SHOWTECH IT SOLUTIONS

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Your Small Business Technology Information Source!

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What Value Do Managed Services Offer? Fourth, Data Services

Data is of key importance to many modern businesses, and with the help of a managed service provider, it can become even more useful. Here, as we continue our series on the value that a managed service provider can offer you, we'll focus on the ways that data can be harnessed to your business' advantage.

Storing Data in the Cloud

There is a truly astronomical amount of data produced by today's businesses, each and every day. A business that can harness...

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When approaching the holiday season, everyone here reflects on those that have made our success possible. Thank you for continuing to support us and may your holiday season be filled with joy.

Chatbots and Other Simple Artificial Intelligence

There are plenty of technologies that come to define the point of time in which they were developed. The printing press, the light bulb, the automobile, etc. Today, we live in a time where new, and potentially transcendent technologies seem to be a dime a dozen. In the past twenty years we've seen the development of the mobile device, broadband technology (both wired and wireless), social media, blockchain and cryptocurrency, all the way to self-driving cars. None of these technologies (even YouTube) has the promise that Artificial Intelligence has, however. Let's take a look at how businesses are using AI to improve their business right now.

What is AI?

The AI that we see in business today isn't the same AI that we see portrayed by sentient robots in the movies. This is undoubtedly a good thing, but with each passing day more AI is being used for business. AI and machine learning (ML) are the underlying processes of

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Where is Your Data and Who Can See It?

We are all in the cloud. The concept of cloud computing and cloud storage has revolutionized the way businesses handle data storage and software distribution. We have helped many of our clients utilize cloud-based services, and these days, most of us are connected to this entity labeled as "the cloud" in one way or another. The question is, how can we tell if our data is safe?

Real Quick, What's the Cloud Again?

It's not a dumb question, because the term "the cloud" is used synonymously for essentially any data stored on the Internet. It's a very broad term with a lot of loose ends. Technically, Twitter and Facebook are "the cloud" and your website host is also "the cloud." Google Drive, Dropbox, and Microsoft 365? They would also fall into this category.

If you store data on the Internet in one way or another, you are essentially in the cloud. If you want to split hairs, you can even look at having an online bank account as being in the

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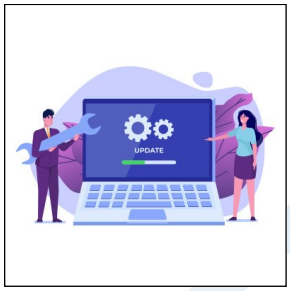
Windows 7 Support is Coming to an End



Here's something that may surprise you, Windows 7 is still one of the more popular operating systems. This is troubling since Microsoft is shutting off support for the OS on January 14, 2020.

The software giant has begun to roll out warning signs in their patch Tuesday's patches, but it hasn't been enough for people (and businesses) to upgrade away from Windows 7. Let's take a look at more about this shift.

January 14, 2020

We are now just a month away from Windows 7 End of Life event. Computers running the software after January 14th, will not be receiving technical assistance from Microsoft; and therefore will be in danger from a new wave of oncoming vulnerabilities.

Why Shouldn't You Run Unsupported Software?

The way it is written, software isn't always secure. Developers need to make consistent changes to ensure that hackers don't have access to vulnerabilities. Since a data breach can effectively wipe out your company, you need to ensure that all of your systems are up-to-date and patched thoroughly.

Not only that, a data breach can flatten any forward momentum a business has. That's not even taking into account that the fact that today, with ransomware being a consideration, making sure all of the software you depend on is supported keeps your business secure. Besides the security issues, there are other considerations to contend with, like a loss in functionality

What are Your Options?

Upgrade to Windows 10

To be honest, your options are shrinking by the day. You only have about a month before Microsoft pulled the plug on the software for good, and you need to upgrade away to keep threats from piling up. Windows 10 only requires at least a one GHz processor, 2 GB of RAM, and 20 GB available on a hard drive, which may allow your business from facing huge upfront costs if its technology already meets those standards.

Extended Support

With only a month left it may not give some organizations enough time to make the change. For businesses that qualify, Microsoft is offering a costly extended support package that will be available for all Windows 7 Pro and Windows 7 Enterprise customers with volume licensing through January 2023. For qualifying businesses, costs for Enterprise will be $25 per device from 2020-2021, $50 per device from 2021-2022, and $100 per device from 2022-2023. The cost of support for Pro versions will be double that...

