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4 Tools that Every Small Business Should Use



The key to running a successful small business is keeping costs down and production/service delivery efficient. This is easier said than done. Some tools have been developed to boost productivity and efficiency while others are built to eliminate downtime and manage risk. Let's take a look at some of the technology your business should be using.

VoIP

Short for Voice over Internet Protocol, VoIP presents any business a laundry list of benefits. First, and probably most importantly, a VoIP platform will allow your business to eliminate the cost of your traditional business phone system. Since you will be using bandwidth to host your organization's telecommunications, you won't have any need for phone lines. Secondly, the options that VoIP presents can make it the answer for many of your business' communications needs. Some of the most useful features for a small business include:

- Automated attendant with integrated call management
- Call routing
- Call forwarding
- Voicemail
- Instant messaging
- Video and voice conferencing
- Softphone integration for mobile phones
- Text messaging

...and much more.

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FBI Warns About Banking Scams



In response to the coronavirus pandemic, many people are avoiding human contact by turning to the Internet and mobile apps. On a national scope, mobile banking alone has seen an increase of 50 percent over just the last few months. In what certainly is no coincidence, the Federal Bureau of Investigation recently put out a warning that identified banking apps as likely targets for hackers.

As was said in the FBI's Announcement...



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A Brief Guide to Leading a Company During COVID-19



Chances are your business has been affected by COVID-19. For those companies who had to shut down their operations, and are in the process of opening back up; or, the business that moved operations out of their location and had their employees work remotely and are recalling their employees, this situation is unprecedented. This month, we thought we would take a look at some of the factors surrounding this process, and how they will affect your staff.

Uncertainty Provides A Lot of Risk

The number one thing any business owner has to understand is that their employees--especially ones that have been working from home--are scared to death of getting sick. This presents some serious problems. Think of it this way, your business enters an agreement that doesn't have finite terms. All of the negative scenarios that could happen while under this agreement is the risk you take entering into the agreement. For your staff, coming back to the office without the assurances that COVID-19 is under control is risk. If you plan on bringing your staff back to an office or a workplace, you will need to address the elephant in the room. Explain why you decided to bring them back and what steps you are taking to ensure their collective and individual safety.

Know from the top that if your sole reason that you want to recall your staff is that you don't trust them working from home, consider that there are many businesses that closed down and will never re-open. If your staff wasn't producing up to your expectations from home, consider how bringing them back into the workplace with no assurances that they

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Think Of Managed Services as Healthcare for Your IT



When you feel under the weather you visit the doctor, they examine you and prescribe a remedy. It's a pretty simple process; and a relationship that is important to maintain your health. A managed service provider functions the same way for a business. Let's take a look at the similarities.

When most people think about IT support, they think of the phone calls they make pleading for help, the technician "squeezing" into your workspace to check something, or creating tickets that never seem to be resolved. Sometimes businesses don't want to call in their tech support because it is doing more harm than good. A lot of people feel the same way about going to the doctor's office. Neglecting your health, or the health of your business' technology are both shortsighted strategies.

4 Tools that Every Small Business Should Use

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With a VoIP system, you gain mobility, call security, and best yet, the ability to quickly and easily scale your phone system to your business' needs.

CRM

Customer Relationship Management (CRM), is a way to manage all the different types of relationships that you cultivate in the course of doing business. Without a CRM, it is very difficult to track these relationships, and make no mistake, there are a lot of them. Think about how your business functions, you have vendors for numerous things, you have your customer base, you have your campaigns and resulting opportunities, you have all of your other marketing opportunities (including those that are cultivated online), and you have your human resources that you have to track for payroll and benefits sake. That's a lot of moving parts. The

Just like you need to find a doctor you can trust; you need to find the right IT support. You need to find a provider that has solutions for problems, but who also works to keep your business healthy and successful without having to be called on to do so. Using a cutting-edge remote monitoring tool that features enhanced automation, the managed service provider can ensure that any issues found on your network or with your hardware can mostly be remediated before there is any interruption to workflow.

