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Tech Experts Keeps The Motor Running For Friendly Ford

In 1983, Tom Shankie purchased the Ford franchise located on South Monroe Street, and over the past 25 years he, his family, and the staff at the dealership have sold many vehicles, serviced vehicles and supported the community. In 2002, having outgrown the Monroe Street facility, Friendly Ford built a new, state of the art dealership on North Telegraph Road.

The company has seen many changes in the auto industry, and computerization of the dealership is one of them. We talked with Nicole Ernst, vice-president of the dealership, about how the company uses computers and the business benefits they've experienced since choosing Tech Experts for their computer and network services.

"We use our computers to determine what the customer's payments will be for financing or leasing the car, we also input all customer information so that all of the customer's paper work prints out correctly with their information," explained Nicole. "We use the computers to communicate with the financing institutions, to manage customer follow-up after the sale, and to respond to Internet customers."

Tech Experts installed a Microsoft

Small Business Server network and IBM/Lenovo workstations for each of the dealership's employees. Staff have access to the Internet for work related browsing and access to the dealership's management software .

"We also use the network in the service department," continued Nicole. "Customer information can be easily recalled if they have done business with us before. The service advisor can simply type the customer's concerns into the computer and, while working on the vehicle the mechanic can communicate with the advisor about repairs."

"When we decided to purchase our own hardware and instead of employing an "IT" person to contract an outside company to provide maintenance and service for that hardware I called many different places," Nicole explained. "I started in the phone book and called a few companies that were referred to me."



Melissa Smith and Sheila Johnston work the parts counter at Friendly Ford, using their new IBM workstation computers.

"I really hate to say that reducing our expenses is a "value added" service, but as we experience some of the worst economic times in history it does tend to stand out in one's mind," Nicole explained. "Tech Experts came in with a full bound proposal with at least three different options for me, the other company walked in with one sheet of paper with a large number on it."

"I felt that Tech Experts did an excellent job listening to me when they made their first visit. They came back with a proposal that was well thought out, they knew I had expenditure concerns , and they kept that in mind when putting together all of my options."

Continued on back page

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**Nicole Ernst,
Vice President,
Friendly Ford**



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The Year Is One-Sixth Over... How's Your Progress?



Thomas Fox is president of Tech Experts, southeast Michigan's leading small business computer support company.

I'm writing this month's article in the Dallas airport, waiting for my flight home after spending three days in meetings with my HTG

peer group. I wrote about peer groups before, but in case you missed it, here's a quick refresher:

Four times a

year, I get together with other computer company owners for a two to three day meeting, sharing company metrics, reviewing the business, and setting goals.

We act as each other's "accountability partners." We hold each other's feet to the fire. We start by reviewing how our businesses did the last quarter; we lay it all out on the line, the good, the bad and the ugly. Everyone is here to work "on" their business for a few days – instead of working in it.

A big part of what we do together is sharing goals. Most small business owners talk about setting goals for their companies, but at the end of the day, they almost always get stuck in the day to day, and don't get a chance to focus on the objectives they have set for the business. That's what I really like about the HTG experience – there are 11 other business owners who are holding me accountable for what I say I'll get done.

When we report on our goals for the previous quarter, the group votes on whether we're "green, yellow or red" on a goal.

Green means we nailed it, yellow means we're almost there, and red, obviously, means you didn't get it done.

There's a lot more to the HTG experience, and I'm sure I'll share more throughout the year. If I had to sum up the value in just a few words, I'd say that the peer group experience forces me to focus on what's really important for my business, my team and my clients. It is accountability on steroids.

Now that the year is one-sixth over, how are you doing on the goals you've set for your company? Are you 10% there? Have you set the world on fire yet?

Part of our job as your IT company is to work with you on the strategic goals you've set for your business, and help you apply information technology in ways that will improve efficiency, increase client satisfaction, and reduce costs. Toward that end, we'll be conducting quarterly business reviews (QBRs) with each of our business clients.

The purpose is to sit down with you and discuss the big-picture aspects of your network, computers and servers as they relate to your business goals. Chances are, there are things we can do to improve operations at your company – and there's probably some things going on in your business and industry that we should know about.

QBRs will also give me a chance

to check up on our relationship and get a feel for how the services team is performing for you. I'm excited about this new initiative and believe we'll both get a lot of value from it.

My three goals for Tech Experts for the next quarter – we set three goals in HTG, the thinking being it's impossible to concentrate on more – all revolve around process documentation and improvement. As Tech Experts grows, it's critically important that we perform all of our services consistently, so that when Bob works on your network, the flow and process works the same as when Corey or I do.

I also have to admit that I have a fourth goal – one that didn't get accomplished last quarter. That's the thing about being held accountable – goals don't go away when they're not completed. They just get added to the list of things you're responsible for in the next meeting.

Big, business changing goals don't get accomplished in a week or even in a quarter. But being accountable to your goals should happen every day.

Are you working on your business, or in your business? When you look back at January and February, will your goals be green yellow or red?



Some of the members of HTG16 gather before going to dinner. From left, Jason Hagens from Seattle, Tim Rettig from Cincinnati, Mike Perkins from Boulder, me (checking service tickets), Alex Rodriguez from Borger, Texas, Matt Zaroff from Sherman Oaks, California, and with his back to the camera, Dave DeVecchio from Easthampton, MA.



3 Things You Need To Know About E-mail Marketing



Corey Bogedain is a network technician and web developer with Tech Experts.

It's everyone's favorite application. Since its introduction, it has revolutionized the way we communicate, both personally and professionally. It has had a major impact on how compa-

nies market themselves, communicate with vendors, send out press releases, rally employees and alert clients to their latest and greatest promotion. The ease, low-cost and speed of e-mail in marketing is the biggest reason why our inboxes are overflowing with spam.

