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TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

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Our Top Tweets

@AshtonSolutions Aug 7 We've had two companies call us this week after being hit by ransomware. Sadly, neither was aware that their data backups were not working properly. One company lost 90% of their data, even after paying the ransom. Ask your provider to verify your backups are working properly.

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@AshtonSolutions Aug 6 Use #Venmo much? Might want to check your settings... http://bit.ly/2w6Ndlw

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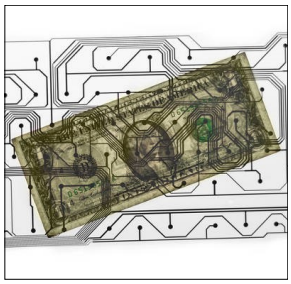
How Much Should You Be Spending on IT?



It's no secret that technology is a big part of today's business, but how much money should your organization really expect to spend on your IT? Of course you need to stay competitive, but can you justify dropping huge chunks of capital on solutions that may or may not come with a visible ROI, or that's total cost of ownership (TCO) is going to affect your ability to spend elsewhere? Today, we'll talk about what technology your organization definitely needs, and go into the corresponding cost of that technology.

For the modern business, having a centralized network is par for the course. On this network you'll find at the very least email, some sort of file database support, a security solution, and a backup system. You would also have some endpoints, whether they are workstations, laptops, or mobile devices. That's about as bare bones as any business could get. As the company grows, more has to be added. Some organizations have moved significant parts of their computing infrastructure offsite, either to the cloud or to a colocation center where they still have a good deal of control over the management of the infrastructure.

Besides servers and end points, there are plenty of pieces of technology the average business uses. There is the modem, and the routers, switches, printers, and more. Then there are other options that businesses often take advantage of such as security systems, digital signage, and other solutions that require additional hardware. All of which comes with an assigned cost.

The scaling of all this hardware doesn't necessarily happen as the company grows. While some organizations may need a hosted VoIP system, for others it simply doesn't make any

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Backup and Disaster Recovery Gives Businesses Another Chance

Data backup is a hot topic for businesses, particularly because the stakes are never higher for small businesses and enterprises. You either protect your future by implementing a data backup system, or you don't and put it in jeopardy. What some businesses might not know is that even certain backup strategies are outdated in a modern workplace.

Some types of data backup might seem like cheap and ideal alternatives to a legitimate cloud-based backup system, but they are far from the greatest or most efficient solution out there. Unfortunately, the price point might seem just right for organizations that have limited budgets, making them attractive alternatives to investing in an enterprise-level solution. Regardless, the current options for data backup and disaster recovery that don't involve cloud-based BDR are subpar at best compared to the real deal. We'll go over some of the current options and why cloud-based BDR is a better alternative.

Common Data Backup Technology

Some of the most common methods for data backup and disaster recovery have nothing to do with the cloud. For example, some businesses still use tape backup that stores data on magnetic tape reels. The issue with this type of backup solution is that it relies on a user

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""Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution." - Albert Einstein

A.I. Is Beginning to Run Business Functions

How much does your business rely on its data in order to make decisions regarding its future? Organizations are making strides in how they collect and interpret data, but one of the biggest contributors to this is the idea of using artificial intelligence to perform data analysis. With the implementation of A.I., businesses are able to collect more data, analyze data for trends, and take action based on those trends.

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That being said, there are still some concerns about A.I. that need to be addressed--at least, from a theoretical standpoint--before implementing it for your organization. We'll try to address some of the major thoughts concerning A.I. in the workplace so you can make the best decision regarding your organization.

The Fear of AI Stealing Jobs

Many people are concerned that A.I. is taking jobs away from hard-working employees for the sake of convenience. While it's true that previous innovations in business have made employees more productive with their time, none of them have taken employees out of the equation quite like artificial intelligence and automation have.

However, we feel that this isn't the right way to approach the discussion about A.I. If anything, it should be about augmenting your business' workforce with options that save time and resources for better, more lucrative pursuits.

Whether we like it or not, the fact remains that computers are much better at processing data and sifting through results to find trends. It's just easier and more efficient overall for organizations to have a computer program do the work of several employees than it is to pay them for it.

How A.I. Helps Businesses

There are several business applications out there that are designed to make changes to the way they function based on what kinds of knowledge they accumulate as time goes on. These applications tend to help businesses better manage and maintain data with the intention of finding actionable insights. By this, we mean finding any information that can be used to take action and make educated decisions about the future of your organization. It stands to reason that the data collected by organizations should be leveraged in some way to improve operations, and A.I. implementation is just an extension of this thought process.

