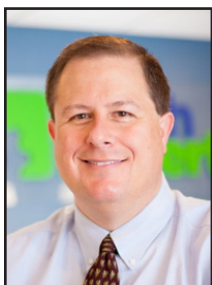# TechTidbit.com

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Four Tips For Next Year's IT Budget

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

As the year winds down, you're undoubtedly working out plans for 2016, and preparing your IT budget is top on that list.

Every year presents unique network, server, and technology challenges that need to be addressed.

The increasing ubiquity of cloud services is something small business owners need to consider, but working out the basic budget items should take priority. Here are four tips to give your business a little bit of breathing room when it comes to planning next year's IT expenses.

Think in the long term

When planning your IT budget, it's important to consider both short-term and long-term investments that you'll be making for the sake of your business.

The fact that so many services, like cloud computing, are being turned into operational expenses is placing an emphasis on a model based around affordable payments rather than heavy up-front costs. It's important to consider how these costs will affect your budget, especially over the long-term.

Invest in training your team

There's far too little investment in ensuring that employees understand the benefits of the latest technology solutions. What good are the latest IT solutions if your staff has no clue how to use them?

By properly training your team to take advantage of new technology, you're essentially providing them with skills necessary to make their workflow easier and make them more productive.

This helps them get the most out of their technology and maximize the amount of work they're able to perform.

Consider your storage options

Your organization shouldn't just be taking advantage of one centralized storage system for its data. Instead, plan for multiple locations where your data can be stored. The primary reason for this is redundancy. Business continuity in the event of a disaster relies on having your data accessible.

Another reason for this is to optimize your organization's access to its critical data. For this purpose, cloud computing can be exceptionally helpful for both data storage and data backup solutions.

Plan for software and hardware upgrades

Unexpected hardware failure can quickly drain your IT budget, not only in terms of replacement equipment, but also lost productivity and downtime.

Not only are hardware failure and software issues hard to predict, but they're also expensive to replace. Your budget should always have assets allocated toward mitigating and replacing technology that's critical to the success of your business. Otherwise, you could be dealing with huge expenses that will, without a doubt, break your budget, and force you to come up with funds from elsewhere.

For more tips on how to optimize your IT budget and get the most out of your technology, give Tech Experts a call at (734) 457-5000.

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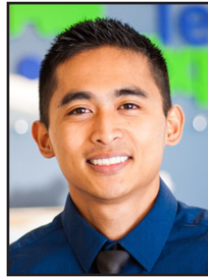
Need help? Call the Tech Experts 24 hour computer emergency hotline at (734) 240-0200.

A Few Reasons Why Desktops Are Better

"Comparable hardware for a PC is significantly cheaper than similar laptop hardware. If you don't need the mobility, you can save a pretty decent chunk of money just by sticking with a desktop."

Michael Menor is Vice President of Support Services for Tech Experts.

With all this talk about mobile devices like tablets, smart phones, and ultra-portable laptops, you'd begin to think that traditional desktop PCs are going to seem archaic.

Depending on your needs, that can be the case, but desktops aren't going away anytime soon – and for good reason.

More Powerful Hardware

This has been the case from the very beginning – desktop PCs are capable of more powerful hardware.

Desktops don't need to worry about electricity consumption the same way portable devices do and components don't need to be shrunk down into a tiny lap-sized chassis.

This also allows better heat dispersion. All three factors give desktops the flexibility to utilize the most complex, cutting edge components that aren't designed for mobility (yet).

In other words, computer hardware manufacturers build new components, then work on shrinking those components into mobile sizes.

This reason alone will keep the desktop alive - PC gamers, graphic artists, and multimedia buffs will always want high-end desktops.

Cost Effectiveness

Of course, you don't need the newest, cutting edge components to have a blazing-fast PC. You can easily get by with cheaper, previous generation components.

Remember a decade ago when a desktop PC could cost thousands of dollars? It's still possible (and easy for some) to spec out a high-end PC with that kind of price tag, but each additional dollar spent isn't worth it unless you have VERY specific needs.

