IT Radix Resource

Gearing Up for the Holidays

Fall 2010

Technology for the Season...and Beyond

OK, I know it's only October but for many of our clients, the holidays are the busiest times of the year—whether it's servicing clients or simply dealing with being short staffed. Think of the holidays as a stress test for your organization. The best practices you embrace now will pay dividends throughout the rest of the year.

In that spirit, here are some simple technology tips to help gear up your business for the holiday season and beyond:

- *Create a common online shared calendar.* Something so simple can ensure that you have sufficient staff coverage to cover all the necessary work over the holiday period.

- Still using tape backup or other removable media? *Check your backup and its schedule.* During the holiday season, it's all too easy to take things for granted and not change your backup media. Schedules can be modified to account for office absences and ensure that important data is being backed up properly. Even better, before things get busy, take a moment to consider media-less solutions such as online or image backup to ensure your data backup integrity, without human intervention.

- *Use built-in or online reminder services* to ensure that any bills that need to be paid are covered. Planning early will ensure you can pay on time, and not risk damaging your relationship with suppliers because of work holiday gaps.

- In an era when security breaches and virus threats are at an all-time high, the holiday season compounds this problem even further. The holiday season brings an influx of personal emails and files that also mean more potential for security breaches. These security problems plague organizations of all sizes. *Educate your staff to be especially vigilant when accessing email and online sites during the holiday season. Monitor more closely that operating system and anti-virus updates are being performed properly.* Have better things to worry about? Call us, we'd be happy to set you up with one of our managed services packages so you can cross this off your To Do list.

- Take customer support seriously—but let's chat. The time has long passed since the days when an e-commerce site could hide from its customers by not responding to queries. Phone calls are usually best, but not every company has the resources to handle them, especially during the holiday crunch. What to do? Resist the urge to bring in people who can answer the phone, but lack the expertise to truly represent your business. A badly handled call is worse than an unanswered one. Instead, *consider online chat.* The medium isn't as personal as the phone, but skilled representatives can conduct 5 or 10 chats at once—and customers will quickly recognize whether the people at the other end know what they're doing. Of course, email can also be effective as long as you're diligent about responding quickly . An email black hole is worse than no email at all. What if you're truly swamped with customer queries? Apologize, get a number and a good time to call—and call back!

- *Use "heat map" technology to track what clicks.* Here's another place the holiday stress test can serve you well in the coming year: tracking what people actually do on your site. Companies like GetClicky, CrazyEgg, and Clickdensity offer services that can show you how people are navigating your website, with the ability to experiment with new designs that are more effective. While the holiday season is no time for a major redesign, you can make quick fixes, and then use this invaluable data to make bigger changes down the road.

Implementing some simple technology best practices, can reduce the holiday stress on your company and focus your business. Want to learn more? Call **IT Radix** today. It's our goal to make I.T. work for you!

Goblins in Your Computer

Do you ever feel your computer is infiltrated with tiny goblins or demons doing their best to annoy you? Are you constantly bombarded with pop-up ads or excessive firewall alerts? Or, worse yet, have you ever been a victim of one of these tiny goblins totally sabotaging your computer? Phishers will attempt to coerce you into disclosing personal information. If you've ever been a victim of identity theft, as the saying goes—once bitten, twice shy! Thankfully, you can learn to avoid many of these pesky troubles before they snowball into huge system problems that take over your computer. Here are some signs that you're headed for trouble, along with tips to keep you safe.

Pop-ups

You are suddenly bombarded with porn pop-ups after clicking a search result. Back out immediately by either clicking the "X" in the upper-right corner or by pressing <Alt+F4> to close your browser. Then run a malware scanner/remover to assess and fix the damage. Turn on Internet Explorer's built-in *Pop-up Blocker* accessible via the "Tools" menu to avoid these pop-ups in the future.

Missing EULA

You are about to make a purchase online and aren't prompted to accept an end-user license agreement (EULA), nor are you offered a privacy policy to view. This is a telltale sign that something's fishy about this site. Some shady site proprietors may offer these, but often disclose their intentions in the "fine print" so to speak of the privacy policy or EULA, so you should always read carefully! EULAlyzer is an invaluable free tool that analyzes license agreements and notes any unusual or possibly dangerous language.

Excessive firewall alerts

Your firewall repeatedly alerts you to file extensions you don't recognize and other suspicious peculiarities. Once you've set your firewall to allow your most common programs, any alert should be taken seriously. A number of warnings should tell you that something is amiss. Not currently running a firewall? Get one right now!