Thanks to A.I.'s ability to remember and record information, it's able to far exceed anything that a human being is capable of. There are many applications out there that utilize A.I. for this specific reason, as accuracy is one of the most...

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Backup and Disaster Recovery Gives Businesses Another Chance

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actually setting and initiating the backup, meaning that there is some room for error--something that you don't want to deal with ever, especially if your organization's future is on the line. Tapes can also be destroyed if they are on-site, so a big threat like an office fire or flood could end any chances at coming back from a disaster.

Another way that businesses might back up their data is with an external hard drive or flash drive, both of which present many issues that come with tape backups and other types of physical storage, including the risk of physical harm to them. One point stands out though, and it's that thieves could potentially steal these devices if they are taken from the office. You can't risk your data being stolen just for the sake of convenience and price. At that point, it's not even saving you money (and could potentially be costing you much more than you actually save).

The Ideal Solution

Cloud-based data backup and disaster recovery can be a critical component in business continuity for both small and large businesses. In fact, it's largely considered the best product out there for this purpose, as you basically eliminate many of the issues present if you were to use tape-based or hardware-based backup solutions. For one, you eliminate the hassle of relying on users to initiate the process, making sure that user error can't be the reason why your business is doomed in the event of a data loss incident.

The other reason to leverage cloud-based backup is that it essentially cuts out all potential downtime that results from a disaster. Since you're downloading the data from the cloud, you'll have instantaneous access to the data, as long as you have hardware that can act as a server. Even if you don't, BDR devices are capable of functioning as a temporary server so you have time to find an adequate replacement. It's just one way that cloud-based data backup saves your business money.

Does your organization need cloud-based data backup? To get started, just give us a call at 216-397-4080.

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How Much Should You Be Spending on IT?

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sense. This goes for CRM or ERP solutions, security systems, productivity software, cloud storage, and other software-based solutions. Since many cloud-based platforms are beginning to see higher-degrees of utilization, a lot of companies are avoiding huge upfront costs associated with purchasing hardware by relying on these cloud systems, which are more attractive, but, whose TCO may actually be higher. By transferring the type of expense to a more recurring, operational expense, today's businesses are able to accomplish more with less.

Additionally, most businesses today are beginning to utilize online marketing platforms, whether they be through a dedicated website, social media platforms, or other means. The cost of these strategies tend to be variable even though most organizations will adhere to a very fixed percentage of total revenue for a marketing budget.

How Small Business IT Deployment Stacks Up

As you might expect, the average small business spends a higher percentage of their revenue on IT than larger organizations. According to Gartner, most small businesses, which make up over 99 percent of surveyed companies, and nearly 83 percent of total IT dollars, will spend upward of six percent of their revenue on IT, while larger organizations typically spend around three percent of theirs. This means that smaller businesses are paying more of their available money to get the IT that larger organizations get. This can present problems if a core part of a small business' IT infrastructure fails, or if there is a project that is mismanaged or fails to meet the expected return; a cost that many larger organizations can manage.

However, the market for IT seems very strong with one survey concluding that technology spending across small business has grown a whopping 4.8 percent over the past six years; and is expected to grow another five percent in 2018. The total small business IT investment in 2017 wrapped up at a cool $690 billion, with a lion share of that spent on hardware, software, and virtualized hardware and software environments.

Larger businesses don't pay quite as much per worker, but they are cognizant of technology innovation, especially with new solutions available that…

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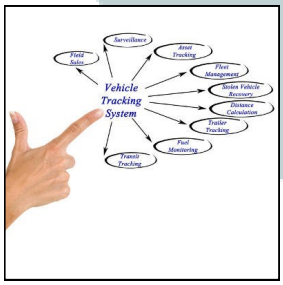
Efficient Distributors Stare Down Rising Gas Prices



Rising fuel prices have an effect on everybody. From the commuter who drives 20 miles into the office, to the manufacturer that needs to keep their supply chain moving, to the distributor that depends on that fuel as a core component of a business. For the small distributor, gas price fluctuation can either be a godsend or a travesty depending on which way the needle points. When gas prices rise significantly, it becomes inevitable that some of the cost is going to be transferred to the consumer. This can wreak havoc with their business as it depends on a fleet of trucks to distribute their goods to other businesses. We'll look at how smaller organizations can use information technology to keep their costs down when the costs at the pump rise.

