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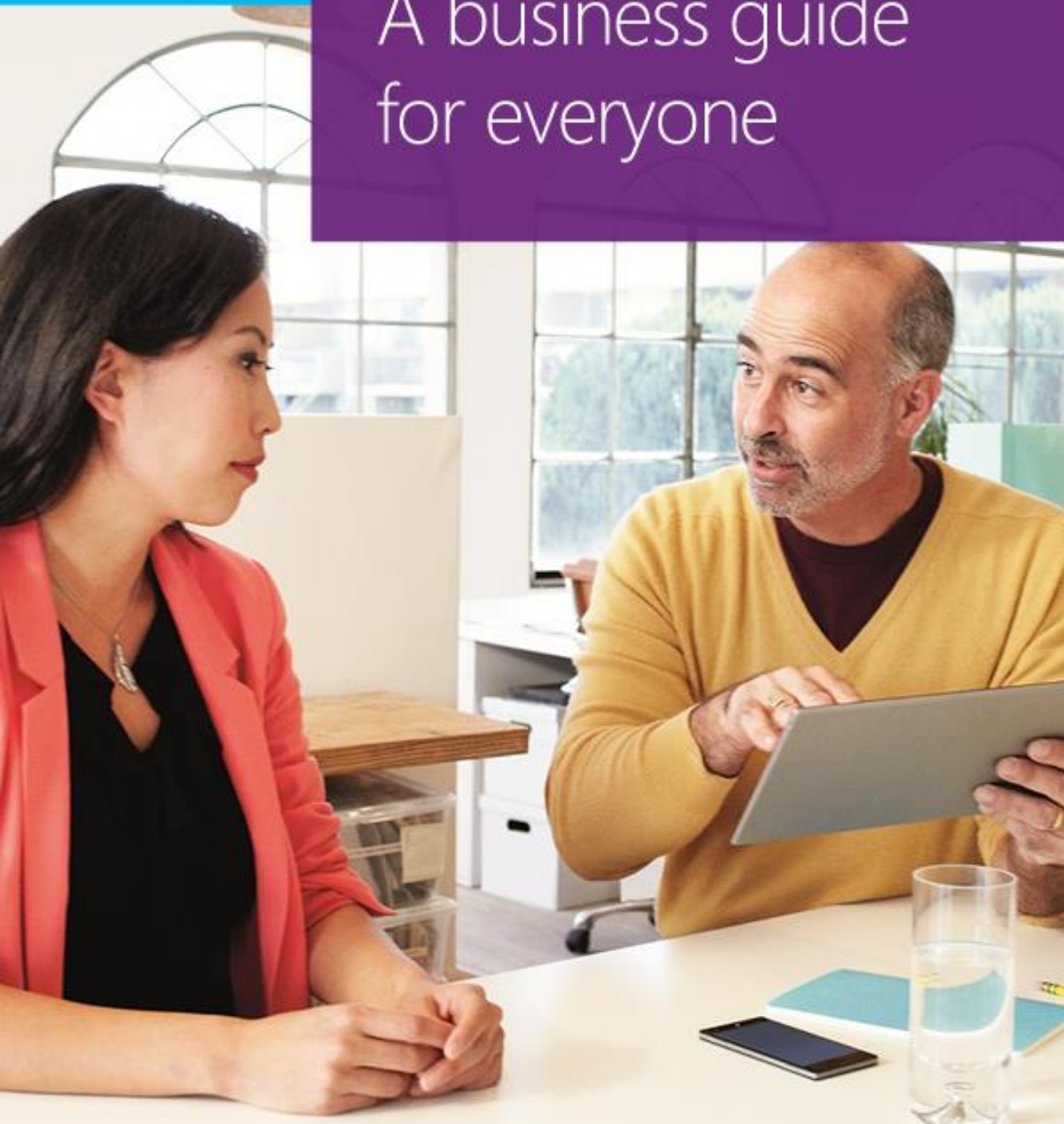
Technology for technophobes: A business guide for everyone



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A Buyer's Guide for people with more sense than money

Ever walked into your local computer emporium and felt a twinge of fear as you walked up to the counter? Then this is the guide for you: everything you need to know about buying computers and smartphones in plain English.

Buying a PC: learn a lotta lingo!

Let's start with the terms you need to know a little about – here are the factors which generally dictate the options – and price – of any kit and caboodle you might buy.

- **Form factor:** Once upon a time, there was only one sort of computer: the desktop. It was a big box – big enough, in fact, that it usually lived under your desk instead. Now there are a bewildering array of options, from laptops (where the display flips open from the keyboard), to tablets (super-portable, often without a keyboard because you can type on the screen) and plenty in between. These build-types are called form factors.

> *"It can't be just shiny and new, it's got to do what you want to it do."*

- **CPU:** The Central Processing Unit, measured in GHz (gigahertz). The CPU is the engine of your computer, and just like the engine on your car, bigger is better.

- **RAM:** Random Access Memory. This is where your computer stores what it's currently working on. Again, bigger is better: the larger your RAM, the more things your computer can do at once, and the faster it will get round to doing them. Remember that most computers are doing several things at any one time (or 'running many processes' in geekspeak), even if you're only looking at one thing at a time. It's measured in GB ('gigabytes' or 'gig' for short).