Your health care professional spends most of their time assessing a patient's health, not because there is anything necessarily wrong with them, but because they want to promote good health. This is exactly what the modern MSP does for a business. It provides proactive care for a business' computing and also delivers useful consulting services that ensure that your business is healthy now and in the future.

For a static monthly fee any technology covered under your agreement is

CRM automated large parts of this process, allowing your staff to efficiently manage their role and stop wasting time with clerical work when it could be better served on tasks that bring in revenue.

The Cloud

Today, nearly every business uses some type of cloud computing resource. Whether your organization has turned to a hosted email solution, a productivity suite hosted in the cloud, or if you have gotten a little more aggressive with your cloud initiatives, businesses are really seeing the benefits of using the cloud to host their data and applications. For those companies that haven't considered cloud resources, it saves you large amounts of upfront capital as you don't have to pay for new hardware to host the cloud on. Additionally, you get access to your cloud platform from anywhere you have an Internet connection,

actively monitored and managed, taking action remotely if there are issues to resolve. If it calls for a little more personal touch, an MSP will make a house call and remediate any problems you may have onsite.

Services most MPS offer include:

- Proactive monitoring and management of onsite resources
- Comprehensive consulting services
- Hardware and software procurement
- Around-the-clock IT support
- Vendor management
- Patch management
- Cybersecurity auditing
- Backup and Disaster Recovery (BDR)

..and more.

Your business may not be sick, but it might be on the verge. Call Directive at 607.433.2200 to talk to one of our IT experts today.



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making it easier for companies to deploy their people offsite. If your business is looking to get powerful computing, storage, and other digital resources, consider hosting them in the cloud for the best results.

Backup and Disaster Recovery

Speaking of the cloud, today's data backup is an integral part of protecting your business' data. Some solutions use the cloud, some use hard drives, some even use tape (a shrinking number, thankfully). At Directive, we utilize the BDR, which is a network-attached backup device that takes incremental backups of your data and sends a copy to the cloud. This provides a business with multiple copies of their recently saved data. This ensures that not only does...



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A Brief Guide to Leading a Company During COVID-19

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won't be exposed in some way to COVID-19 will affect productivity. This leads us to our next point.

Stay Closed If You Can

Can your business function with your employees working from home? Have they responded to the crisis thus far? Do you have definitive productivity metrics that make you think that recalling them is completely necessary? COVID-19 is far from over in much of the US and acting like everything is behind us is irresponsible. If remote work is the new normal, then adjusting expectations to that normal is much better than having a workforce that is terrified to come to work.

If You Do Open, Emphasize Safety

Obviously, some essential businesses

have been open the entire time and many workers for those companies have been able to avoid catching COVID-19. How did they manage that? By providing a workplace where their employees are safe. That means maintaining a six-foot distance between employees, requiring masks, and educating employees on the best ways to avoid catching the virus in the first place.

You should provide everything necessary to keep your employees safe. If they've been working from home this whole time, it might be fairly difficult to get them to see your motives as anything but selfish, but if you provide masks, sanitized workspaces, and plenty of soap, it may work to your benefit.

Mental Health During a Pandemic

It's hard to upend your life, get settled

in again, and then be forced to upend it again. For the worker that has been working from home for months, there may be some issues that have surfaced over those months, especially if they have had the misfortune of losing loved ones because of COVID-19. Have a mental health strategy for your staff. Everything may not be the same for them than when you sent them home, so having some support available can go a long way toward helping people cope with everything that the pandemic brought.

Be Fair

Some organizations are recalling employees that don't have children...



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Are You Wasting Money in the Cloud?



The cloud has proven to be an extremely useful tool for modern businesses. Not only does it provide anywhere-

anytime access to applications, processing, storage, and more, it also delivers those products as a service, allowing an organization--or an individual--to budget for recurring costs rather than major upfront ones. This provides your organization with functional, supported, and secure computing environments that eliminate a lot of the support costs that traditional computing environments require. It sounds like a perfect scenario for small and large businesses alike, but things aren't always what they seem, as a lot of cloud users have found that they have incurred several hidden costs by using cloud platforms. Today, we take a look at these hidden costs.