In response to the ubiquitous outcry, "I hate spam," governments have crafted new regulations surrounding the use of e-mail; and if you are one of the millions of companies using it for marketing, then it's important that you familiarize yourself with these laws. But the danger doesn't stop there...

Even if you don't get caught by the authorities for violating the rules of e-mail usage, you can still end up on a blacklist with the major ISPs such as Yahoo!, AOL, and MSN. Once you get blacklisted, you are considered guilty until proven innocent, and ALL the e-mail you send won't get through, even to

people who want to receive it—a consequence that could end up hurting your business more than a fine.

So what are the basic guidelines of e-mail marketing?

First and foremost, make sure you are only sending e-mail campaigns to people who have solicited (requested) to be on your distribution list. This is called "opting-in" or subscribing, and e-mails sent to these folks are considered "solicited e-mail." You are perfectly within

your rights to send them messages; but if you got their e-mail address by any other means and they did NOT specifically request to be on your list, that is "unsolicited e-mail" or spam.

Sending promotional e-mails to people who have not requested it can be illegal, but certainly annoying...so don't do it!

Next, make sure you provide directions on how a person can remove themselves from your distribution list in EVERY e-mail. The best

place to put this information is at the very bottom of your message.

You should also include your full company name and contact information at the bottom so no one can blame you for cloaking your identity—which is in violation of the CAN-SPAM Act.

Finally, when sending mass e-mails, we recommend using a web based service such as iContact (www.iContact.com). These applications will help you manage your e-mail distribution list with automatic opt-out and opt-in tools and will



keep your e-mail server off an ISP's blacklist. Naturally, you want to make sure the information you are

sending is interesting and relevant. No one wants more junk filling up their inbox so the better you are at marketing, the better your results will be.

Email is not a magic marketing bullet that will solve all your marketing problems, but used correctly, it can help you reach more customers and build stronger relationships with the people you already do business with.



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On the web:
<http://www.icontact.com/a.pl/310189>

How To Pick A Good Password

What's the most common password? You guessed it... "password." Obviously this is not the best way to protect yourself against hackers and online thieves. But even if you don't use the word "password," you might be using an equally easy password to decipher. We suggest you DON'T use the following passwords for really important

web sites, such as your online banking web site or other financially related sites.

- Your name or your spouse's name.
- Your children's names.
- Your pet's name.
- Your birth date.
- The last four digits of your Social Security number.

- Your phone number.
- Your address.
- A series of consecutive numbers, such as "1, 2, 3, 4."
- A single word that would appear in a dictionary.

Your best bet for creating a strong password: Use combinations of letters, numbers and special characters.

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USB Flash Drives Great For Backups At A Low Cost



Robert Saylor is a senior network technician and hardware specialist with Tech Experts.

A few issues back I discussed what random access memory (RAM) was, and how important it was to have as much memory as your computer can hold. This month I'd like to talk about memories. Or more to the point the storage and retrieval of

memories.

I've experienced countless numbers of hard drive failures in computers that belong to our home user clients and as a result of this failure they lose all of their precious photo memories.

Once I tell them that I cannot rescue these photos, a lot of times they get that deer in the headlights look, and it is so sad. I got to thinking about this as just this past holiday season, my wife and I purchased a digital camera. Never having owned one before, I have been taking pictures like crazy and downloading them to my home PC.

In years past, it wasn't an issue to back up your photographs. You used to take your pictures into the store and have them developed. It didn't matter which type it was, slides or photos: Once you got them back developed, you could put them in an



My wife and I took this picture of a deer at the Metropark near our home.

album and anything short of a major disaster those images will live on for generations. Your "backup" was the negatives that came back with your pictures.

Hard drive failure can lead to a loss of so many memories that many feel this would be a major disaster. We've touched on various backup systems for business users, but home users should be just as vigilant in the protection of what they consider to be their important data, their photo memories.

As technology has changed over the years, storage technology has evolved just as quickly. We used to backup onto floppy disks. Then came the writable CD player. And just a few years back came the development of an affordable DVD writer that can store much more data than a CD.

But the latest technology is the USB

thumb or flash drive. This tiny portable electronic drive has no moving parts and is small enough to fit on your key chain.

And as companies refine their technology; these drives have become more and more affordable.

The ease of use is one of its best features, a truly plug and play device that works instantly on any computer with a current operating system such as Windows XP or Windows Vista. You can move the drive with true ease from computer to computer to copy those memories and have them stored away for future generations.

I've seen USB flash drives with 4GB of storage sell for as low as \$25. This type of capacity will allow you to store numerous photos and can serve as an electronic photo album. The other nice thing about a USB drive for backup is that you can use them for more than just pictures - any important data you have on your computer can be backed up or copied.

If you'd like more information about how to use a USB drive to backup your memories (and important documents), just give us a call at (734) 457-5000.

Friendly Ford & Tech Experts, Continued From Front Page

"They also knew that I was going to need a lot of assistance with getting this started and completed and a company that would follow up with good support after the installation. They went above and beyond, for example: when I stated that I used a management system for all of the dealership operations, they asked who it was and asked for a phone number to contact someone for more information and to ask their own questions. The other company didn't even ask who we used or what the whole system was about or why we needed it."

Nicole concluded, "Tech Experts truly cares about each one of their clients. They established a personal working relationship me because that is what I needed. They understand that it is important for me to not have to know ever working aspect of my computer system so that I can concentrate my efforts towards taking care of my customers."

For more information about Friendly Ford, call (734) 243-6000, or visit www.YourFriendlyFord.com.