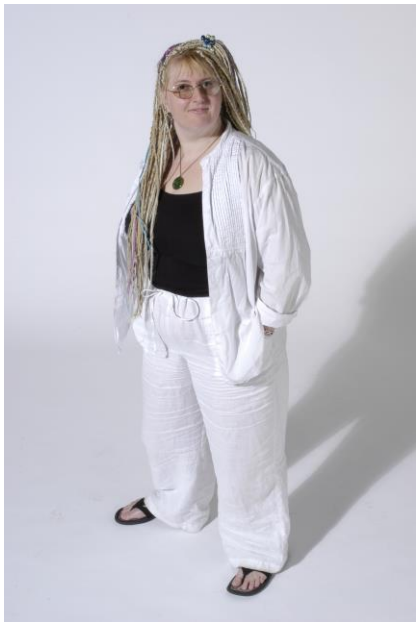
- **Hard drives:** This is your long-term storage. It's like a library. Again, bigger is better – the larger your library, the more you can store; but speed (how fast you can dig books out of the library) also matters.

- **Displays:** Traditional desktop computers have separate monitors. Laptops, tablets and smartphones have built-in displays which trade off size for portability in all sorts of options. As well as size, consider resolution (a higher resolution gives you a sharper picture and fits more on the screen) and format (if you like watching films as well as beavering away, a 16:9 cinema-style format may be a priority for you).

So, what do you want to do?

Now that you know the basic terms, you're ready to go shopping. To return to the analogy of buying a car,

your purchase depends very much on what you want to do. You wouldn't buy a van for the doing the school run, and you wouldn't buy a little runabout for offroading through the fields. Whereas your little runabout would be perfect for economical city driving, and the van is the ideal resilient choice for deliveries. There are plenty of options, and the most expensive isn't always the best for the needs of a business.



Mary Branscombe is the author of "Windows 8: What your business needs to know" and "How To Do Everything Windows 8" and has been advising on technology for over two decades in publications like the FT, The Guardian, ZDNet and TechRadar. She says, "The **form factor** is all about what you're going to use your machine for. If you're out on the road a lot, think about portability – both size and weight. Also look at battery life. Today's notebook PCs and tablets have much better battery life than you might be used to – I have used a Surface Pro with power-hungry wi-fi switched on constantly, and still achieved a ten-hour battery life." These are perfect for doing presentations, on-site work or staying in touch 24/7. If, however you need several documents open side-by-side, or you need to type long documents, then a larger screen and the ability to sit and type for long periods may be more of a priority.

Similarly, your **CPU** depends on your planned usage. Price is very CPU-dependent, so it's an important decision to make. "The top end machines are for intensive work like video editing or heavy graphics visualisation. If you need that heavy-duty power, go for the extra horsepower. For most business purposes, a better mid-range machine will be just fine. Equally, don't just automatically buy what's cheapest. A low-powered machine will either disappoint you by being slow, or, as programs and services get ever more sophisticated (which they do every year), it will simply become out of date much more quickly than you would like. It's well worth investing at the higher-end of your needs today."

RAM and **hard drives** deserve to be considered together. Branscombe says, "RAM is fairly easy: get as much RAM memory as you can reasonably afford. Don't go for less than 4GB or 8GB for a power user." However, the speed of your PC is influenced both by RAM and your drive storage; because your machine is constantly moving stuff between your drive (the library) and RAM (where work is done). So, slow hard drives can negate the benefit of a zippy high-RAM machine. And there's a new cool kid in the world of hard drives: SSD (Solid State Drives). Older hard drives are mechanical wonders, with discs spinning thousands of times per second. Solid state drives are simply memory chips with no moving parts, they are faster, lighter, more reliable and without doubt the future of storage. However, they are currently restricted to a smaller size than old-style spinny-discs.

So: what to do? Says Branscombe, "If you can get an SSD, that's the single thing which will speed up your machine the most. A Windows 8 notebook with SSD will go from pressing the button to turn it on to being

at your first application in ten seconds. It may cost a bit more, but SSD is worth it. If you need larger storage, look at keeping an external hard drive in your office. Or use a device called a NAS (Network Accessed Storage – an extensible drive which lives on your office network). Keep these big drives around for storing backups, for example, and use the SSD for day-to-day work or out on the road."

Displays are also one of the easier decisions to make, mainly because, whatever you buy, the quality is generally very good and you can bolt bits on at a later date. Branscombe says, "Even many small Ultrabooks at only 11'-12' screen sizes now have gorgeous full high-definition screens which would make any movie buff proud.

What matters, though, is long term usability; and the secret here is Display Management- software tools which will let you do clever things with your screen. Windows 7 and Windows 8, for example, both have the ability to zoom in to compensate for the screen resolution, so that you can do close-up work more easily on a small screen. Similarly, most laptops and notebooks (but not all tablets) will allow you to connect an external screen. That means you can bring a presentation to a client's office on your notebook, and plug in to their monitor – which will do your back a world of favours! PowerPoint 2013, Microsoft's presentation software, is perfectly optimised for two monitors, and also allows you to simulate 'Presentation View', so you can rehearse your presentation on your own PC before you do it for real."

Finally, we haven't yet mentioned touchscreens. As many smartphones and tablets use touchscreen technology, so it has rapidly been adopted by manufacturers for larger form factors. Branscombe says, "If you can afford it, get one. It's a bit of a luxury, but Windows 8 and modern software tools are all becoming more naturalistic to use through touchscreens. Even just reading a webpage is so much nicer when you can scroll down with your finger."

