

Get more done



Small businesses face tremendous difficulties in achieving high levels of productivity. But while smaller companies may lack the financial resources of larger enterprises, they can still achieve remarkable productivity gains – often with software and technology that they already have in front of them.

Managers everywhere seek out ways to keep their employees more productive, and to get more done themselves as well. However, posters on the break room wall, inspirational talks or even financial incentives don't work very well (if at all). Getting more done depends on using the right processes, and the right technology.

In the classic Harvard Business Review article, *One more time: how do you motivate employees?*, Frederick Herzberg dismisses some of the more obvious motivators as counter-productive, including cutting working hours, increasing wages and adding fringe benefits. Of course, getting the basic 'hygiene factors' wrong can be immensely demotivating. However, what really motivates people is, by and large, what motivates you: achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement and personal growth.

TOP TIP: multiple windows in Outlook

If you use Microsoft Outlook for your email and calendar, says Ian Watkins, Director, Oxbridge Technology, you probably find yourself switching between the Mail and Calendar tabs fairly regularly. Did you know that you can open a separate window up for both mail and calendar at the same time? It's quite simple, just right click on the Calendar button and the chose Open in New Window: Your Calendar will now open in a separate window of its own and you can switch between them quickly and easily.

The problems come as companies grow. What works in a five-person company fails when you have fifty employees. Consequently, a structured look at productivity and how to improve it is an essential part of your plans for growth and success.

Using technology

There are plenty of productivity features contained within Microsoft Office, Microsoft Outlook, and the Windows 7 operating system, but before the technology, it's important to understand what you're trying to accomplish.

That's the role of productivity schemes and processes like David Allen's [Getting Things Done](#), Stephen Covey's [Seven Habits](#) and time-management systems like the [Pomodoro technique](#) and countless other ways, rules, plans and systems.

Good time management – getting more done – starts with five basic points, as follows:

- Set realistic and defined goals
- Establish your processes
- Find the best software tools
- Track your accomplishments and progress
- Apply lessons learned to improve the way you manage your time

The first stage of goal setting is where you define what your business needs to accomplish, in specific terms. By themselves, goals don't accomplish much unless you move onto the next step, where you actually define how you're going to achieve them. Only then will it be time to seek out the best technology to help accomplish your goals through those defined processes. Even then, you're still not done. You need to

understand how well those new tools work, and that's the role of tracking and gathering hard metrics. Creating a more productive office isn't hard once you define your goals and processes. While specific goals need to be stated, broadly speaking, achieving a higher level of productivity revolves around just a few things. Having easier and faster access to the data and applications you need, keeping paperwork to a minimum and removing unnecessary steps, and being able to collaborate easily with your team.

The technology of productivity

Productivity starts with process, but it ends with technology. For companies that have invested heavily in technology, productivity grows by 1.1% per year, while other companies that are less heavily invested in technology see productivity increases of only 0.35%.¹ Devoting a small amount of time to training will ensure that all personnel understand how to take full advantage of existing tools. Small innovations, such as the ability in Microsoft Windows 7 to arrange two windows side-by-side with a couple of key presses, yield big results. The tracking feature of Microsoft Word, and the ability to leave comments within a document, achieves further productivity gains by allowing documents to be more easily edited by multiple people. This makes a strong case for upgrading regularly. Computers and software evolve rapidly. Just think about how much mobile phones, satellite navigation systems and TVs have improved in the last five years. It's the same with business technology.

Training matters. Colin Foster, Managing Director at [Universal Solutions 4 Business](#), says, "if it is effective, then maybe you can save three minutes per hour . . . which is around a day per month . . . quick payback for the training in terms of both money and time invested." One of the greatest productivity-enhancing innovations in recent times is cloud computing and remote access to data and applications.

This was the experience of Simon Belt, a consultant at [Simply Better IT](#), who noted, "Remote access to applications and data allows me to be productive when I need to be, freeing me to develop other relationships and opportunities the rest of the time. The integration of SharePoint for document storage and retrieval and the use of workflow-triggering email notifications

Top tip: use two monitors

People are more productive with larger screens or even dual monitors, especially when they can use them to open multiple documents at the same time. Microsoft Windows 7 makes it even easier to use multiple monitors by making it easier to arrange windows on the screen. Shake a window's title bar and all the other windows on the screen shrink. Drag off the left or right edge and it the window resizes to exactly half the screen width. You can also use the Windows key plus different arrow keys to arrange windows quickly.

allows my business to be productive on things that require my decision rather than process that's already decided and agreed."

Time-saving tips

Making your office more productive is a continuous process, but you can start with the low-hanging fruit, deploying a few common-sense procedures and making use of the software and technology you already have in place.

- **Use templates.** There's no need to re-invent the wheel every time you create a document. Office.com has a wealth of existing templates for every occasion, ready to be downloaded.
- **Keep your email organised.** You can quickly accumulate an inbox with thousands of emails, making it impossible to locate anything. Within Outlook, you can create folders for different projects, colour-code messages, or view them in a coherent thread. And if you can't find that critical email, the enhanced search functionality in Office 2010 will help.
- **Remote access.** The office is no longer defined by its four walls. Use tools like SharePoint to provide secure, anytime access to information – so work can get done from any location.
- **Centralise customer information.** Even in a small company, customer information is often fragmented. As a result, fulfilling customer's request may take longer than it has to, when an employee has to pull together information from

multiple sources. Use tools like Microsoft Outlook with Business Contact Manager to centralise customer data.

- **Web conferencing.** Implement web conferencing technology for connecting with clients, partners and suppliers in real time, across town or in another part of the country. For a small business, this need not be a costly solution. Ordinary webcams and Microsoft Office Live Meeting can fill this need. Look for a hosted solution for easiest implementation.
- **Basic training.** Most office workers don't make full use of software applications because they are simply unaware of the available features. A little training goes a long way, and users that know the software well will be able to be more productive.
- **Productivity metrics.** If you don't keep track, you'll never know for sure if you've achieved any real productivity gains.
- **Don't over-think it.** It's easy to spend too much time worrying about productivity, so any gains you achieve are lost. The easiest and most readily available solutions are often the best, so look in your own office and on your own computer desktop for productivity solutions before bringing in something new and expensive.
- **Look for roadblocks and stovepipes.** Once you've finished your part of a project, where does it go? Is data held on your desktop, so other people that need it can't get to it? Are there unnecessary steps that prevent your part of the project from progressing to the next level? Seek out these roadblocks and stovepipes and eliminate them.
- **Insure your time.** It's all very well being super productive but one of the biggest time-wasters is dealing with IT problems. For example, if you lose critical data without a backup, it can take ages to recreate it again from scratch. Make sure you have a sensible method for making backups and storing it securely.

Get more done . . . with less

If you're a growing business, you need to get more accomplished, and often without additional resources or staff. Refine your processes, keep track of your progress, and look at your own computer desktop to make the most of the software productivity tools that can help you achieve your goals.

For more information

- [Microsoft Windows 7 Professional](#)
- [Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite](#)
- [Microsoft Small Business Server 2008](#)

¹ The Progressive Policy Institute. ["Explaining the productivity paradox."](#)