Bits & Bytes

Insider Tips On How To Use Technology To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier, And More Profitably

Technical Action Group Inc

TAG

we're I.T.

6 Reasons To Choose Hosted Solutions Over Traditional IT

"As a business owner , I know you don't have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That's where we shine! Call us and put an end to your IT problems forever."

Joe Stoll, President
Technical Action Group (TAG)
JStoll@TechnicalActionGroup.com

Inside this issue:

If you want to save your organization a good amount of money on hardware, software and support, you ought to be looking at the various hosted IT solutions that are available.

A hosted solution is simply a business application – be it a CRM system like Salesforce or an e-mail system like Microsoft's Exchange – that is stored (or hosted) on a server outside of your office and is accessed via the web. This is also called "cloud computing." While some folks are still a bit skeptical of putting their entire computer network in the "cloud," that fear is starting to subside with the incredible cost savings and ever-increasing security and reliability of hosted applications.

How Hosted Solutions Save You Money And Solve Many IT-Related Problems

1.   **Cost Savings.** With a hosted solution, you get the instant advantage of having very sophisticated software running on top-of-the-line, fully supported hardware without having to pay for it out of pocket. Since the resources are shared, you only pay a small fraction of the overall costs. Plus, upgrades and on-going maintenance are included, saving you even more.

2.   **You're Not Stuck With Any One Solution**. Another advantage of a hosted solution is that there is no long-term commitment. If you don't like a particular CRM or application, you can (usually) cancel the contract and move on to something else. Compare that against building your own in-house solution which costs a LOT more money and is much harder to walk away from because of the investment.

3.   **Your Costs Go Up Or Down Based On Users**. Since most hosted solution fees are based on the number of users who have access, you can quickly scale up or down.

4.   **Less Hassle.** Since your provider is providing these services like a utility, THEY are responsible for all the upgrades, maintenance, security, etc.

5.   **Faster Implementation**. Building your own infrastructure is not only expensive, but also time consuming. With hosted applications, you simply turn the service "on," making it much easier (and faster) to get started.

6.   **Easy Access From Anywhere.** If you or your employees travel a lot or work from remote or home offices, going to a hosted solution makes even more sense because users can work from anyplace they happen to be connected to the Internet.

Shiny Gadget of the Month:

WorkFlowy

Who doesn't want to be more organized?

You're less likely to forget important projects, dates and tasks, which in turn will reduce your stress and wasted energy.

But if you think getting (and staying) organized is tough, maybe you just haven't found the right tool. If so, you should check out WorkFlowy.

WorkFlowy makes capturing and organizing your ideas, projects and "to-do" list simple. It's based around the idea of outlines. Just pick a topic to organize and start typing. The outlining is handled almost automatically through its intuitive interface.

You can create outlines within outlines and break up a large project into smaller actionable tasks. It's great for multi-step processes or even planning your week.

Best of all, it's all online so you can access it from anywhere. All you need to do is create a free account and install Google's Chrome browser.

Since it's free, you've got nothing to lose for giving it a try**!**

www.Workflowy.com

What About The Downsides?

Some folks are still a bit too squeamish to put their entire network and data into a hosted solution, usually because of concerns over security or the fear of not being able to access their data if the Internet goes down. While these are valid concerns, they can easily be addressed by choosing a reputable company with a long-standing history of good service (think SalesForce or Rackspace) and by getting a backup Internet connection (something we recommend to all clients).

If you really want to know if your business can benefit from hosted solutions, give us a call. Even if you're not ready to go 100% to the cloud, you can often get certain pieces of your network hosted to save money and provide easier access to those who travel.

7 Key Ways Windows 7 Helps You Work Faster

We've all seen the Windows 7 TV commercials showing how multi-media addicts love Windows 7 for multi-purpose entertainment (movies, recording TV, listening to music all over their house, video-editing, etc).

What's still a bit of a mystery to most people is how Windows 7 helps them at the office. Here are the top 7 ways Windows 7 can help you work faster, and more pleasurably. With crushing deadlines and increasing workloads, don't we all need to get more done in less time?

1. You Can Still Use Your Favourite XP Applications in Windows 7
If you don't want to part with all that is good about Windows XP, rest easy – Microsoft considered XP addicts. With Windows 7 Professional or Ultimate, you can download Windows XP Mode so you can run many Windows XP productivity applications on your Windows 7 computer.