Get smart with smartphones

There are probably some technical terms to understand when it comes to buying a good phone, too, right? Errr... no. Smartphones do have CPUs, and RAM, and displays and connectivity. But nobody talks about them. It's just accepted that a modern smartphone will do a pretty good job at keeping up with the demands of a person on the move; and that an older phone will be out-of-date within a couple of years. Besides, the unit's power is immaterial next to the more limiting factor of how connected you are- and that's a function of the network, not the handset.

There are form factors to consider, ranging from some pretty teensy displays through to 'phablets' (somewhere between a phone and a tablet PC) which you'd be lucky to squeeze into your pocket. Even so, this is just a case of size and comfort, and you can try them all out in your friendly local phone shop. Branscombe adds that if you're a heavy user, it's worth getting a phone with an SD card slot (a space to add extra memory).

Your network and contract are much-of-a-muchness, too. The following advice is applicable across the board:

- Network coverage is generally good. But you obviously want good call coverage in your home and office, so remember, you have a cooling-off period in case you're in a black spot.
- Stop worrying about minutes. Very few people use up all the minutes on their contract, whereas most businesspeople underestimate their data usage. Go for a high-data contract.
- And ask for a 12 month contract rather than the current norm of 24. Nobody publicises them, but they are available!

So, what does differentiate a good phone for business from a bad one? Branscombe says "As before, the magic question is: what do you want to do? And whether you can do it will come down to the Operating System and the Apps which are available for it.

"For a business, I think you want rock-solid email, and the ability to flip seamlessly between the cheapest and most effective ways of reaching people at any one time. With Windows Phone's People Hub, I can flip between text messages, email, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, all in one familiar interface.

"If you travel, for example, text messaging can get really expensive. Using a hotel's wi-fi to flip channels and avoid call charges is really handy. And of course, this works for dealing with suppliers and clients as well as colleagues. It's just seamless to talk to anyone in the way which they find most comfortable."

That seamlessness also means being able to work on any document, anywhere. Branscombe says, "On a Windows Phone, documents, emails, photos and everything else I do are synced automatically – without even a button press – to my SkyDrive; and from there down to my PC and other devices. Plus, Office documents are rendered on my phone with 100% integrity. A client can email me a document. I can open it on the bus, seeing changes, annotations and everything else; make some edits and then save it to SkyDrive. When I get back to my desk, it's there – perfect and complete, and in an ordinary folder like all my other stuff. That really is time saved."

Phones are launched with even greater alacrity than PCs, and it's a landscape which is changing all the time. Don't hesitate to interrogate your phone retailer: they want to sell phones and contracts, whereas your requirement is much more subtle; you need a product which will do the job of making your specific business easier to run.

Whether you're buying a PC or a smartphone, the mantra is "It can't just be shiny and new, it's got to do what you want it to do."

HOW MICROSOFT CAN HELP

Microsoft Office 365 brings together online versions of the best communications and collaboration tools from Microsoft. Subscribe to web-enabled tools that let you access your email, documents, contacts, and calendars from virtually anywhere, on almost on any device.

Putting Windows 8 to work

Windows 8 is the latest version of Microsoft's Windows Operating System. An Operating System is the nuts and bolts that keeps all the other things you want to do on a computer working properly – think of it as rather like the Air Traffic Control people who keep planes in the air: you don't need to know how they do what they do, but you're glad they do a good job. Here's why buying a Windows 8 PC (or putting Windows 8 on an older PC) is handy for business.

Windows 8 is fast

A raft of under-the-bonnet performance improvements make Windows 8 faster and more frugal than its predecessors. Indeed, in a world where PC prices are not going to come down (to be fair, they're appreciably lower accounting for inflation than they were ten years ago), some reviewers have pointed out that Windows 8 is sufficiently Spartan that it will allow you to rescue old PCs and put them back into service. That has to be good news for money-conscious new businesses. On newer PCs, Win8 boots up (that's techspeak for 'switches on') faster, and browsing the web is exceptionally nippy.

A desktop which follows you

Do you work in different places, on different PCs? You can choose to sign in to Windows 8 using your Windows ID; which stores all your basic desktop information online (in fact in your SkyDrive account). This will allow you to sync all sorts of information - settings, desktop apps, favourite websites etc. - automatically, whatever device you log in on. Even your mail and calendars can be synced. Now every desktop can feel like home.

Windows 8 is secure

After productivity, security is probably the number one IT concern for any business owner. Win8 includes new security tools which (like air traffic control...), nobody's going to shout about, but which you should be glad are there. First off, Win8 ships with a fully-featured anti-virus service. It's built into Windows Defender, an all-in-one security solution which has been around for a few years now, but which has been beefed up for Win8. Then, if you're using a relatively new PC, you can also take advantage of Secure Boot (you may also hear this called UEFI, but let's not get too technical...), a tool which prevents hackers from doing damage when they start a machine up (i.e. before Windows gets to load its own protective layers).

Store your stuff safely

Let's look at SkyDrive in a bit more detail. SkyDrive is a cloud-based (i.e. online) storage space, and the perfect place to keep your business information. It's secure, and it's accessible not only from Windows PCs, but also (via an App) from Macs and several phone handsets, too. What makes Win8 spectacular is that you can drag-and-drop files to SkyDrive just like an inbuilt drive. Cloud storage just doesn't get any easier. Then there's Storage Spaces, a nifty tool for managing your hard drives. Whatever drives you connect to your PC or network, it will help you create archives

which are easy to search and even duplicate (also called 'mirroring') so that if one drive breaks down, you won't lose any data.

