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Here's wishing you a wonderful holiday season, filled with joy and prosperity. We are so fortunate that we are able to work with you... we're looking forward to next year!

Look to Technology to Shift Your Business' Prospects



For the average small business, technology use isn't always a make-or-break scenario. Sure, there are some technologies that everyone uses nowadays. Inventory and point of sale systems, social media, and wireless Internet are some that you'll often find used by small businesses. If, as small business owner, your plan was to enhance your company's exposure to technology, cost may temper your expectations. Today, we look at some solutions that would be useful to your business, but will they break your budget?

Before we start going through solutions, we just want to point out that technology doesn't have to be expensive to be effective, but it often is. We understand that some businesses need it more than others, but we feel as it is our responsibility to introduce companies to technology options that they may not have considered, either because they didn't know about them, or didn't see how they will fit in for their business.

One way that technology can work to improve any business is though putting it in a position to take in more revenue. In fact, one study conducted by Bain & Company found that companies that embraced digital transformations to their business grew by an average of 14 percent, of which 83 percent enhanced their profit margins, while less than half of companies that didn't modernize increased theirs. It gives you some perspective just how

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New Collaboration Apps Building Better Businesses



Collaboration fuels business more than ever before. Now there are software titles dedicated to promote the highest degrees of collaboration possible, while also giving users the access to the tools they need to stay productive. Today, we will look at collaboration apps to give you an idea whether or not they are right for your business.

As more businesses depend on inter-departmental communication, it becomes important that their people know they can trust their co-workers to produce. If your organization depends on the cooperation of your staff to meet your goals, having software in place that can facilitate that type of cooperation is important.

Traditionally, companies have spent a pretty penny on their telephone and email systems for this purpose. Keeping people connected and in-the-know about the happenings of the

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Our Top Tweets

@AshtonSolutions Something to Consider; The Simple Joy of No Phones Allowed <https://t.co/StLVhuNHF1>

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"Life is better when you treat the word NERD as a VERB"
- Beth Ziesenis

Managed Service Providers Deliver Value



There can be no denying the opportunity that comes from using managed IT services, particularly in regard

to how much you can save in both time and resources. Before managed IT services, businesses would often have to settle for unreliable and expensive IT assistance, but there are better alternatives these days that businesses cannot just benefit from, but flourish with. In other words, managed IT is capable of creating immense value for your business.

The Alternatives to Managed IT

We say "alternatives," but honestly, they aren't exactly the most viable options for your organization. There are generally two types of IT management alternatives to managed IT: hiring an in-house IT department, and break-fix IT. The issue with hiring an in-house IT department is that not all businesses have the assets to make this happen. Trained IT professionals aren't the most affordable resources, which makes some businesses content

to just rely on non-trained professionals to make sure maintenance and management happens--a risky venture to say the least.

In an attempt to find a viable alternative to hiring internal IT help, businesses utilize break-fix IT, but this is hardly a more useful or helpful solution. Break-fix is far from the cost-effective solution that businesses seek. Rather than solving the problem at its roots, it only solves the short-term issues that you might be having, not taking preventative measures to make sure they don't happen again.

Both of these options are not adequate for a modern business that hopes to be self-sustaining in the long run. This is where managed IT comes in.

The Benefits of Managed IT

Technology management is made easy by working with a managed IT provider. Here are some of the ways that managed IT can provide value for your organization:

- **Less downtime:** Any time spent not working as intended is considered downtime for your business, and it should be prevented as often as

possible. Managed IT aims to make issues more preventable, which means that if you're taking advantage of it, you'll experience less downtime.

- **Fewer costs:** Hardware and software can be expensive, so a business that wants to save money in the long run will try to cut corners and costs as frequently as possible in this area. If your hardware experiences fewer issues thanks to proactive maintenance, you're spending less money over time, improving the value you receive from your assets. This also means you're not footing an expensive repair bill as frequently, as well.
- **Increased flexibility:** Managed IT generally includes a remote service component. This means that your organization can get IT support without the technician being on-site. This keeps your costs to a minimum, and you can enjoy IT support whenever you need it without having to wait around for a technician to show up.
- **More time:** Managing IT is a time-consuming task. If you don't have someone handling it full-time, work...