A study from Research In Action polled 468 CIOs about their cloud usage and the costs associated with them. Many admitted that cloud investment was one

of the largest technology expenses their organization has. The study went on to discover that while a majority of CIOs considered the "hidden" costs of this technology, much of the concern is completely alleviated by the reputation of their vendors. This leads one to ask, is who you do business with as important as the value you get out of a solution? In this case, it certainly is.

That's not to say that CIOs aren't understanding the issues. Many of them continue to assess the situation by looking at problems like these:

- Having to put forth more effort to properly manage vendors, and their corresponding Service Level Agreements (SLAs).
- Bottlenecking and the impact poor cloud performance could have on brand perception, productivity, and customer support.
- The increased cost of solving complex problems inside cloud...



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Cybersecurity Tips

Two-Factor Authentication

In today's cyber landscape, having just one strong password on an account just isn't enough. While we can do a lot to improve the strength of our passwords, having Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) is critical to take that security to the next level.

In this cybersecurity tip you will learn about what Two-Factor Authentication truly is and how it can help protect your critical accounts.

<https://dti.io/tip2fa>

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Marketing Ideas & Tips for Your SMB

4 Excuses Businesses Should Stop Using When it Comes to Social Media



As the owner of a business, one of your number one tasks is to grow your business. Simply put, without the revenue new contacts bring in, you'll likely grow stagnant. While word of mouth is great, there is a limit to how many people you can meet. You have to market, advertise, and promote your services to reach a wider audience. In terms of reach, social media can provide access to a nearly unlimited source of leads.

Yet, many businesses don't see the value that social media brings to their business. In fact, they have a plethora of reasons why they won't invest in social media. Here are four excuses businesses give for not investing in social media (and why they aren't accurate).

Excuse #1 - I Don't Know Anyone Using Social Media
Facebook has 2.37 billion active users. Twitter has 126 million daily users, LinkedIn, 500 million members. Now consider the other platforms, like Instagram and YouTube (and more!) with their

millions of users and tell us again you don't know anyone on social media. The number of users, companies, organizations on social media, makes it statistically impossible not to know somebody.

So, what you really mean to say is that you're out of step with current avenues of marketing and customer communication. Hey, we get it. It's pretty easy to feel burnt out or annoyed at Facebook, especially with how the platform has been run the last few years. It's totally fine for you, as a person, to not see the draw of social media. You, as the business owner of an MSP, however, need to see it differently.

Not having an active presence on social media means you are willingly missing out on an untold number of leads. Your audience is there, in at least some form or fashion.

Marketing campaigns require you to 'touch' potential clients more than just one time in order for your message to reach them and for it to be successful. In fact, what makes social media so valuable as a marketing tool is that you can connect with

hundreds, thousands, even millions of potential customers instantly and repeatedly. It doesn't happen overnight, but as you cultivate it, it becomes more valuable. This leads us to our next excuse:

Excuse #2 - I Tried Social Media (Once) And It Didn't Work

When an MSP says they tried social media and it didn't work, it usually means they made a random post or two, and since they weren't inundated with calls the next day, social media doesn't work. Okay, it's not always that extreme. Sometimes a business might buckle down really hard on social media for a month or two, and not see results. There are a lot of variables that could lead to poor performance though (more on that later).

Social media (like all marketing) can take time to gain traction.

Part of this is because you are not only competing against other businesses, but also against the news of the day, celebrities, and funny cat...



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We partner with many types of businesses in the area, and strive to eliminate IT issues before they cause expensive downtime, so you can continue to drive your business forward. Our dedicated staff loves seeing our clients succeed. Your success is our success, and as you grow, we grow.



Chris Chase
Solutions Integrator



Charlotte Chase
Solutions Integrator

Directive

330 Pony Farm Road
Suite #3
Oneonta, NY 13820
Toll-Free 888-546-4384
Voice: 607-433-2200

Visit us online at:
newsletter.directive.com



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