A world of Apps – right on your desktop

If there's one thing we all love about our smartphones, it's Apps. Windows 8 takes Apps and puts them on the desktop – just like your mobile's home screen. Apps aren't just like small programs, they also serve to make key information visible on your desktop – right where you need it. Win8 includes free apps for email, social networks (see feeds from LinkedIn and Facebook in real-time), web searches and SkyDrive (see above). Add Skype for videoconferencing, Amazon for purchasing, and many more...

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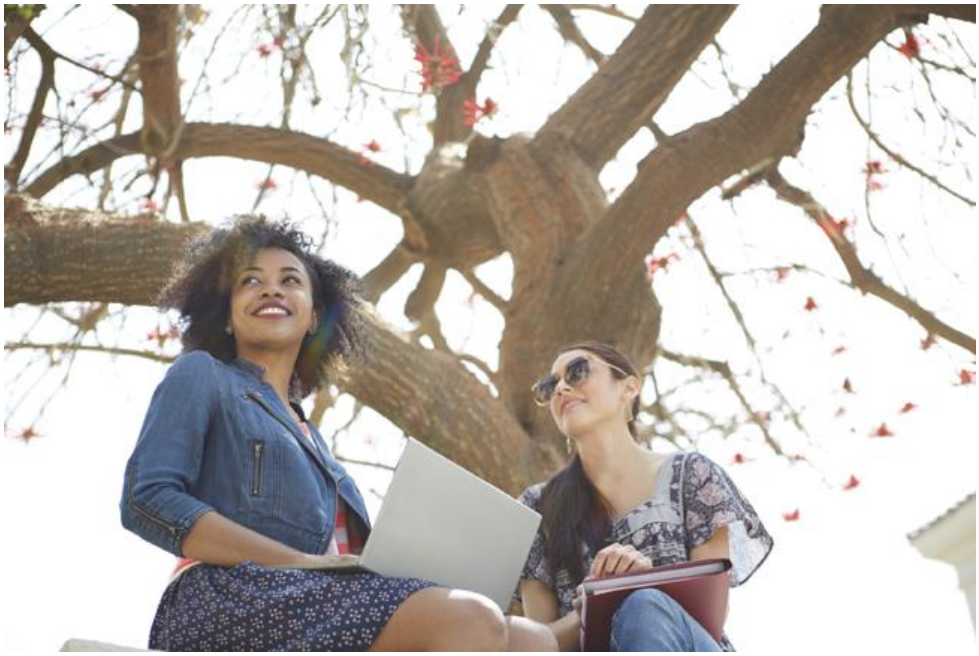

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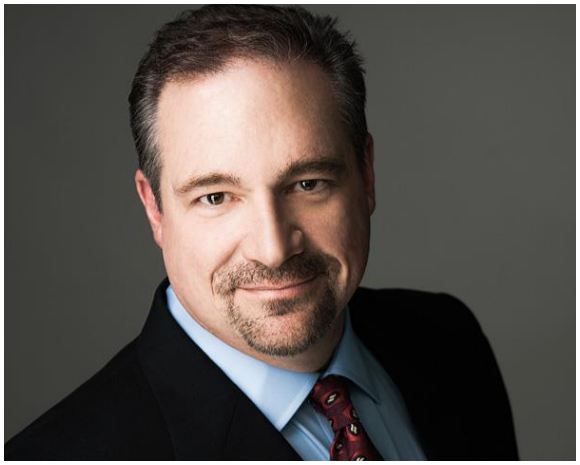
Breaking through: why cloud computing is perfect for small businesses

As a newcomer to technology, or someone who has better things to do that get your hands dirty with it, cloud computing might just be the best thing since sliced bread for your business.

The facts are simple. Before the internet came along, you would purchase software, usually with a licence, and install and run it on your computers – rather like buying a music CD and playing it in your house. Under the Cloud model, the software is run online by a third party provider, and you access it through your internet browser. You never install anything on your own computer, and you never actually 'own' any software: rather than buying a product, you're renting a service.



So far so good; but tech folks are really excited about cloud computing. Analysts 451 Research say that cloud computing in 2013 will be a $16.7bn industry. To understand why it's such a game-changer, we need to look in more depth at the reasons why the cloud (also, for the reason above, often called 'Software as a Service' or SaaS) is so different, and how it creates business-friendly benefits.

Make IT someone else's problem

First off, there's just no technology for you to worry about. When you rent a car, the maintenance, repairs and breakdown assistance are all taken care of by the rental company. You rightly expect to be able to jump in and drive off, safe in the knowledge that your car will work. The same is true of cloud services: when you sign up, you get to use the software without worrying about installing it, maintaining it, downloading updates or keeping it secure. You also won't need a server or any of the other additional IT investment that larger suites of software used to require. All that is taken care of by your service provider.

David S Linthicum, SVP, Cloud Technology Partners; author, blogger at InfoWorld, and host of the highly successful Cloud Computing Podcast, says, "With cloud, you have the ability to push the operational IT work to other people. This shifts the risk to the cloud provider and away from the enterprise, which is a good thing." By effectively outsourcing the technology, you're reducing the risk, and unexpected expense, associated with your in-house IT (even if it's just a couple of laptops) going wrong. Adds Linthicum, "Thus, you can focus on the core issues around IT: defining and implementing core business processes." This is a point which is often forgotten. If you can spend less time 'keeping the lights on', you can spend more time making your technology do useful things which meet the needs of your business.