2. Device Compatibility
If you don't have a computer support professional managing your network, yet don't have the time or patience to muck around figuring out how to make all your devices work together, Windows 7 makes it easy to do this without a lot of fuss and aggravation. Your phone, printer and other PCs on your network can connect and synch easily so you're not stuck pulling your hair out adjusting settings and troubleshooting connections.

3. Location-Aware Printing
Whether you are a road warrior living from your laptop, or you divide your time between the office and home / cottage, Windows 7 makes it a no-brainer to print to multiple locations. When you have a Windows 7 laptop, it can automatically switch the default printer when you move from one location to another. So your laptop automatically prints to your home printer when you're home, and your office printer when you're at work. Note this feature is only available in Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate versions.

4. Get X-Ray Vision
If you hate closing or minimizing all your windows to get back to a file on your desktop, Windows 7 has the answer. There is a "peek" feature (think x-ray vision) that you can use to see through all of your open windows to your desktop without closing or minimizing them. If you have Windows 7 already, simply point to "Show desktop" button at the end of the taskbar. All your open windows will fade from view and you'll see your desktop. Move your cursor away from the end of the taskbar and you'll see all your windows again.

5. Improved Power Management
Raise your hands if the biggest annoyance with laptops is how fast the power drains dry. With Windows 7 running with fewer background activities, your laptop power is extended from using less power. Default power plan settings also let you control how your laptop manages power. To access this feature:

Click the battery icon in the task tray and choose your preferred option.

Balanced – Offers full performance and brightness when you're using the laptop, but conserves power when the computer is idle.

Power Saver – This is the best choice for conserving power; however you'll notice slower performance and lower display brightness.

6. Sleep and Resume

You want what you want, when you want it and you don't have the time or patience waiting for your computer to wake up and get back to work. Windows 7 improvements help your PC go to sleep (which conserves power) and resume more quickly so you can hit the ground running faster.

7. BitLocker Data Encryption

Even if you've never been the victim of computer thieves, don't be too smug in assuming it will never happen. Feel confident with Windows 7 protecting your valuable data against hackers and cyber-thieves. BitLocker data encryption keeps all of your files and passwords safer by scrambling the contents of the entire drive that Windows and all of your data reside on. BitLocker To Go extends the lockdown treatment to portable storage devices such as USB flash drives and external drives. This feature is only available in Windows 7 Ultimate and Enterprise.

All of us at TAG have been using Windows 7 since it's release. In a nutshell, we're in love with not only the way we can get things done faster and more securely, but how much more cost-effective it is for our clients for us to support it.

Why Am I Getting VIRUSES?!

You are paying for computer support. You have anti-virus software. And yet you are STILL getting viruses that slow down (or crash!) your computer, impede you from getting your work done and in general create a HUGE pain in the you-know-what situation. Why?

Here are 4 possible reasons:

(1) **You are on the Internet.** Yes, I know you HAVE to be online to run your business. But the reality is that NOTHING is 100% perfect in completely blocking every single harmful virus, hacker, worm, Trojan, malware, or spyware that tries to meander onto your system while you are online. So since running an "offline" business is not an option for 99.9% of us check out the next few reasons...

(2) **Your firewall isn't strong enough**. Most computers and servers have some type of firewall inherently built into the operating system and then a basic hardware firewall (a physical box that allows Internet traffic in and out of your network) to block the evil-doers from entering. But take note: All firewalls ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL. Some firewalls can lock your network down tighter than Fort Knox. Others act more like a screen and keep out only the REALLY BIG bugs. In general, the higher quality (and, yes, MORE expensive) firewalls protect you better. (As a side note: Our clients with these firewalls have less viruses and other malware issues than the ones who don't!)

(3) **Wireless Card or Home Internet Usage**. Most people don't realize that even if you have a firewall at work, you are pretty vulnerable at home. If you use a wireless card (3G/4G card) or download files onto your computer at home and use your home Internet connect (aka...NO FIREWALL) you are more likely to get nasty intruders like viruses messing with your system.