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New Collaboration Apps Building Better Businesses

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company, of a project, or a simple task is essential for operational effectiveness. For the past several years instant messaging has been used by many businesses as a good, less distracting solution that can get people up to speed.

Higher Need for Collaboration

Nowadays, however, there is demand for more. As more and more younger people enter and sustain themselves in the workforce, more dynamic collaboration tools have begun to be developed and utilized. Cloud-based conferencing is one technology that has taken off over the past few years as they give anyone with an Internet connection (Wi-Fi or cellular connection) the chance to sit in on a meeting. One such application that has started to take the business world by

storm is called, aptly, a collaboration tool.

The collaboration tool is exactly that. It is an interface that looks a lot like an email client, but instead of email, these applications utilize instant messaging. This allows a more integrated, real time conversation to happen between collaborators, moving business forward faster. Titles like Slack and Microsoft Teams have been developed with the team in mind. These applications also come with dozens of third-party software integrations to help each user get the information they need faster and utilize it just as quickly.

Many of these tools are hosted in the cloud so it provides users a scalable, flexible, and highly accessible interface

in which to be productive and meet the goals outlined for them faster. As business becomes more collaborative, expect more applications to be developed with integrations with other apps. This provides users powerful tools quickly to be more productive and more cooperative.

"Collaboration fuels business more than ever before. Now there are software titles dedicated..."

Does your business utilize these communication apps? For more information on how to speed up your business call the IT experts at Ashton Technology Solutions today at 216-397-4080.



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Look to Technology to Shift Your Business' Prospects

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useful a technology transformation can be.

What is Digital Transformation?

Digital transformation is exactly what it sounds like. For the business that wants to embrace technology, a digital transformation typically constitutes a complete shift in the way that it deploys technology. Some of the technology includes solutions that enhance mobility, connect people remotely, promote hyperconvergence, and virtualize data and infrastructure.

To totally transform your business into a business of the information age, it's important that decision makers and stakeholders understand that digital transformation isn't just some IT project. It is very much a core transformation of the business and the way that it functions.

It's no secret that many small and medium-sized businesses struggle with technology implementation. More

specifically, they struggle with the cost. Budgetary constraints can put a major damper on your company's technology deployments. As with anything though, it is important to give the projects that you choose to implement the respect that they deserve.



A business that tries to get by with poorly implemented and cheap systems, will get poor results. It becomes important then for any company that is looking to implement solutions that will transform the way it conducts business to do its due diligence and understand what the costs of implementing a specific technology are. By knowing the cost, what the benefits are, how long they will take to deploy, how long they will take to show results, and what your project ROI is

expected to be, you can go into any major technology project with the confidence to know that what you are doing is the right thing; and, that it will ultimately improve your business.

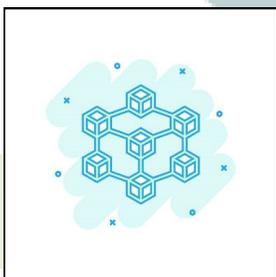
Keys to a Successful Digital Transformation

Beyond the variables listed above, you'll have to begin to understand just how valuable data can be. For the business that has embraced this digital transformation, it won't take long to establish the fact that managing all the data that you collect is going to be a major undertaking. To mitigate issues for your IT staff, or outsourced IT provider, starting in places that sets the groundwork for all other digital projects is probably the most effective way to go about facilitating a top-to-bottom digital transformation of your business. This means that you should outline the entire transformation beforehand. Since it is a...



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Where Are We with Blockchain?