Predictable and economical – a business-friendly financial model

The greatest benefit of the cloud, however, is financial. Let's return to the rent-a-car analogy. When you buy a car, there's a huge upfront expense. You don't get that money back if you don't use the car every day, or even if you sell it on. After five years, you'll have an old car which nobody else wants to buy, and if it goes wrong, it will cost ever more to repair. Your rental car, however, is always a current model, and you only pay to use what you need, when you need it.

This is exactly the case with cloud services too. There is no upfront cost. You'll pay a low, predictable, flat-rate monthly fee per user for the software that you use; and that means that you can scale up or down as your business needs demand. When you take on more staff, you can switch on new licenses immediately, and similarly turn off the tap if you scale down. Says Linthicum, "I don't have to continuously purchase hardware and software to keep up with capacity requirements. Cloud computing provides you with the ability to expand or contract the number of resources you're leveraging. Thus, the spend on technology – which used to be a major capital expense for even small businesses – now becomes an operational expense. The biggest benefit of cloud computing is agility, the ability to change, to adapt to the emerging needs of the business."

Unlike installed software, you will also always have access to the latest version. When a new version of a service is released, it is instantly made available to all subscribers, giving you access to tools which will keep your business at peak competitiveness.

Running software online also brings with it some inherent benefits:

- **Work from anywhere:** Software which was installed on a computer only ran on that computer. Today's business owners work from home and airport lounges as well as the office; and with the cloud, you will not only always have access to your software, you can also log in and simply pick up where you left off.

- **Collaborate with colleagues, clients and suppliers:** You can share access to your cloud workspaces. That means you can work on documents, proposals, presentations etc. with other people, and expand the boundaries of your office to clients, too.

- **Cut the risk of crisis and speed up disaster recovery:** One of the key economies of scale involved in cloud computing is that a good cloud provider will have better security and resilience than you can ever hope to afford. They will store your data safely and securely. If your office was broken into (or, more likely, you leave your laptop on a train), your data is still safe and immediately accessible online from another machine.

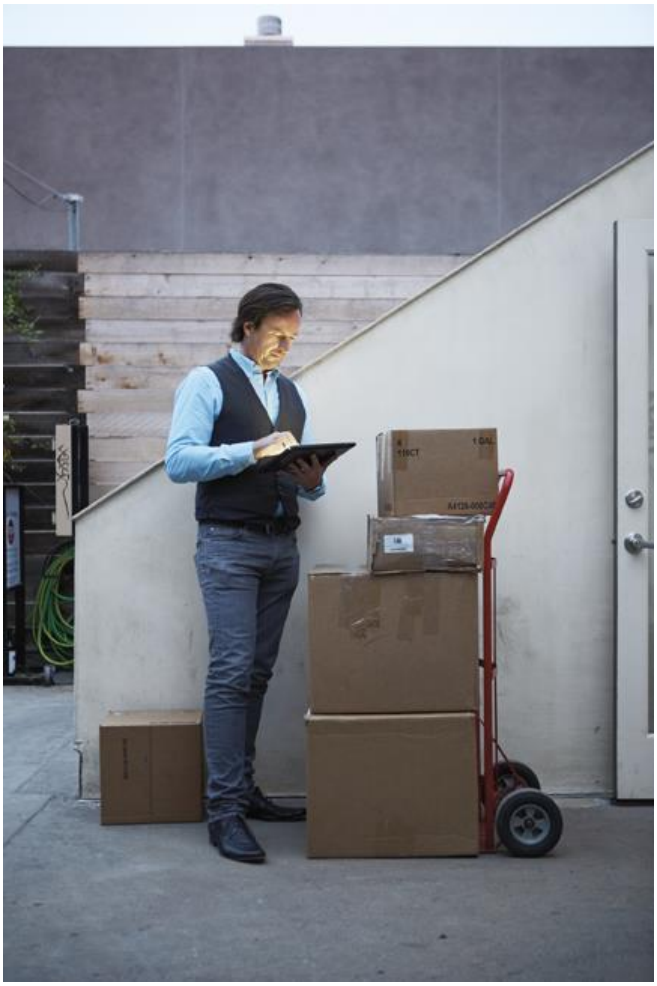
The security question

These stack up to a pretty compelling argument for the cloud for small businesses; but there is also a degree - although rapidly diminishing – of 'caveat emptor': buyer beware. Putting your business-critical information in the hands of a third party demands a degree of trust. There are plenty of smaller software

providers, often based in countries which would offer you dubious legal recourse if things went wrong, who would find it very hard to prove their security or resilience credentials. Going back to our rent-a-car example, you would probably feel safer with one of the major providers than with a wheezing old jalopy from 'Bob's Truck-U-Like'.

Solid providers will explain their security methodologies and commitment to you. Microsoft's Office 365, for example, has a Trust Center here, with documents which clearly outline their promise. Your provider should also give you an SLA, or 'Service Level Agreement' which commits to delivering, for example, a guaranteed level of 'uptime' (i.e. ensuring that their service will be available for e.g. 99.9% of the time). Linthicum says, "While you can certainly put an SLA in place to guarantee uptime, there are no complete guarantees when moving to cloud computing. The comfort factor will come, with time, as we understand the true reliability of leveraging public clouds." You are opening a key aspect of your business to a third party, and it's your duty to yourself to minimise the risk of doing so. Rest assured, if that third party is reliable, they will do a better job of looking after your data than you could by yourself.