Also, comparable hardware for a PC is significantly cheaper than similar laptop hardware. If you don't need the mobility, you can save a pretty decent chunk of money just by sticking with a desktop.

Desktops are Easier to Fix and Maintain

Let's share a real-world tech scenario. Replacing a part on a desktop is a pretty simple task for a technician. In fact, with a little hand-holding, almost anybody could figure it out. Replacing the motherboard on a laptop, however, is an extremely cumbersome process. Depending on the model, it can involve over two dozen screws and a lot of time.

Replacement parts aren't as affordable as they are for desktops either. For smart phones and tablets, expect to ship those out to the manufacturer.

You Probably Won't Leave your Desktop at the Airport/Coffee Shop/Hotel

It's true! If you are lugging around a big PC case, a monitor or two, a keyboard, mouse, and power cables, it's pretty likely you won't accidently forget it when you realize how light your luggage has become.

All joking aside, because your desktop lives a pretty uneventful life without much movement, it doesn't endure the little bumps, drops, and spills that laptops, tablets and other mobile devices take.

It's harder to steal too, so there is a little essence of security knowing your data is locked inside a great big aluminum box tethered to your desk with a web of cables.

Have you moved on from the desktop PC completely or are you still holding on? Do you even want to go strictly mobile? Let us know and let us answer any questions you have.

Replacement Equipment And Workstation Data Storage

Scott Blake is a Senior Network Engineer with Tech Experts.

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a huge project or in the height of your busy season, then suddenly, a key piece of equipment breaks? You have orders that need processed. Deadlines to meet. Stress starts to roll in. You start to wonder how long the downtime is going to last or what this is going to cost your business.

One way to reduce the stress levels and temporarily resolve the situation is to maintain a stock of replacement workstations and essential equipment.

Being able to switch out a workstation or any other critical piece of equipment and be back up and running sooner not only reduces stress levels, but also saves your business countless dollars in lost revenue.

Example: your company designs and prints graphics for billboards. An employee says their workstation has crashed while they were working on a project for your largest client that's due in two days. What do you do?

You try to contact the manufacturer of the workstation, only to find out your warranty does not cover on-site service and the soonest they could be on location is in two to four days. That's not the answer you wanted to hear.

If you had a replacement workstation on hand, you could reduce your downtime dramatically. But let's say you do have one. So you switch out the workstations and your employees is back to work…

Until they realize all of their work is stored on the crashed workstation. Stress levels start to climb once again.

One easy way to avoid losing data would be to migrate the user's data to a storage device located on your network. Network attached storage is much more reliable than the storage within your workstation. They can also be configured for redundancy.

This entire migration will be transparent to the user as the workstations libraries will still remain intact, just relocated to a different device. As far as the user is concerned, all of their data is saved to the workstation.

The general rule of thumb is to maintain a 10% replacement stock level of workstations or essential pieces of equipment (and always have at least 1). Replacement switches, as well as firewalls, should always be on hand or able to be purchased locally. Being able to replace a switch or firewall to bring your VOIP phone system back online or restore network connectivity to your entire business in minutes is critical.

If your business is unable to maintain replacement inventory, make sure you have (and fully understand) support contracts either from equipment manufacturers or from a local network support company.

 Depending on the manufacturer or support company, support contracts can range from 24x7 to 8x5 to "whenever we can get there." That's why it's very important to understand your support agreements. Never get taken by surprise.

Manufactures, depending on the piece of equipment, will offer warranties or support contracts. Be warned the contract may not include next day equipment replacement, data recovery, or installation of the equipment.

They may be able to offer remote assistance, but in most cases, you end up in a long call that does nothing to resolve your issue.

The best option, if available to your business, is to have a managed service plan with a local network support company. Most local support companies will offer same day service including weekends.

Local service companies can act as your business IT support department and/or work with your existing IT department to maintain your business equipment and resolve any issues that arise.