The blockchain continues to largely be defined as the technology behind cryptocurrency. However, it's certainly

not the only practical way to use the blockchain. Blockchain has only become more well-known over the years, but as far as what the future holds, what can the business sector expect?

Defining Blockchain Technology

In its simplest terms, a blockchain is a peer-to-peer network that includes a continuously updating collection of records. The blockchain is made up of nodes and these nodes are encrypted and connected. What this creates is a system that makes records very difficult to change, as changing one record means creating a node to accommodate

the new edit. The network majority must then confirm such an edit is fine, making it a truly democratic method of managing records found on the blockchain. These nodes, or "blocks", also hold information about the record, including when it was created or edited.

"The blockchain continues to largely be defined as the..."

How It's Used

Blockchain is typically used for cryptocurrency due to the fact that it's encrypted and not easy to change, but it can be used for various other purposes that lend themselves to these specific parameters. Public blockchains can be used similarly to Bitcoin's distributed ledger, but a private blockchain can be used for private business applications.

How It Will Be Used in the Future

One particularly interesting way that blockchain could be used in the future is through sharing medical records be-

tween service providers. Thanks to its distributed nature, all of the doctors on any designated patient's medical plan would have access to the same unaltered data, allowing them to provide the best possible care for that patient based on their specific medical history. This cuts down on time offices might spend on waiting for records and documents from other offices. Other ways that businesses might incorporate blockchain is through the use of a transparent ledger for public viewing, providing plenty of ways for users to track payments for services rendered.

Ashton Technology Solutions can help your business stay up to date on all the latest and greatest technology solutions on the market. To learn more, reach out to us at 216-397-4080.



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How to Order the Items on Your To-Do List



Being in business today means that you have a lot on your plate, it's as simple as that. Yet, with so many tasks piling up, it can be challenging to prioritize them all so you can figure out where to start. Below, we go over some strategies you can use to make sense out of all the tasks you have on your day and reach a point of productivity.

1. Eliminate Non-Starters

If you are not currently able to work on a particular task, it shouldn't be on your to-do list. Therefore, you need to identify which of your compiled tasks you are actually able to complete, and which you can't do for reasons outside of your control. Once you

have determined these, remove them from your to-do list consideration, or make a point of following up on them. These kinds of tasks will likely only frustrate you and slow you down.

2. Rank Your Tasks by Importance and Urgency

Let's all be honest here - there are tasks that we all just don't want to do, which means that there is going to be the temptation to procrastinate doing them until the very last possible moment, hoping that we'll have the time when it's down to the wire. However, there are also tasks that unequivocally must be done within a certain timeframe. Yet, even when these two categories overlap, the urge is still there to push back the unwanted task. Resist it - the negative consequences of missing a deadline

would be far worse than some frustration now.

3. Determine a Task's Value

This is related somewhat to the importance and urgency consideration. What item on your to-do list will deliver the greatest benefit to the company as a whole, and a bit more importantly, to your clientele? Alternatively, which task will cause the greatest fallout if it isn't completed in a timely fashion? By comparing each item on your list to one another in this way, you can arrange them so that the work gets done in the order it needs to.

4. What Does the Boss Want?

What does the person...



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Is Your Organization Ready for a Disaster



While not every business needs to worry about hurricanes, the same can't be said for other kinds of disasters out there. Tornadoes, fires, and other natural disasters could strike at any moment depending on geographical location, but if you're prepared, you can limit the influence these events have on your organization's future.

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Research Your Threats

Disaster scenarios require having a comprehensive business continuity plan on-hand to ensure your organization can take any hit possible. Depending on where your business is located, you'll have a specific set of threats that you'll need to be prepared for. Environmental influences are known to create 30 percent of all downtime incidents; this number includes flooding, hurricanes, humidity, extreme temperature/

weather, and so on. Do some research and think about what kind of environmental threats might exist in your location.

Of course, there will always be threats beyond your control, so you should have ways to identify when a disaster--no matter how small--goes unnoticed. A monitoring...



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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.