Plus, the range of cloud delivered software is now as broad as anything you might buy in a shop. The Office 365 package includes email, calendars, conferencing, website building tools and access to the Microsoft Office desktop tools used by millions of businesses worldwide. Other services will keep your computers secure, manage projects, help you stay in touch with your customers, and indeed anything else you can think of – including plenty designed for specific business sectors. Few businesses today can escape technology completely, and few should want to – it's a key driver of commercial competitiveness. But the cloud can make unlocking that competitiveness simple, flexible and free of upfront expense.



Forty features of Office 2013

Microsoft Office is the world's most popular business productivity software; and the latest version – Office 2013 – has just been released. You can do a lot with Office – invoices, proposals, nice letters and angry ones, forecasts, presentations, notes, articles, and plenty more besides. So here are just a few reasons to investigate Office: 40 of them, in fact!

1. Automatically and instantly analyse, format and present data in Excel spreadsheets with QuickAnalysis
2. Bring charts to life with animations when data is changed in Excel
3. Build database apps in Access which are ready to upload to a SharePoint site for your whole team to use
4. Comments in Word are now conversation threads - reply to annotations just like a group conversation
5. Connect and create relationships between different spreadsheets and other data sources to make the most of the information you have
6. Create budgets, invoices and financial reports easily in Excel with Templates
7. Create navigation functions in Access databases automatically
8. Create visually smoother presentation documents in Publisher by applying shadows, reflections, glow, soft edges, bevels, and 3-D rotations to pictures
9. Customise presentation themes with your own colours and fonts
10. Edit and save PDF files with total control direct from Word
11. Excel 2013 includes over 60 new mathematical, statistical and date/time functions
12. Excel includes new labelling tools for making charts more intuitively comprehensible
13. Fill Excel columns intuitively and automatically with Flash Fill
14. Find images on the web with Bing Search direct from a document
15. Flag, delete or categorise emails from within the message list
16. Get 20GB of SkyDrive thrown in with Office 365 Home Premium Edition
17. In Outlook, preview one list from another; for example, preview appointments by hovering over the Appointments tab, whilst viewing emails
18. In presentations, use a magnifying glass tool to zoom in on slide highlights
19. Insert expandable/collapsible elements into Word documents. Ideal for optional paragraphs, forms etc.
20. Insert online video and other media objects directly into Word documents

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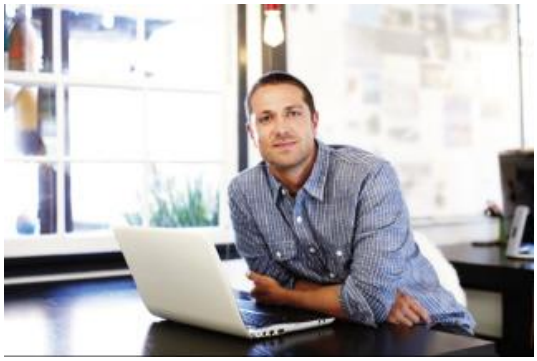
21. Install Office on up to 5 PCs with Office 365 Home Premium Edition
22. Jazz up your presentations with more supported audio and video formats, and more play options
23. Make presentations smoother with automatic snapping of charts, images and other objects to gridlines
24. New visible alignment guides in Word make laying out for print easier than ever
25. Open documents on any device - phone, tablet, laptop or PC
26. Open video calls and instant message conversations direct from an email
27. PowerPoint's desktop and online versions are both fully collaborative, allowing you to work on presentations with colleagues in realtime
28. Save files to SkyDrive online or Office 365 and collaborate on them with colleagues in realtime
29. Security on database apps is improved in Access with three default but customisable user permissions
30. See everything about your contacts in one place - including live availability and social media updates
31. Set up online presentations with full audio support using the Office Presentation Service
32. Take advantage of touchscreen swiping and zooming to make presentations more interactive
33. The new Simple Markup view in Word shows annotation lines without cluttering up the view with the annotations themselves
34. Use both standard and widescreen presentation templates and layouts
35. View documents even on devices without Office installed, thanks to Microsoft Web Apps
36. View Excel workbooks in their own windows (rather than the previously used Tabs)
37. When presenting, see cue notes on your monitor, whilst showing only slides on the display monitor
38. With SharePoint activated, create team and project folders in Outlook
39. Word's new Read Mode automatically formats documents perfectly for reading rather than editing
40. Zoom in on any object in Word to have it fill the screen - it makes objects usable as well as pretty on the page



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Meet your new biggest fans: your customers!

A business is nothing without its customers – so it's no surprise that technology has plenty to offer in bringing you closer to your clients. But the world of sales has changed – there are more ways to reach your audience than ever, and that audience is becoming more and more demanding. What strategies can small businesses use to stand out from the crowd without breaking the bank?

When did you last gladly receive a cold call? The days of the pushy salesperson with a fat tie and cheap suit are long gone. But you still need to find – and keep – customers. So what has replaced bashing those phone buttons until your fingers hurt?

Among the key secrets to effective sales today are two related concepts: ***engagement*** and ***relevance***:

- Engaging with customers means building a meaningful and long-term relationship with them. This is particularly important for service businesses, where clients might not have enough knowledge to solve a problem by themselves, and will respond to being looked after. Think of the times you have used a professional or trade service: solicitors, plumbers, financial advisers, even (dare we say it…), a bank! You would decide who to use based on reputation and word of mouth, and how well you were treated from start to finish.
- Relevance, meanwhile, means giving customers exactly what they want, just when they want it. This is particularly important for product businesses, where clients are most swayed by a keen price and efficiency. Think of the times you have ordered something online and made your decision by finding exactly what you want, comparing prices and looking at the speed, simplicity and quality of delivery.