Most local service companies will have replacement equipment and repair parts on hand, thus reducing downtime.

A local service company will also be able to assist your business in less stressful times by offering remote support services and preventive maintenance visits to spot any potential issues before they become larger problems.

They will also work to ensure your business' network is safe and secure and offer suggestions for upgrades to your infrastructure.

While no one can predict when a workstation may go down or a firewall will fail, the best thing you can do is be prepared.

> *"Being able to switch out a workstation or any other critical piece of equipment and be back up and running sooner not only reduces stress levels, but also saves your business countless dollars in lost revenue."*

Maintaining Workstation Data Protection

Making sure your workstation's data is backed up and ready for deployment in the case of workstation failure is vital to any business. Once the workstation has been replaced or repaired, it's key your employees are able to pick up right where they left off. This means restoring their data as soon as possible.

Three of the more common methods of maintaining data protection on a workstation can be deployed on business networks, as well as home user environments.

Roaming profiles are the method most commonly used in larger businesses. A roaming profile stores user data on a file server or storage device located on the network. This allows the user full access to their data no matter which workstation they log into, as long as it's connected to the business' network.

The roaming profile allows the user to have a consistent desktop experience, such as appearance and preferences.

The downsides to using roaming profiles are that they can be difficult to set up and if the user has a large amount of data contained within their user account, there can be a delay when logging in.

User profile folder migration is a method in which the local user data folders are moved to a file server or a secondary hard drive. To migrate your user profile folders, you first need to create new folders located on the storage device, keeping the names similar for ease of use (such as My Documents, My Pictures, etc).

Once the new folders are created, you can change the location of your user profile folders to save to the new folders. After that, all of your data files will be copied to the new location and the original folder will be removed from your local profile.

If the workstation ever needs replaced, you would repeat the process on the new workstation and all of the existing data will be available. However, if you migrate folders to a network attached device and lose network connectivity, you also lose connectivity to your folders and their data.

Simple file storage is the simplest and most common form of data protection on a workstation. This method is accomplished through either hardware or software means, such as connecting an external storage device to the workstation or using a web based file backup such as

our Experts Total Backup service.

Simple file storage method is the least costly, which is why it's often utilized by small businesses and home users. Attaching an external storage device such as a large USB flash drive or hard drive to the workstation allows the user to save the data to the device.

This method is also a way of increasing storage capacity of the workstation without having to install internal hard drives. The drives can be left connected to the workstation or removed for safe storage. Using a web based file backup is another commonly used way of backing up your data files.

Once the backup software is installed and configured, the backup process becomes fully automated. The downside to web based backup is that it's web-based – so data restore time is based on your Internet connection speed. It can take anywhere from a couple of hours to a couple of days to restore your data depending on the amount of data that was backed up.

If you have any questions on workstation data protection or would like to implement a backup method, call us at (734) 457-5000.

What's A Good Portable Projector Under $500?

Choose the Celluon PicoPro for a reasonably priced projector that's easy to tote. At just seven ounces with the batteries in it, it won't weigh you down, and it is small enough to store in your purse or carry in a shirt pocket.

It retails for $399.99, which is pretty inexpensive for a projector of its caliber, and its use of laser technology for a light source creates a good picture on virtually any surface with uniform brightness. The PicoPro is

also designed to stay cool without the use of a fan, so it runs quietly enough to allow viewers to focus on the displayed media without the noise distraction.

In addition, since it is small, you can't view stored images directly from the PicoPro. You can, however, pair it with most smartphones to see any stored media without problems. It focuses automatically, taking the guesswork out of achieving a clear picture. Although the focus is a little

softer than that on other projectors, it slightly affects the readability of text-based images but isn't noticeable otherwise.

The battery lasts two to three hours, and it can also connect via USB to your computer or plug straight into the wall when you need to recharge or conserve power. The Celluon PicoPro also comes with a carrying soft case for protection when on the go and a diminutive stand that works like a small tripod for hands-free use.