Email links phishing for info

You follow a link embedded in an email and arrive at a site that asks you to provide security information for an "important update." Contact the company for verification before taking any action! Also, check the Federal Trade Commission's *Alert Board*.

OUR CLIENTS SPEAK OUT:

Introducing…Jim Faist

At IT Radix, our IT Consultants are always excited about new challenges that advancements in technology throw our way. **Jim Faist** is no exception—he's always up for a good challenge and problem solving is his specialty! Jim's motivation and "take the bull by the horns" approach to problem solving as well as his commitment to our clients is a quality that we admire here at IT Radix. When asked, Jim states that "his top priority is putting our clients 1st and giving 100% of himself to everything he does!"

With 22+ years of experience as a computer consultant, Jim brings with him a wealth of knowledge and expertise. Back in the early 90's, Jim was heavily involved with component-level repairs—back in the days when it was more cost-effective to refurbish computer components (e.g., circuit boards, floppy drives, capacitors, power supplies, etc.). Jim is a wiz at what makes computers tick! Plus, the experience Jim has gained from owning his own computer consulting business for 11 years is invaluable and helps him understand the needs of our small business clients.

Jim's problem-solving approach carries over to his personal life as well. He's not one to shy away from even his deepest fear! Here's but one example…Jim has always been deathly afraid of heights. So, what did he do?!?!? He took flying lessons! And, if that wasn't daring enough, he decided to jump right in, so to speak, and parachute! The most fun Jim's had in his entire life has been parachuting (tandem jumping)! Jim's own words… "The first time I jumped, you couldn't get the smile off my face for a week!" How's that for jumping right in and conquering your fears?!?

When he's not working, Jim enjoys spending time at home cooking and tinkering around with his motorcycle (1983 Yamaha Virago Classic). He's loved riding roller coasters since he was a kid at *Great Adventure* (although, waiting 2 hours for a ride is a thing of the past). Jim also enjoys reading—primarily U.S. history.

Jim's personal philosophy… emulates Abe Lincoln and the ideals Abe stood for. Jim admires Honest Abe's strength to go against the grain to do the "right" thing. We are the "last best hope!"

> *"I never had a policy; I have just tried to do my very best each and every day."*
>
> —Abraham Lincoln

The 1st Thanksgiving celebration in 1621 lasted 3 days!

The Pilgrims spent 66 days at sea on the Mayflower!

973-298-6908 (Phone) 973-298-6909 (Fax) resource@it-radix.com

Holiday Travels With Your iPad

Unveiled this past April, Apple touts their iPad as a new paradigm for computing—selling 3 million units in the first 80 days on the market. Touch-screen tablet devices are proving to be one of the top tech gifts of the 2010 holiday season!

Advantages

Watching a movie or relaxing with a good book are great ways to pass the time while traveling on business. Thousands of copyright-free books are available for download through Project Gutenberg, and Apple's iBook store has all the latest publications. A few publishers are already providing iPad versions of newspapers and magazines. iPad's compact size is perfect for airline and train travel as it fits nicely on the small seat trays. Other key benefits are iPad's large screen, light weight and low noise. They are also less vulnerable than laptops since they don't heat up and they don't have hard drives that can break with one bump.

Frequent business traveler, **Ken Annitti**, of E&H Laminating, won't leave home without his. "My iPad is a wonderful thing!" states Ken. "It eliminates the need for me to lug along my laptop, Kindle and iPod while traveling. As long as I have my iPad and Blackberry, I'm good to go!"

Disadvantages

One of the biggest disadvantages of the iPad is its inability to display flash-based programs, making it incompatible with many websites. It also does not have a USB port, which means that if memory is full while you are traveling, you cannot download information to a stick to free up space. For tourists who like to pack light, iPads won't replace all the gadgets they'd like to take along (i.e., mobile phones, cameras or video cameras).

Beware of Roaming Charges

Roaming charges can be very costly abroad, and surfing the Internet with an iPad using its UMTS card may cost you a pretty penny. As of July 1, the European Union (EU) has limited the amount phone customers can be charged while surfing the Internet away from their home countries—however, beyond the EU's borders, there are no such rules. To protect yourself from an enormous telephone bill upon returning home, limit yourself to using the iPad's WLAN function or buy a micro SIM card for the country you're visiting (these cards are usually much cheaper than paying roaming charges).

