

DEATH BY TECHNOLOGY

BEWARE OF THE SEVEN MOST LETHAL TECH SINS IN BUSINESS.

by Brian Killian

While tough economic times linger, companies large and small are still investing in something that's critical to their business: information technology. Whether it's to protect data or plan for disaster recovery, streamline processes or better integrate systems, enhance remote access or mobile computing, company leaders are focusing on information technology to ensure that their operations and their people are ultra efficient today and in the future — no matter what the economic conditions.

For many Central Florida companies, from newly established to fully grown, thoughts of IT can mean information overload. To heighten the challenge, the people responsible for the behind-the-scenes technology systems may have a hard time planning for, or deciding on, a tech plan that's right and affordable for the company.

What to do? No matter the size, companies looking at their tech systems should avoid getting caught up in these seven deadly technology sins:

1. A technology strategy that's MIA.

Companies that think they're not big enough to need a tech strategy need to think again. Every company needs to have chief information officer-like direction and to understand that a technology plan should be aligned with its business, not the other way around. An expert assessment of your systems and a long-term plan will improve your business processes and your bottom line, and it will provide a foundation for your company's growth. Remember, too, that proper implementation is more important than the technology itself.



2. Technology on the cheap.

The lowest price option isn't always the best option. Buying cheap software, hardware or services could end up costing you money on a recurring basis, not to mention its effect on performance and overall efficiencies.

3. No method for systems management.

You can't manage what you don't know you have. Reactive management, in the majority of cases, is the norm, where a great deal of time is spent "putting out fires," waiting for tech support to come and just diagnose the problem, and productivity is interrupted. Proactive management is the goal — where you have network inventories and documentation, and are able to automate as much as possible plus implement a proactive monitoring system.

4. Poor security practices.

An unprotected computer can be completely infected within 20 minutes of being connected to the Internet. Among

the "best of the best" practices are these: a business-class firewall, monitored virus protection, spam filtering, laptop encryption, cell phone passwords and, of course, regular internal and external security reviews.

5. No functional disaster recovery plan.

Think about what it would cost if your systems were down for a day or a week. Disaster recovery is much more than a tape backup; it's a full backup with a restore plan. Experienced outsource companies can establish disaster recovery sites, where all production systems and data are replicated on a daily basis.

6. No secure remote access to business-critical information.

While there are many remote access options, the best applications and practices include Web access that can be locked down with encryption, cell phone passwords and remote "wipes" that can deactivate a stolen phone.

7. Living with poor tech support.

Now more than ever, companies need a support team that really understands the business and its needs. Efficient technology implementations provide the foundation for efficient support systems. Know when to outsource, and if you do, conduct an annual review to ensure the team is meeting your current business objectives.

Information technology is a significant investment for a company — an investment that requires protection for the existence and growth of a business. Companies that avoid the all-too-common tech system mistakes will be positioned for long-term efficiencies in their operations and productivity with their people.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brian Killian (not pictured) is president of NorthPoint Technology Group, a growing locally based firm that provides full-service IT consulting, implementation and support for small and medium professional services and financial industries. For more information, visit www.teamnorthpoint.com.