Is your IT good enough?

Does your IT need an MOT? Could you be getting more done with the latest hardware and software? Are you missing out on new IT developments? Find out what your peers and competitors do and how you can upgrade your own systems.

Sometimes 'good enough' isn't. You wouldn't work in an office with a leaky roof and no lock on the door, and you wouldn't drive a car that had a flat tyre. But many companies look on IT in a different light. They soldier on with PCs that are slow, out of date and insecure, and they miss opportunities to do more with IT investments and increase their productivity.
IT is essential for every business. Microsoft-sponsored YouGov research highlights the importance of IT for small businesses:

- 86 percent use PCs for book-keeping
- 85 percent use PCs for customer communications
- 80 percent use PCs to store important documents
- 78 percent use PCs to store client databases

However, many companies are not getting the most out of their computer systems. Inefficient and outdated IT causes unnecessary downtime, lost data and the inability to access computer files out of the office.

TOP TIP:
Save money with Windows Firewall

Improve the security of systems and reduce additional licence fees by making use of your Windows Firewall.
An effective firewall is essential for business security and since the release of Windows XP Service Pack 2, the Windows operating system has included a free firewall. Just access the Windows Firewall option from the Control Panel to view its current configuration. In most cases, you don't need to buy a separate firewall.

"We find that successful organisations understand how IT will add value to their business. They select the right hardware and software, then they integrate it into their strategy and day-to-day processes," says Adrian Barkey, MD at EJC IT.

Security

Good IT can accelerate a business and increase employee productivity by reducing the impact of security problems. YouGov research found that IT security failures are costing two-thirds of the businesses surveyed an estimated £1,259 per annum. IT departments often find it difficult to find a balance between productivity and protection. Too many security controls can hinder employee productivity, but compromising on security leaves your business vulnerable to attacks.
Microsoft Office 2010 is one of the safest and most productive pieces of software on the market. New security controls in Office 2010 make it easier to stay protected against threats while maintaining worker productivity.
Windows 7 provides another layer of defences by putting security status information at your fingertips and with a built-in firewall (see sidebars). It also includes backup software and, in some versions, BitLocker which lets you encrypt your hard disk and memory sticks to prevent unauthorised access to the files on them.
YouGov research found that loss of data is one of the key factors contributing to business inefficiency, yet half of small businesses are not backing up their data on a daily basis. Windows 7 Professional solves this

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problem with full-system backup and restore. It also offers enhanced protection against malware and other online security threats.

As you grow, a central file server, such as Windows Small Business Server 2008 lets you keep all your business-critical files in a secure central location. This makes it easier to share files and also to control access to sensitive information. Most importantly, it ensures that all your data is backed up safely, using built-in software.

Productivity

According to the Office of National Statistics, the more employees use computers and the internet, the more productive they are, with the most IT-intensive firms being twice as productive as the least. This means that companies need to deploy the best hardware and software they can afford; it provides a genuine competitive advantage.

The latest version of Microsoft Office lets people in growing businesses maximise their productivity. In countless small ways, such as the ribbon interface and new features, it streamlines users' experience. For example, Office 2010 includes:

- Audio and video content in PowerPoint 2010
- Microsoft Office Backstage view to preview, print and share documents from one place
- Live Preview, which lets you see how design changes will look in real time
- Navigation Pane in Word 2010 to find your way about long documents
- Office Web Apps, which lets you view and edit your files in any web-connected PC
- Quick steps in Outlook 2010 lets you do repetitive tasks like filing or forwarding emails with one click
- Use the Office Backstage view in Excel and other applications to save, email and preview printouts quickly

Similarly, Windows 7 offers a range of features that help you get more done faster:

- Improved desktop navigation, with the ability to organise windows on your desktop easily
- Built-in document and email search so you can find the information you need
- Faster boot-up and improved performance
- Better wireless networking so that you can get online in a couple of clicks

Productivity matters more than ever. "The business world has seen some major changes over the last decade," says Chris Adams, Microsoft Office Product Manager. "There's been the huge rise in connectivity that means we are in contact with the office, customers and partners far more than when we were just tied to a desktop PC. Another huge change has been the contraction in time. We simply don't have a week to respond to a customer request any more. They expect a response within hours."

Sales and marketing

YouGov research showed that a fifth of small businesses are not using their PC to manage customer and supplier relationships. This is a missed opportunity. Joined-up sales and marketing helps companies reach customers and increase the value of existing ones. Outlook 2010 with Business Contact Manager is an add-on to Outlook[1] that includes a suite of CRM functions using the same familiar interface as Outlook. Business Contact Manager tracks prospects, customers and sales opportunities so that you can focus on your customers.

Outlook 2010 with Business Contact Manager lets you:

- Consolidate and share customer information
- Synchronise Business Contacts with Outlook, SharePoint, or Windows Live Contacts
- Stay connected when you are out of the office

For more information

- Office 2010 security and features
- Microsoft Windows 7 Professional
- Small Business Server
- Microsoft Operations Framework

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