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Chatbots and Other Simple Artificial Intelligence

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machines using algorithms to perform tasks without the explicit parameters that are typically necessary. Though AI and ML, businesses are benefiting by eliminating work.

In the course of doing business there are a lot of small, mundane, and repetitive tasks that cost businesses a lot to carry out. Typically due to the costs established from having people performing those tasks. Today AI/ML systems are capable of accomplishing many of these tasks with a keen eye for small deviations. In some cases, they respond well to larger deviations. Let's take a look at some of the way's businesses are using AI/ML right now.

Network Security

In the course of keeping networks secure, there are dozens of very mundane, very repetitive tasks that need to be accomplished. Integrating AI into IT services and hyper-converged infrastructure systems, helps balance workloads by automating network security tasks.

Cyber-Defense

Aside from regular network security tasks, AI/ML systems provide answers to the breakneck speed of network interactions. By being able to check network packets faster than ever, and quickly discern what is in them, these AI cybersecurity systems can work to quickly cross reference information to ascertain exactly what information should be allowed and what should be blocked.

Chatbots

Everyone knows that customer service is a major part of doing business, and many sectors have begun to roll out AI-fueled chatbots to handle the product and service support via a website-based chat application. These interfaces are building intelligent conversational abilities with machine learning. Since most support questions are asked frequently, the chatbot can learn how to return useful conversation about products, services, and company information.

Business Intelligence and Predictive Analysis

One of the most important uses of AI is as a supplement to a dedicated business intelligence platform. AI can enable BI tools to produce much clearer, much more useful insights. The clearer and more useful the insights the more forward-thinking decision makers will use them.

Accounting and Billing

Accounting has been one of the most straight-forward aspects of...

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Where is Your Data and Who Can See It?

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cloud, because your personal information is stored on the bank's online servers.

If you send digital photos to get printed at Wal-mart, those photos are going to Walmart's servers and stored in, you guessed it, their online cloud. When you attach a file to an email in Gmail, that file is stored on Google's servers in the cloud. When you ask your Amazon Echo to remind you to wake up early next week to make it to your oil change, your voice is being transferred to the cloud, and your schedule gets processed and sent to your device.

Florida businesses use the cloud for storing company data, sharing documents, or even using cloud-based apps like Office 365 to edit files from any device. Often, line of business applications will have cloud options too, so the software itself and all the data is stored offsite.

You Make It Sound Like Most of Our Data is Online… Is This Bad?

Well, depending on how you store your data, this might be the case. Whether or not it is a good thing or a bad thing depends on what your data is and where you are storing it.

Many businesses still have onsite servers where they store company data. This means the responsibility to keep those servers secure is on them. It's no different than storing all of your vacation photos on your home computer - if something happens to your computer and the files aren't backed up, you might be out of luck. This is why we all take precautions to secure our networks, install antivirus, set up firewalls and security devices for our businesses, backup data, etc.

The cloud is just someone else's computer. If we store data in the cloud, we are entrusting someone else to protect it. There are pros and cons to this.

First of all, if someone is in the business of storing data online, ideally they are able to afford the best security to keep that data safe. This isn't a guarantee, but chances are a massive company like Google or Microsoft has more capital to invest in protecting the data of their customers than a small business.

The problem is that not all cloud solutions are created equal, and they aren't all investing the massive amounts of money needed to protect the data that they store. Plus, these solutions are bigger targets for hackers. A massive data breach at Microsoft would be a huge score for a group of hackers.

We've seen situations where these big cloud entities have been breached before in the past. Yahoo, Google+, Dropbox, and Apple iCloud, have all…

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Basic Cybersecurity Practices to Minimize Risk

With cybersecurity talent at such a critical shortage, data breaches that expose millions of people's sensitive information are routine occurrences. It is one of the biggest problems that the modern business faces. Since shortages have businesses of all types scrambling for cybersecurity personnel we thought we'd put together a list of five things that every person should know about how to keep systems secure.