Most distributors are either tied to a larger organization or contracted by one. For the smaller manufacturer that relies on efficient distribution of their product, regrettably the ability to keep shipping costs down is a major factor on the price of certain products. In 2018, with fuel supply outpacing demand for the first time since gas prices spiked in 2014, prices are again up and thus far it hasn't made much of a difference for consumers.

This is because the distributor (or the manufacturer that has a distribution arm) looks at the increased cost as the cost of doing business, but as gas prices start to rise (they've gone up nearly 30% since May 2017), the more cost is transferred to them, the less they are apt to be as generous. This goes for delivery services and any other company that has a fleet of vehicles. With gas prices affecting so much of the economy, it's a solid business strategy for the business that relies on petrol to look for solutions to mitigate the increased cost that depends on rising fuel prices. Information technology can provide such a solution.

Fleet and Asset Tracking

Tracking solutions can drive down the price of distribution by ensuring that each vehicle in your organization's fleet is taking preferred and efficient routes. By finding the right routes, a company can not only cut down on fuel costs, it can cut down on the amount of maintenance that their fleet vehicles need, requiring less operational capital. Additionally, by deploying a fleet tracking solution, insurance for your fleet is reduced, saving your organization more money. Here's how it works:

Each vehicle in the fleet is outfitted with GPS devices that can be tracked by Internet-connected endpoints outfitted with the tracking software. Using GPS technology, the software calculates the most fuel-efficient route. Other qualifiers can be entered to avoid things like construction, bottlenecks in traffic, and other cost-inducing situations. This allows an organization to reduce downtime, optimize their resources, maximize vehicle utilization, and provide prompt and…

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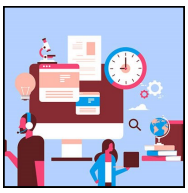
Three Secrets to a Successful Business



It takes a lot of work and determination to make a successful small business. There are countless parts that need to be managed and maintained--so many that it can be difficult to assign a priority at times. There are certain requirements that your organization must achieve in order to remain successful, but it takes a little more than just business savvy to keep your organization ahead of the game. Let's take a look at some of the ways your business can make itself stand out and achieve success.

One of the best ways to make the next leap toward success is by implementing the right technology services. Since we at Ashton Technology Solutions consider ourselves technology professionals, we want to help your business improve operations by implementing the best and most powerful solutions specifically crafted for your needs.

Designing Your Infrastructure for Success

First of all, consider the tools that your organization is using at the moment. Are they scaling to meet your specific requirements at any given time? If your business were to grow, would it be able to adapt to this change? One of the biggest reasons why businesses are turning to the cloud is because it allows them to achieve this kind of flexibility. It can be applied to many different parts of your organization, be it for communication, data storage, and more.

Guaranteeing Reliable Storage

Data storage is one of the most useful aspects of the cloud. Even a small business can collect a large amount of data, and as such, it needs a place to store it. The cloud offers many benefits to data storage, the primary one being that you're not required to purchase or maintain on-site hardware to host your data. All you need to maintain an adequate...

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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.

5 Handy Tips for Microsoft Word

You would be hard-pressed to find a better-known software suite than Microsoft Office, Microsoft Word probably leading the pack in terms of name recognition. When a solution is so well-known, it can be hard to call anyone who uses it a power user. However, for this week's tip, we're doing a deep dive into its capabilities to take your use of Word a few steps up.

Faster Backspacing

One of the most frustrating parts of using Word, like any other word processor, is when you realize that you've messed up a sentence and have to restart it - for the fifth time. The primary source of frustration isn't even the fact that you have to rewrite something again, it's the fact that you have to take the time and delete what you've just written.

Instead of poking at your keyboard to delete each and every letter, you can consolidate the process by holding down Ctrl as you press the Backspace key. This tells Word to delete the entire word, instead of each character. As a result, it is a much less time-consuming process to delete words like "configuration," "discombobulated," or "telecommunications," ultimately saving you time in...

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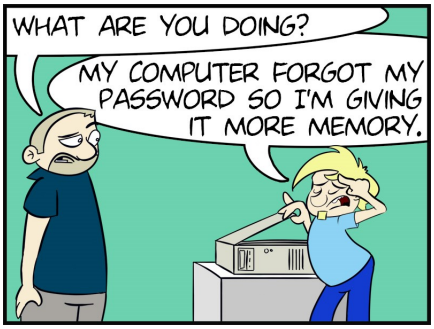
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