I don't want to be acquired!

It's worth emphasising: every business can succeed by employing some degree of both engagement and relevance; and neither of these is well served by the phone-burning salesperson. Bernie J Mitchell is an avid blogger and director of social marketing consultancy, Engaging People Ltd. He says, "It's not about the number of calls you make. It's about how deep and rich a relationship you can build with your leads. Plenty of big companies work on the basis that if you make 100 calls, one will become a client. These are the people who talk about customer acquisition… well, I don't want to be 'acquired'!"

Both, however, are well driven by technology. With the right tools, even if you don't have a dedicated horde of customer service agents at your beck and call, you can discover, then serve and finally delight new prospects until they become true evangelists for your business. "It's far better to put effort into

encouraging your potential clients by helping them", says Mitchell. "Hang out where they hang out. Run webinars, write blogs, offer them help in forums. It's a long-term investment; but when the time comes that people do need your service, it's you they'll come to first. And better still, when they do, they'll be primed for your products, talking your language, and thinking your way – because you've given them the mindset to do so before they even became a proper sales lead."

Be my number one…

When those leads do come through the door, the rules of engagement and relevance also demand exceptionally personalised and individual service. Again, the customer does not want to feel like the unlucky one of 100 calls; but rather as the person you think of morning, noon and night.

- Check out Search Engine Marketing with Bing
- Create websites and blogs with Office 365
- Design great flyers with Publisher
- Produce pitch-perfect presentations with PowerPoint
- Manage all your customers with CRM Online

Says Mitchell, "If you use search engine marketing, for example, make sure there's a relevant website to click through to. If you send out an email newsletter, make it personal for each recipient. I don't advocate buying contact lists, but if you must buy a list, it's even more important to make each email personal and human in some way. Help each user solve a problem which is relevant to their business, and don't forget a clear Call To Action so they know what to do next."

And when the hard work of persuading people to visit your website, pick up the phone or come to your premises is done; the engagement process is really only just getting started. These days, customers will write reviews, tell their friends and post their experiences on Facebook. To make sure nobody is ever forgotten or made to feel unloved, check out CRM technology – that's Customer Relationship Management.

CRM is a system for keeping a record of every customer's experience with you; for example:

- where they are in your sales process
- where they came from and how they found you
- each customer interaction: phone conversations, emails etc. Mitchell adds, "If you can connect it to your social media activity, you can manage your contacts on many social platforms which your customers use, too."
- what they have purchased before
- how happy they are and what you might have to do if something has gone wrong

Most small businesses spend at least something on marketing. And yet, they invariably don't achieve enough. Note that spend and achievement are not joined at the hip: you don't have to spend more to achieve more. Mitchell says, "If you're not going to do it properly, don't do it at all!" It's better to spend a little on managing a small number of clients from start to finish, than spending the same on getting a lot of clients in – and then failing to give them cradle-to-grave service. Repeat business is relationship business, and even the smallest company can put effort into building relationships with its customers.

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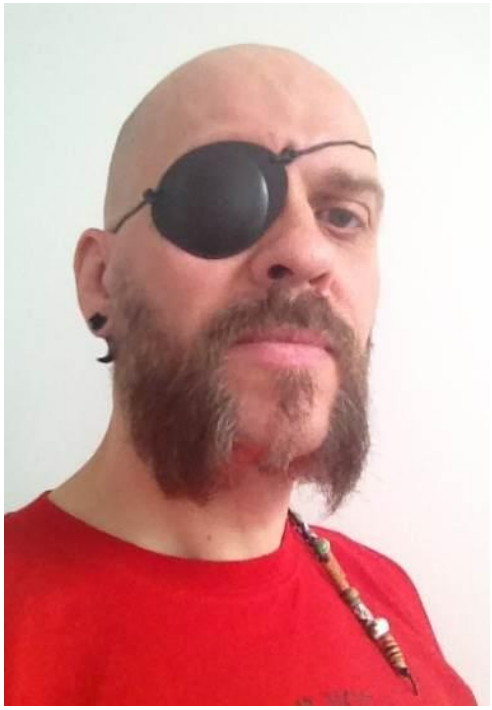
Lockdown! Staying safe and secure

Davey Winder, Editorial Fellow at Dennis Publishing, Three-times Winner IT Security Journalist of the Year

Computer crime comes in all shapes and sizes. Hacking is a weapon of choice for political activists across the globe, a rich seam of industrial espionage, and the favoured tool of organised criminals harvesting credit card details by the thousand. For some hackers, it's just fun.



Unfortunately, for business owners, it can also be very costly. Cyber attacks can close down your website, disrupt your emails, and suck up the most valuable commodity you have as a small business owner: time. If you keep personal data about your clients, it can leave you the wrong side of data protection law. Plus, now that we live in a totally connected world, it's also impossible to protect yourself 100%, just as even the most expensive alarm won't make you impregnable to burglary.

Luckily, by following some basic rules, you can give your company protection which is workable for the everyday conduct of business and adequate in the eyes of the law. The following checklist will see you right.

