, at Ashton, we get the biggest satisfaction from integrating into our clients' processes, helping them look ahead, avoid trouble, and find better and more cost-effective methods of operating. In other words, we become partners in their growth. Ultimately, we earn our real enjoyment by watching our clients grow and prosper right along with us.

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