Apple is in for a little *friendly* competition this holiday season. Google is teaming up with HTC and Verizon to produce the *Chrome OS* tablet that will run on Google's Chrome operating system and is likely to be heavily subsidized for buyers who opt to purchase the device along with a monthly data plan from Verizon. Samsung is also launching another iPad competitor called the *Galaxy Tab*, that will run on Google's Android operating system that is primarily designed for mobile phones.

Tech-Age Etiquette While Home for the Holidays

There's no place like home for the holidays…creating memories over Thanksgiving dinners and informal gatherings of family and friends! In this age of technology advancements when many interpersonal communications are conducted by device rather than face-to-face, a whole new genre of technology-informed manners has evolved. This holiday season, beware of these common tech-age etiquette faux pas:

Is it OK to talk on your cell phone when holiday shopping? If you're calling your spouse while at a store for assistance in finding a gift, that's one thing. However, if you're interacting with a clerk while checking out at a store or ordering food at the food court, it is not polite to be having another conversation on the phone. It is always rude to talk on the phone when interacting with others—no matter who they are. Remember to treat everyone with common decency and respect.

Is it rude to check your PDA at a friend's house? It depends…if you arrive at a friend's house and explain that you need to check a few emails before visiting so that you can give her your full attention, she will surely understand. If, on the other hand, you find yourself perusing unnecessary emails, you'll send the message that your emails are more important than spending time with your friend.

You run into someone you know while listening to your iPod. Do you need to remove both earbuds to talk to her? Yes…if you're having more than a two-minute conversation, both buds need to come out (whether you turn off the device or not). That goes for your Bluetooth earpiece, too. Remember—etiquette is all about making the other person feel comfortable. Would you feel comfortable talking to someone who has something in their ears?

Is there a polite way to use *Call Waiting***?** Many of us are reminded over the holidays to slow down and reconnect over the phone with faraway family and friends. Interrupting a conversation mid-stream to answer a new call coming in may come across rude. However, *Call Waiting* can be a lifesaver when waiting for a call from a child or a doctor's office. If you are expecting a phone call, tell your friend at the beginning of the conversation that if you get another call, you'll need to take it. Your friend will surely understand.

Remember, holidays are a time to cherish with family and friends—enjoying the companionship of good people who have made a difference in our lives. Savor these times together without letting technology get in the way!

Sending Holiday Cards Without the Headaches

by Kendra Von Achen — DB Pros

We all know the holiday season is coming, but time seems to escape us, and then it's time to scramble! And when your systems are not organized the way you'd like them to be, it makes the task of getting your holiday cards out to your clients, prospects, and other colleagues a nightmare!

I'm going to share with you a few secrets to make this year's holiday card process MUCH easier. These tips hold true whether you're an entrepreneur or share information with coworkers.

Using a database system/CRM – If you are using a database system, you're already a few steps ahead of the curve. If you don't already have a special field or area of your system to track who should receive holiday cards from you (your company), then I suggest adding one. Go through your key contacts and identify who you'd like to send cards to this year. Using the new (or existing) field, mark all of those contacts to receive the holiday card.

Then when you're ready, create a search or report of all contacts marked to receive a holiday card. You can then either export that information to Excel and create mailing labels, or use the database's mail merge feature to create the mailing labels.

Using Outlook – If you are using Outlook to manage your contacts, you can use Categories to tag contacts to send a holiday card to. First, create a new category called Holiday Card (if one doesn't already exist). Then change the View to either *By Category* or *By Company*. This will bring up a list view of your contacts. Select the contacts you want to send holiday cards to by holding down the Ctrl key and clicking the left mouse button on each person's name. Then go to Edit → Categorize → and select Holiday Card. In the Categories view, go to Holiday Card and highlight all of the names listed. Copy the information (Ctrl-C) and then paste it into a blank Excel spreadsheet. Now you have your list of contacts to send holiday cards to (You may have to adjust the fields visible in this view in order to get addresses included).

Using Excel – If most of your contact information is stored in Excel, you can simply add a column called "Holiday Card" to the spreadsheet. Go down the list, putting an "X" in the Holiday Card field for all contacts you want to send a card to.

When done, simply sort the file by the Holiday Card field, and print labels for all those with an "X"!

Kendra Von Achen is President of DB Pros, a database consultancy for entrepreneurs and small businesses. Visit Kendra online at www.dbprosconsulting.com.