(4) **Inadequate Anti-Virus Software.** Believe it or not, on some levels a firewall is MORE important than virus software. Why? Because for virus software to do its job, the virus has to ALREADY BE ON THE MACHINE. Then, the software can quarantine the malicious item, clean it, and repair the system if necessary. If you have a FREE anti-virus software, or don't have a product that automatically updates at least daily, your protection from threats on your machine is minimal.

Want to know how to DRAMATICALLY reduce issues from viruses?Call Joe Stoll at 416-489-6312 x 204 to arrange for a FREE "Block The Viruses" consultation! We'll look at your situation, and present you with a cost-effective solution that can save you HOURS of aggravation and downtime.

Top 5 Network Security Mistakes

1.**Weak Passwords**. "password" is still the #1 password used by computer users. For maximum security, your password should contain numbers and letters, both upper and lowercase combined.

2.**Lack of Education.** Most viruses / spyware are invited by the user; if you want to make sure your employees don't download viruses, take time to educate them on what new viruses are circulating and about common scams.

3. **Lack of Maintenance.** No software is perfect, which means security loop holes are exploited by hackers the minute they are discovered. That's why it's critical to keep your security patches up to date.

4.**Plug and Surf.** Computers are NOT designed "ready to go" out of the box. Before a phone line, cable or wireless card is anywhere near a new computer, certain security needs to be installed. This should include virus protection, multiple spyware scanners and a program that runs in the background to prevent malicious software from ever being installed.

5. **Do It Yourself**. Setting up a network, applying proper security measures and downloading and installing software can be tricky. Large companies have IT departments. Small business owners should hire professional help. It's worth the extra cost.

What To Do When You Want the Advanced Features of Microsoft Exchange But Don't Want the Costs

With the complexity, costs and problems associated with installing a mail server, many businesses are now opting for "Hosted Exchange" in the cloud rather than bringing the server in-house. What are "cloud"-based or "hosted" services? Think of them like a gym membership. Instead of purchasing your own home gym equipment, which can be expensive, require maintenance and take up a lot of space, you can pay a small monthly fee to go to the gym and use a multi-million-dollar facility that is kept and maintained by someone else.

Hosted Exchange works the same way. Instead of incurring the costs and hassle of building and maintaining your own mail server, you can pay a low monthly fee and get top-of-the-line services, storage and security for your e-mail. Plus, you get the following benefits:

☐ Being able to access your e-mail remotely from any device
☐ More uptime and fewer issues
☐ E-mail archiving (storing of old e-mails)
☐ Spam filtering and anti-virus included
☐ 24/7/365 support
☐ Unlimited storage
☐ Easy synchronization with mobile devices

Want to find out how Hosted Exchange can save you a lot of money and solve your storage and archiving problems? Give Joe Stoll a call at 416-489-6312 x 204.

Eliminate Cell Phone Distractions While Driving With MobileSafer

Most of us have done it, though we know the laws, and the risks to human life. The phone beeps and you just can't help but check that e-mail or text when we're behind the wheel— even if only when stopped at a red light, when our eyes should still be straight ahead. If you (or your teen / young adult children) need an intervention, MobileSafer is just the ticket to keep your hands off your phone without having to put it in the trunk of your car.

MobileSafer is easy-to-use software for your mobile phone that eliminates the temptation to text or e-mail while driving and also keeps you safely connected via hands-free services. MobileSafer reduces the risk of getting a ticket or causing a crash, and it enables you to stay connected with modern lifestyles in a safe, legal and hands-free manner while driving. It also provides a message of social responsibility to anyone who tries to text or email you while driving since the MobileSafer™ software automatically responds back to let him or her know you are driving and will get back to him or her when you are done.

MobileSafer detects when any Bluetooth® device you choose (installed in your car or third-party accessory) activates to detect when you start your car. When your Bluetooth® device activates, MobileSafer sees the pairing and activates "safe drive mode," allowing hands-free use without distraction. If your car does not have Bluetooth® technology built in and you do not have a third-party accessory (car kit, PND, etc.), you can purchase a Bluetooth car-charger.

However, if you don't have an existing Bluetooth® connection, there are many choices of headsets, car kits and personal navigation devices (PNDs) that all provide hands-free access via Bluetooth® connection. Any type of Bluetooth® solution / accessory can be used to launch safe drive mode for MobileSafer.

For more info go to http://zoomsafer.com/products/mobilesafer/