

Make the Most of Your Technology Dollars



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Not technical? This is no reason to abdicate your good judgment when it comes to making technology decisions. Applying plain old common sense can help you make the right decisions for your business even though you do not understand all the underlying technical details.

The most critical thing to remember is that investing in technology is not like buying a refrigerator, where you plug it in and call for help if it fails. Rather, buying technology is like buying a car: an essential and significant investment that will rapidly lose value and utility unless it is proactively maintained throughout its useful life.

In general, you evaluate the purchase of an automobile in terms of the capacity you actually need, expect to need in the future and are willing to pay for. Ask the same kinds of questions about cost and availability of upkeep and maintenance to aid in your technology decision-making process.

No one expects that a car will continue to function reliably without routine maintenance at regular intervals. You know, too, that even though a car has been well-maintained, you may require replacement in situations where reliability is vital and a breakdown would be devastating. This is the same common sense judgment that must be applied to help you keep your business technology safely on the road. In the final analysis, neglecting your technology infrastructure can cost your business many times over the cost of regular maintenance and monitoring.

Here are five basic rules of the road aimed at avoiding the high cost of neglect whether you have two computers or 200.

- **Purchase Strategically.** Think about all your technology purchases in the context of your total technology site. Understand the compatibility and scalability of your options. Consider the

ubiquity of support and ongoing parts and service commitments as important components of evaluating any potential purchase.

- **Deploy Strategically.** Ask questions about key issues, such as backup, disaster recovery, intruder lockout, virus protection, data security, documentation, maintenance and monitoring. If your in-house technology staff or outsourced provider does not cover these details to your satisfaction, make them explain it again. Insist that all the actual functional details are clearly documented in writing, updated as needed and that you always know where to find them.

- **Budget for Technology Expenses Each Year.** Technology is an ongoing expense. Budget for support, maintenance AND new equipment each year. Have a well-defined purchase strategy so that you avoid the added expense of having all of your equipment become simultaneously obsolete.

- **Maintain Your Technology Environment.** Apply hardware and software updates and patches on a regular basis, at least at eight-week intervals. Never let your virus protection lapse. Virus definitions change as often as threats materialize and must be applied to be effective.

- **Monitor Your Technology Environment.** Require simple procedures to track the daily health of your systems. Keep a log to record any performance problems, error messages or other anomalies. At least one person must be responsible for knowing if the system backup completed properly every business day. Know whom to call if you are experiencing problems and make sure they have access to the system documentation and the maintenance logs.

Your technology is the engine that drives your business, and you can put yourself firmly in the driver's seat with these simple guidelines.

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