Cybersecurity is just risk mitigation. These six steps will go a long way toward managing the amount of risk, while extending the knowledge base of your staff, and distributing some of the responsibilities for the security of your data to them. These aren't ironclad policies enacted to protect data, they are tips designed to help an organization better manage the stress that comes from the spike in cyberthreats many businesses see in the course of doing business.

#1 - Keep a Clear Inventory of Assets

The first step toward risk mitigation is to know, and document, exactly what assets you need to protect. This includes every wire, extra peripheral, and piece of software your business has purchased. By knowing exactly what hardware and software you possess, the easier it is to manage it.

#2 - Educate Users on Cybersecurity Best Practices

Training your staff on what it takes to secure a business' computing network from the myriad of threats your business is exposed to is fundamental to actually protecting these systems. Their online behavior matters, and the more they know about how to spot phishing attacks, how to create and use proper passwords, and how to build work profiles on their mobile devices, the better off your organization's security efforts are going to be.

#3 - Address the Shadow IT Problem

Shadow IT is software that is downloaded by end users that hasn't been approved by an organization's IT administrator. In order to keep software from being vulnerable it has to actively be patched with security updates. If end-users are just downloading any program they want, what's stopping an infected program from appearing on your network one day? Nothing. Make sure your staff has a clear understanding of what software is allowed and how to download and update approved software titles.

#4 - Have Tools In Place

Comprehensive cybersecurity is dependent on sticking to solid practices...

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What Value Do Managed Services Offer? Finally, Procurement

The information technology solutions that are out there for businesses to utilize are constantly improving. While these improvements are beneficial to your operational abilities, you do need to make sure you are staying up to date. This is where a managed service provider can help. Here, in the final part of our series exploring the value of managed services, we're considering procurement assistance.

Why is IT Procurement Important?

In a nutshell, the most effective way to get value out of your technology is to ensure that each piece serves a purpose, as well as plays nicely with the rest of your infrastructure and solution set. To do so, it may help to examine what solutions effectively any modern business would likely need.

Workstations and Other Resources

In order to properly accomplish their tasks, any employee is going to need the right tools. In your case, that means that they will need workstations and/or the other technology that is most appropriate for their responsibilities - not just whatever you could get the best bargain on.

Let's imagine that you did settle for what offered you the "best," lowest price, without considering the value that you'd receive. Chances are good that whatever system you purchased, wouldn't be able to effectively serve the needs of everyone in your organization… and that's assuming that you didn't just get a good "deal" because there is something wrong with these systems.

In this case, you'd have to pay more anyway to have someone fix your workstations, if not purchase more that do suit your needs. A managed service provider, on the other hand, would be cognizant of your business' needs, leveraging their connections with vendors to get you the most value they could for your money.

Servers and Networking

Once your employees have the tools that they will be working with directly, you will need to have an IT infrastructure in place that allows them to collaborate appropriately. Furthermore, this infrastructure should have the capability to expand to match any growth that your business experiences.

While this all sounds fairly straightforward, it is actually a fairly difficult process - meaning that it should only be tackled by someone who understands how these solutions communicate with one another. Otherwise, there are likely going to be issues and potentially, downtime. If a managed service provider were to assist you, however, your chances of downtime would be greatly diminished. By offering both their professional advice and assistance in actually implementing your solutions, a provider enables your business to adopt these solutions much more efficiently.

Software as a Service

Once you have the technology you need and the infrastructure to support it, you're going to need the software solutions that your industry demands to properly utilize it all. Now, not to make assumptions about you, but it isn't uncommon for business decision makers to leverage torrents and pirated copies of the solutions they need in order to save a few bucks.

These decision makers are making a bad decision by doing so, as it opens up your company to legal issues...

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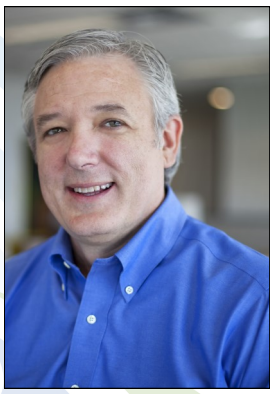
We partner with many types of businesses in the area, and strive to eliminate IT issues before they cause expensive downtime, so you can continue to drive your business forward. Our dedicated staff loves seeing our clients succeed. Your success is our success, and as you grow, we grow.



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