

5 Technology Upgrades Your Business Should Consider in 2012

The year is quickly coming to an end, and 2011 is officially considered old news. While you gear up for the holidays by purchasing presents for friends and family members, stocking your refrigerator with lots to eat and making plans to run the town on New Year's Eve, don't forget that the technology in your business could benefit from a little TLC.

Here are my 5 technology upgrade suggestions that will bring your business up to speed for 2012.

1) Tablets

This year we saw the rise (Apple iPad and Android) and in some cases the attempted rise (Blackberry Playbook, HP TouchPad) of tablet devices into the technology stratosphere. Apple's iPad commands the market, Android tablets have really begun to shine, and expect a splash from Microsoft Windows 8 tablets next year. Tablets will most likely grow into the most ubiquitous mobile device in coming years and you should start finding ways to incorporate them into your business before you get left behind.

2) Smartphones

If making a phone call is the only thing your mobile phone does reliably, it's time to consider a step up. If used appropriately, smartphones will give you a boost as you squeeze e-mails, note taking, calendaring and even that de-stressing game of Angry Birds in while on the go. Picking a smartphone is a lot like picking a significant other, ideally you should be attracted to them (i.e. the look and feel), you should love them for who they are (i.e the platform) and they should get along (i.e. integrate) with other things in your life. Luckily you'll have tons of options to choose from. Between Apple's iPhone, Blackberry and the plethora of Windows Phone 7 and Android phones you should have no problem finding a phone that you'll enjoy spending time with.

3) Cloud Platform

If you find yourself stuck running an in-house email server or you feel jealous when you see friends accessing their data while on the go, you need to get with the times. Online collaboration platforms like Microsoft Office 365 and Google Apps make it easier than ever for you to get reliable (and innovative) hosted email and collaborative applications so your team can be more agile. While, the cloud is still not the best place for everything, e-mail and shared files are no-brainers.

4) Videoconferencing & Online Meetings

Face time is a very important thing in business, but with a hobbling economy, time and money are extremely precious. Instead of taking that trip across town or to the airport, let your hair down and fire up a video chat application like Skype or Google Chat. Applications like GoToMeeting, Cisco WebEx and Microsoft Lync also allow you to combine videoconferencing and screen sharing to provide a total meeting experience. It might feel a little goofy at first, but after a couple times you'll wonder how you lived without it. Now just think of all the gas, tolls, parking and airline tickets you'll skip the bill on.

5) Desktop & Laptop Upgrades

Microsoft Windows XP officially turned 10 years this past August. For you, that means you are either 1) using a technology that is over a decade old or 2) your computer is probably getting up there too. It's time to start thinking about some replacements. A slow computer really kills your productivity and I would even venture to say your morale. If you're in the Windows side of the world, Windows 7 is the best thing Microsoft has done in a long time, and Windows 8 expected out next year kicks butt and I mean it. Mac users on the other hand, usually need no prompting when it comes to upgrades. You guys get the point.