

# MayTrends

GEORGE S. MAY INTERNATIONAL COMPANY



## Business Technology: Is It Working For You? Or Are You Working For It?

A recent poll conducted by George S. May International Company showed that increasing numbers (nearly 80%) of small business owners not only have computers in the office, but also have them networked in some fashion.

If you are a business owner thinking of adding computers or networking current computers, ask yourself a very basic question: What do you want these computers to do? You may very likely be confronted with questions and issues that could lead your project astray unless you have a clear goal in mind.

Many business owners find that after investing time and money into a computer project they and their people are working harder on the computers than the computers are working to benefit them.

Here are tips to keep you and your investment in the computer project on track:

### 1. In sorting out what's important and what's not, always keep your goal in mind.

Your goal is the most important target for you to hit. Keeping your purpose clear also helps you avoid buying equipment and software you may not want or need. Far too often owners or their people make purchases that are not directly related to the key project. Why? Because there are always many "nice to have" items. But will these be used? Will they get in the way of accomplishing the main reason for the computer project?

Remember, anything that distracts you and your people from the goal that you set delays the reason for all your work. Don't let add-ons and other items get in the way. Learning systems and software that don't directly relate to your goal takes away time and effort from your purpose.

### 2. Perform a thorough analysis of your business technology environment.

If you are not a "tech" person, you should consult one. A good technology business analyst can give you a critical appraisal of your entire business process from a technology perspective.

The person can evaluate the technology that is currently being used or not used. Recommendations should be made on what changes you should make in both your business process and the support technology to help you attain your goal.

Remember your overall motive: You got into business to make money and be as profitable as possible. However, too often business owners find the growth they want puts a stranglehold on its bottom line because overhead increases. You must ensure that your computer investment allows you to make more money, not cost you money. A well-designed computer system should always help move you forward, not impede or block progress.

Your technology must support you and your business, not the other way around. It's all about performing work more efficiently. A professional familiar with the use of technology in business can make sure you achieve your goals.

Technology professionals are available at many consulting and service firms that focus on business-to-business work. You may also obtain recommendations from talking with other business owners you trust. Local business organizations also may be able to provide you direction and guidance.

### 3. Buy your technology from a provider that supports businesses, not consumers.

All too many businesses try to make do with what they see at a consumer retailer. This equipment and software may be perfectly suitable for use at home, but not at a business. The majority of local electronic stores and large retail chains specifically target and package computer hardware and software for home users, not businesses.

For example, most computers that are sold in consumer electronic stores come installed with operating systems that are not made to be networked with other computers.

This can be a costly mistake for a small business owner who, after unpacking and setting up a new computer, discovers it



## Business Technology: Is It Working For You? Or Are You Working For It?

won't talk to other computers. Contact a company that specializes in business-oriented technology services and offerings. If you don't know what to buy, have a technology professional help you make the right decision.

#### **4. Think before buying software or hardware. You are the person ultimately responsible.**

There are thousands of companies that make software and hardware. Many have products that could solve your problems or give you the capabilities you desire. One very important issue that most software companies don't tell you is how well their software will integrate with software you may already have or with your existing business processes.

Mis-matched software for the task or goal is a significant problem many small business owners face daily.

So how do you know what you should buy it? The answer is simple but time-consuming - do your homework. You are ultimately responsible for the purchase you make to get to your goal. Think of it this way: You study your customers to better understand what products or services they want. You should do no less to benefit and serve yourself in understanding what are your business needs.

To shorten the learning process and to get an assist in understanding various issues, contact a technology professional to help you. A professional technology business analyst can tell you exactly what are the pros and cons of buying and implementing a piece of hardware or a software package, in relation to your goals and your overall business.

#### **5. Be cautious about custom software solutions.**

Some may tell you that if you can't find exactly what you want, build it. Custom software developed for your business should accomplish one very important thing, that is delivering a tool that fits your business perfectly. If your customized solution does not accomplish this, reject it.

Be aware that a customized solution is expensive. Unless there is a direct need for such software, many businesses find an existing software package works as good as a custom one for their needs, at significantly less cost.

Custom software often has hidden costs, such as special training for users and a limited number of people who could modify it if needed.

If you decide a custom solution is the only solution, make sure you have a firm understanding of the payback on that investment. For some situations that require it, custom software can be the right solution no matter what the cost.

#### **6. Make sure support is readily available.**

Whatever decisions you make about the technology to buy and use to support your business, make sure the support you need is readily available. Existing hardware items and software packages often have extensive user services networks. Buy the extended warranty on that new PC or laptop. Purchase the support contract on that new software. Don't be penny-wise but pound-foolish.

Make sure that the providers of any customized solutions that you decide to invest in are reliable and available for short-term implementation questions, and for answers and support for long-term business-growth issues.

While you need to do homework to help ensure you are making the right decision with the hardware and software you buy, don't expect to become a computer expert. Remember that the reason for the computer system is to help you run your business. That is the primary issue to keep in mind. Your technology should always support your business operations. If the technology itself requires too much support, then you need to reevaluate its value and payback to the business.

*The George S. May International Company has been in business for over 82 years helping owners better run their business. Among the services the firm offers is professional business technology analysts and support.*

*Contact the George S. May International Company for assistance in analyzing your technology environment at [www.georgesmay.com](http://www.georgesmay.com) or 847-993-5452.*