Don't Give the Flu as a Holiday Gift

Which office area has more germs: the restroom or office desktop? The answer may surprise you! Recent studies have shown that toilet seats are actually cleaner than shared office equipment! Computer keyboards, mice and telephones can collect lots of germs and transmit them to everyone who uses them. Some of the germs can be quite harmful—including staph and even E. coli. Health officials say that these findings are not all that surprising. 80% of Colds and Flu Viruses are caught by touching a shared surface! Since most germs are transmitted by hand contact, then it stands to reason that objects that come in contact with many different hands throughout a typical day could be prime candidates for transmitting germs.

Cleaning your office equipment is key to reducing the risk of spreading germs!

Cleaning Tips…

Keyboard – Never eat over your keyboard! Use compressed air to clean your keyboard as often as needed. Use a lint-free cloth with alcohol to wipe down the keys and stop bacteria from breeding right under your finger tips.

Mouse – When cleaning an optical mouse, never put anything on the optical sensor! First, disconnect the mouse from the back of your computer and place it on a flat surface. Moisten a lint-free cloth with a dab of alcohol and wipe the outside of your mouse liberally.

Pay close attention to the buttons on your mouse as dirt and oils from your skin build up between the buttons and on the roller ball.

Telephone – During normal speaking, people expectorate and this bacteria-laden fluid can penetrate the holes in the telephone mouthpiece. Every time someone picks up the phone, their mouth acts as a vacuum, inhaling germs, bacteria and airborne transmittable diseases. Use a lint-free cloth with alcohol to wipe down the handset.

It's good practice to clean your keyboard, mouse and telephone monthly (more frequently during Flu season). However, don't stop there! Our best recommendation for you is also the simplest solution… wash your hands frequently! Hmmm…Mother *was* right!

Goblins in Your Computer (cont.)
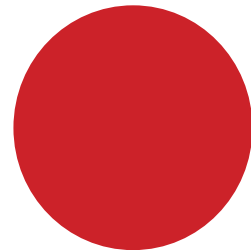
Be Thankful

The two most important words in the English language are "thank you." This is true for business and personal communications.

Business...A quick *thank you* tells your customers and prospects that you appreciate their patronage. Likewise, a simple thank you card is a powerful way to add a personal touch to your client contact.

Personal...These two simple words help people express gratitude and show their commitment to a social relationship. So, carry these grateful emotions into your business relationships with associates, clients, prospects, and vendors.

After all, this is the season of giving and appreciation. So, don't be afraid to say *thank you*!

Site's URL and email don't match

Any case in which a site's URL doesn't match the contact's email address should raise an eyebrow. Most legitimate companies provide their employees with a corporate email account. This doesn't mean, however, that you can automatically trust sites where the two align—illegitimate companies can purchase domain names as easily as legitimate companies.

Unsecure sites

If a site prompts you to enter personal information, check the browser window to confirm it's secure before going any further! Secure sites will have an address that start with *https:* as well as a closed padlock appearing at the bottom of the window.

Check *teh speling*

Beware of a site chock full of grammatical and spelling errors. That includes the Web address! Malicious websites are purposely developed with addresses that are very common to real websites. The malicious site addresses are based on common typing errors like .cm instead of .com. (Note that the .cm domain has been identified as the riskiest domain in the world because of this practice.)

Nested links

Does the site forward you to a completely unrelated site after you select it? Be forewarned…if nested links progressively take you to other sites, the host may be trying to pull a fast one.

Ridiculously extravagant gifts

If a free gift offer seems too good to be true, then it probably is. Remember, everything comes with a price. Most often you'll have to provide personal information, download something compromising, or even engage your friends in a pyramid scheme.

While these tips should help you avoid many dangerous sites, other online threats are much more subtle. Call IT Radix today to start implementing some safe practices to block these pesky goblins from making a home in your computer!

Do Macs Get Viruses? Count Your Blessings…

If you're an Apple Macintosh user, be thankful that you are <u>less</u> susceptible to viruses. The key word here is "less!" It is true that the likelihood of a Mac user getting a virus when compared to a Microsoft Windows user is very little. In fact, many Mac users don't even run an antivirus protection program.

However, don't be misled! You still need to be vigilant, as Macs are not totally immune to viruses.

Why Macs have <u>less</u> viruses…

- Microsoft Windows PCs are used by a lot more people than Apple Macintosh computers—thus making them a better target.

- Newer Mac operating systems, such as the Mac OS X, are built on the Unix kernel, which is one of the oldest and most secure operating systems available.

- Most "virus writers" are familiar with the IBM platform and Microsoft Windows, and therefore, are only able to create viruses for that platform.

- Many of the tools and scripts used to help users create viruses or other malware are designed for Microsoft Windows.