1. **Secure your network.** You don't need to be a tech genius to do this, and it's advice we've been offering for years. Ensure you have antivirus software, and keep it up to date. Keep your Windows Updates switched on. Change your wi-fi access code every few weeks, and use IP-based authentication (a way of showing that a computer is what it says it is) if you can.

2. **Know your users.** Unless you're offering free wi-fi in a coffee shop, for example, you probably know everyone who comes onto your network. Your accountant, that client with the icky beige suit, the sandwich man: you can set some ground rules and manage their access with ease. Although if your sandwich man is using your wi-fi, it might be worth asking why...

3. Speaking of ground rules, **do have a security policy** for all staff**.** Not a sixty-page epic which nobody can be bothered to read, but commonsense advice: no browsing unfamiliar websites, no personal stuff, no running executables (programs, some of which may contain viruses), no unnecessary traffic of office documents without good reason.

4. **Use the Cloud.** We often look at the Cloud as an example of being globally connected, and therefore a security risk. However, it can also support security. Cloud services are all accessed through a browser, which means that users' home machines, or tablets for

people on the go, never need to use software beyond a browser to get their work done. That can minimise security challenges.

5. **Educate your staff.** This has traditionally been a thorny issue: nobody wants a lecture from the boss. But today's employees often use their own computers and smartphones, they often also have some personal files on these machines - pictures of their children and pets, say. If you offer them advice which will keep their own precious memories safe as well as protecting the business, what's not to love? Why not offer to put antivirus on their machines for them, too? Microsoft Security Essentials, for example, is absolutely free.

> Microsoft Security Essentials provides real-time protection for your PC against viruses, spyware and other malicious software. It's a free download that's simple to install, easy to use and automatically up to date, so you can be assured your PC is protected by the latest technology. It's easy to tell if your PC is secure – when you're green, you're good. It's that simple.
> http://www.microsoft.com/security_essentials/

6. **Use strong passwords**. Doh! Amazingly, the most popular passwords are still 'password', '123456', 'welcome', 'sunshine' and derivatives thereof (although it's nice that us miserable Brits still think of sunshine). A blindfolded badger could guess them! Strong passwords include numbers and non-alphabetical characters, they steer clear of whole words, and they definitely don't include the names of your significant other or names of pets.

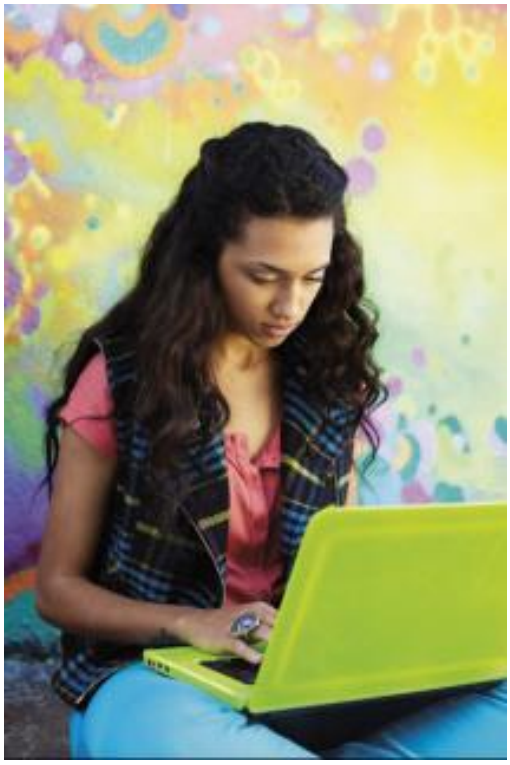
7. **Expect best practice from everyone.** If you overload your employees with burdensome demands, their enthusiasm will crumble. But if you ask for some basic best-practice from your team, it really won't be a problem. They need to keep their systems up to date, and anything which can be left on a train (pesky smartphones in particular) should have remote-wipe facilities switched on. Most phones will do this now; Windows Phones have a particularly good remote lock and/or wipe facility.

8. Speaking of theft, remember **physical security**. Laptops and tablets are more likely to be stolen (or lost) than hacked, so make sure your office or workspace is secure. Lock laptops away at night. And, in case of the worst, encrypt all data held on mobile or carryable devices.

9. **Have a plan for the worst.** When smart people move into a new home, they look for little things like where the water stopcock can be found. That way, when water comes pouring through the ceiling, they can begin to solve the problem quickly and minimise the damage. IT security is the same: have a plan for switching off, replacing machines, or working from home, depending on the sorts

of things which could go wrong. Also, back up all important data: the cost of retrieving files is at least ten times that of protecting them in the first place – if it's possible at all. Forewarned is forearmed!

10. **Come back, same time next year.** Nothing stays the same forever, and your technology, like your business plan, is a movable feast. Come back to your security policy annually and see what new devices or work patterns might require a little reassessment.



If you have more than a handful of PCs in your company, Windows Intune™, Microsoft's cloud-hosted PC security and management service, will help you keep all your computers (and their users) running smoothly. It lets you:

Manage updates
Protect PCs against malware
Monitor PCs for problems
Track hardware and software inventory
Give remote assistance if something goes wrong
Set consistent security policies for your PCs

If you work with an IT partner for technical support, you can also give them access to Intune, allowing them to monitor your PCs and fix problems remotely.

If you would like more plain-English advice on IT security, Microsoft is a founder sponsor of GetSafeOnline.org, an independent, government-backed source of advice about IT security for consumers and small businesses. You'll find plenty more on their website at http://www.getsafeonline.org/