

Effective Small-Business Office Technology

As a technologist myself, I find it important to make technology easy to use. I do this for myself and for my clients. What is by far the most critical point to making technology easy is to research, study and learn. Similar to the way you may buy a new car, you want to get the car that will fulfill your needs most appropriately, so you research and study cars. Once purchased, you learn how to use the car and its features so it works more effectively for you; cruise control, heating and A/C, windshield wipers, fuel door release latch, which side the fuel door is on, etc. Some features you may never or rarely use, and that's fine, this will be very true with computers. And remember this, unless you are a delivery person, you will likely spend much more time working on your computer than you will inside your car, a computer can be a much more important decision.

If you need to haul heavy and large things, would you buy sedan? Probably not, maybe a station wagon or SUV would work better. You need to make the same decisions about technology. The difficult thing about technology is, I admit, it can be very hard to distinguish between a sedan and a station wagon, but that's where research comes in. Research can include reading trade journals or spending time on the web, but sometimes this isn't all too informative if you don't know the lingo. So, a trip to your local technology center may be just the ticket, or talk with a professional you feel comfortable with. **IMPORTANT:** Speak with someone who listens to your situation before they give any advice. And remember technology is a combination of hardware, software and external peripherals, such as monitors, keyboards, mice, projectors, cell phones, PDA's, printers, flash drives, MP3 players, scanners...

So you have the technology and want to use it effectively, now is the time to spend learning. In my opinion this is by far the most important phase, and to this day, the one most users typically and significantly neglect. The unique thing about computers versus cars is that there are thousands of things a computer can do, there are typically two things a car can do, and those are move you from point A to point B, and move your stuff and others from point A to point B (perhaps some cars have nicer radios than others).

Usually built into your computer are some of the basic tools, such as a text editor, email, web browser, etc., but it's likely you need some more sophisticated software to allow you to do more, and be compatible with other computer users in the world. You may likely need a office suite of applications do perform some standard business functions such as writing, reading and printing text documents others have written, or that you want to share. You may likely need spreadsheet, presentation, and database software, all of which are included in many office suite applications. As small business professionals, you likely need some type of accounting software, and time management software. Perhaps you already have versions of older software you used, and in some cases it will work on a new computer, but you can always research if it is better to upgrade, or even move to a different application.

And as a unique professional, you likely have some very specific software needs. As an example, I, as a technologist, have very specialized software to repair hard drives.

Drilling down further, I have specific software to fix all the plethora versions of Windows, and all four versions of Mac OS. Again, if you have already purchased specialized software in the past, it may work on a new computer, but if you are making a switch anyway, do some more research, find out if there isn't something better.

I want to reiterate learning here, it's important to always learn, as technology is vast, and not to make you paranoid, but there is probably a better way to do what you are doing, things change and improve constantly. However, change is not, in my opinion, always a good thing, for at least two reasons. First, change can be difficult, and some have more problems with change than others. In this case, this is where the research was important. The hardware and software you own and use, are they made by reputable companies that have long track records, both developing and supporting? Be certain this is true so that the company doesn't go out of business tomorrow, and check if it has unreliable support (some of the very largest companies have the worst support, I honestly believe there should be some type of minimum standard for support requirements)

The second part of change is that change is not always better. Sometimes change makes things more difficult, and I don't mean that just because it has changed. In some cases software companies remove functionality from their software, or try to add functionality that either fails miserably in its attempts, or is so impossible to use, it is worthless. It happens, and if you find yourself in this situation, don't be afraid to 1) ask for help, from the company, the store, or your professional, 2) complain to the company if help doesn't help. Unfortunately, if nothing changes, go back and do more research to find a better alternative, as a consumer, you vote with your dollars.

The other difference between computers and cars is that if the auto industry had kept pace with the computer industry, today a Rolls Royce would cost \$2.93, run 4,000 miles on a tank of gas, and be able to go from zero to 6,000 MPH in 2.3 seconds. The only problem is that same car every 10,000 miles would crash and explode killing everyone inside (but that's up from 8,000 miles). And remember, you can never, and should never stop learning!

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Chuck Hauge is the Principal Consultant at CPH Solutions, provider of personal and comprehensive Macintosh and PC consulting. You can reach him at Chaz@CPHSolutions.com.