Beware…Macs still at risk…

If you are running a virtual PC on your Mac, it can still become infected with Windows viruses since it is emulating Microsoft Windows. Therefore, you should be running an antivirus protection program on it! In addition, a Mac can serve as a virus "carrier," whereby a virus could be stored on the Mac without appearing to infect it. However, if that infected Mac were then to connect to a network or forward an infected email to a Windows computer, it could easily spread the virus. Additionally, since Mac users are human, they can still be victims of Trojan horses, phishing and other online fraud.

IT Radix strongly recommends virus protection programs for <u>all</u> Mac and PC users. The anti-virus software choices for Mac are not as broad, but do exist. Call IT Radix today for a recommendation!

Q: Why is Thanksgiving always celebrated on Thursday?
A: Puritan mid-week prayer day

973-298-6908 (Phone) 973-298-6909 (Fax) resource@it-radix.com

IT Radix

IT Radix, LLC

P. O. Box 454
Mt. Freedom, NJ 07970

Phone: 973.298.6908
Fax: 973.298.6909
E-mail: resource@it-radix.com

**We make IT
work for you**

**Enter and Win!
Trivia Contest**

The first person to send an email to resource@it-radix.com with the correct answer to our trivia question will win 2 AMC movie passes!

Q:
In *Planes, Trains and Automobiles,* where or how does John Candy's annoying salesman character, Del, first introduce himself to Steve Martin's character, Neal?

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Summer Trivia Challenge

How many gigawatts of electricity did Doc Brown need to generate to power the De Lorean in *Back to the Future*?
(Answer: *1.21 gigawatts*)

From the desk of: Cathy Coloff

Subject:: Are You Geared Up for the Holidays?

As I look out my window, I see signs of fall and the beginnings of another holiday season. The months of October, November and December are always busy—especially now that I have a three-year-old tearing around the house. The days on my calendar are quickly filling up with extra activities with work, family and friends. The only troublesome part is that other things such as the regular day-to-day work and home life don't seem to slow down to accommodate these "extras" which is why the cartoon below really struck home with me. If only technology really could solve the not-having-enough patience problem!

It's amazing how quickly one becomes accustomed to technology improvements that speed things up. When I visit clients with slower PCs or Internet connections, I'm always silently thankful for my zippy Windows 7 machine and super fast Internet connection. We'd be happy to help you speed up your technology if desired…but, on the flip side, perhaps I just need a larger dose of patience and to simply take the time to slow it down a bit and savor those precious moments where the computer *thinks* about my request.

I recently celebrated my Grandfather's 97th birthday, and he says his key to success is being surrounded by the people he loves. So, as I gear up for the upcoming holiday season, I'm not only installing some more patience, I'm adding a dash of humor, a spoonful of gratitude, and pouring on the love for all the amazing people in my life—be it business associates, friends, or family. It's a wonderful life!

Cathy

PS…I hope you'll join me at our *Lunch'n Learn* on October 27th. See the enclosed flyer for more details.

A Company Christmas Party to Remember

A memorable company Christmas party requires creativity and planning and a little bit of thinking "outside the box." When a company's party has a reputation for being both fun and comfortable, not only will folks show up, but the event will also build morale.

Here are some tips to ensure that your Christmas party is one employees look forward to attending:

Tip 1 Do not host the party at your office. You want everyone to feel relaxed and festive, and if they are reminded of work, they might be distracted.

Tip 2 Choose a fun venue. Don't limit yourself to a sit-down, formal company dinner. Consider renting a bowling alley or skating rink for a night of fun and games.

Tip 3 Make it a family affair. If you change your guest list from inviting just staff to inviting staff and their families to your company party, people's expectations and behaviors will change, too. For one thing, alcohol consumption will decrease.   And as an added bonus, more people will be apt to attend. Activity-based parties are especially good for this.

Tip 4 Print invitations. Even if your office is small, invitations are important. Use a template in your word processing or publishing program. Communicating the date of the event well in advance is important. Getting the word out at the last minute will almost guarantee a poor turnout.

Tip 5 Consider dealcoholizing your party. There is no rule that you have to serve alcohol at your company Christmas party. People can certainly have a good time without drinking alcohol. Just make sure that everyone knows that it's an alcohol-free party ahead of time.

Tip 6 Switch it up. Change the venue from year to year.

The trick to successfully hosting any party is to blend just the right amounts of excitement and comfort. With these company Christmas party tips, you can pull off a holiday party that your staff will be raving about for weeks to come.

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"Hello, Maintenance? Could you send someone up to the 14th floor to adjust my attitude and install more patience?"