

New Year's Resolutions with a Technology Twist

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Another year has come and gone. We've all made our resolutions – those often whispered promises to ourselves to exercise, save more money, get focused. And, too often, as business-owners, our New Year's Resolutions have everything to do with finishing that business plan, re-writing that brochure or keeping better track of the company's financials, and nothing to do with evaluating our business technology. Let's do something about that this year...and the next year...and the next...

Here are some technology resolutions on which you should promise and deliver:

Purchase your own business domain name. If your business does not own a domain name that is similar to the business name, look into buying one. Seriously. If you don't have a web site, you are missing valuable business opportunities so, look into getting a domain name. If you are still conducting business on the web at: www.somebodyelsesbusiness.com/~yourbusiness, ask yourself whose business you're promoting, and at what cost to your own business?

Resource: www.dotster.com; domain names are \$14.95 per year

Let there be life. Is your web site re-purposed brochure-ware? Does it teach your visitors anything? Is it interactive? Make sure, above all else, that your web site is professional, typo-free, tells what you do in a clear, concise manner and has your contact information posted prominently on each page. Give it a good once-over and check all the links and forms. Could it use a makeover? Do you have articles and reports ready to download from your web site? Are graphics and poorly done Flash animation bogging down your site? You'd be surprised what you find if you put yourself in your customer's shoes. If you don't have a web site, commit today to putting all your efforts into getting a solid one designed, up and running.

Resource: www.BigStep.com; this web site can help you from start to finish for a moderate price

Get a second opinion. Ask around for referrals to a reliable technology consultant. Interview all referrals thoroughly, when you find one that is knowledgeable and with whom you are comfortable, make an appointment for her to stop by your office to make an assessment of your current technology situation. If you have a home office, that's ok, too. Most technology gurus are used to working with small businesses and they can be very accommodating. The consultant will be able to tell you if there are any serious problems, what should be fixed, what could wait and suggest any new projects that she may deem appropriate based on your situation. This should not cost more than \$100 in most metropolitan areas.

Resource: Your Rolodex

Keep in touch. If you already own your own domain and are satisfied with the status of your web site, this is the perfect time for you to start your own email newsletter (eZine).

Your eZine should feature articles written by you in an effort to share information about your particular industry with your client base. Use your eZine to announce new products or services, updates to your web site, office holidays, special offers or any other pertinent industry information. In addition to sharing information and helping your company look like an information source, it will increase your company's visibility and solidify your brand. Some businesses also use their newsletters as a revenue stream, by selling ads in their newsletter.

Resource: www.eZineQueen.com; solid information and tips on creating your own eZine

Back it up. If you are not doing a regularly, scheduled, off-site back up of your company's important data, you are putting that data in a perilous situation. On September 11th, many companies learned the hard way about how important off-site data back ups can be. If your office or computer were to be ruined in a flood tomorrow, how long would it take for you to regroup and get back to business? If your answer is more than 2-3 days, that's too long. Your clients, vendors and suppliers will have moved on by then. Remember that you are the one who had the emergency, not them. Business will go on. If you have a back up plan in place, add it to your calendar to run a test back up every month to make sure that the back up is backing up the correct data at the right time. Once your back up is configured, it doesn't take any effort from you to perform a back up, in fact, most programs run automatically. But, always remember, if you are backing up to a storage device (CD, tape or zip drive), take the media with you and store it off-site. Your data does your business no good if it's in the flood with your computer. For businesses with high-speed Internet access, consider off-site, Internet back ups. They are reliable, secure and cost-efficient.

Resource: www.atbackup.com ; automatic, secure, restore from anywhere back up option for only \$90 a year

Computer housekeeping. Sometimes computers can be dumping grounds for all kinds of files and 'stuff'. Commit now to cleaning out temp files and cookies and running scan disk on a monthly basis. You should also archive your email to get rid of old data that you still need to keep. Consider moving those email archives to a CD or other data storage media to free up space on your hard drive. Making sure that your computer is not bogged down with ancillary files also helps to enhance your computer's longevity and performance. Many people report, after running a scan disk and deleting temp files, that their computer runs faster and more smoothly. (Imagine that!) Add computer housekeeping to your monthly to-do list so that you have time already set aside for these activities throughout the year and you won't have to scramble to get things done at the most inopportune time.

Resource: Your schedule

Keep it current. Take the time to get the latest security patches and upgrades for your business hardware and software. Printers may have new drivers and software may have security holes that need patching. If it's been three to five years since your last computer purchase, you may want to begin scouting for a new one. Modern, high-speed models can be bought for less than \$900. Also make an entry on your calendar to update your anti-virus software with the latest virus definition files each week - or set your software to automatically check for and download updates as they become available. New viruses are introduced to the cyber-ether daily so, be prepared. If you really want to splurge, how about investing in a new Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) to keep you organized for the incoming year and beyond?

Resource: web site for your various software manufacturers; www.Dell.com , for new hardware at reasonable prices; cNet.com, for reviews of PDAs.

Keeping up with your business technology can, at first, seem a little daunting. But, if you handle it with an organized approach, your business technology needs won't be piled up waiting for you at the beginning of the year. And, the time you save can be spent on fun tasks- like taxes!