

5 KEYS TO STRESS-FREE I.T.



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“Stress-Free” and “I.T.” are two concepts many business owners have never heard or even thought of in the same sentence. We all know that technology is designed to make our lives easier, but all too often in today’s business world, it can feel as if just the opposite is true — servers crashing, virus and malware infections, machines that are quickly outdated, slow I.T. support, hackers and data thieves, downtime and loss of productivity — the list goes on! Thankfully, the negative impact from I.T. problems is mostly **AVOIDABLE!** So let’s go through some basic (but vital) keys to achieving Stress-Free I.T. in your business:

TAP: Baseline Report

Best Practice Score	Inventory (30%)	Security (35%)	Reliability (35%)	Supportability (35%)
Physical	✓	✓	✓	✓
Network	✓	✓	✓	✓
Server	✓	✓	✓	✓
Workstation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Application	✓	✓	✓	✓
End-User	✓	✓	✓	✓
Monitoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
Audit/Tracking	✓	✓	✓	✓

1) Have a Plan

Don’t just let I.T. “happen” to your business. It’s important to organize your approach to I.T. as early as possible so that as your business grows and develops, you don’t end up with an I.T. network that is more of a risk than it is an asset.

Some businesses start out with a couple of PCs. They add a Linksys wireless router from Wal-Mart, a Netgear switch from Best Buy, a couple more random PCs from Costco, a laptop from Amazon, and so on. Eventually, they end up with a “patchwork quilt” of an I.T. network. That might get you by at home, I suppose. However, if technology is important to the success of your business, it’s recommended to use “architected” business-class solutions that are designed to work together reliably.

The best way to start is with a professional Technology Assessment. A good assessment will find out where you are (technologically speaking), where you want to be, and provide the steps to get you there. A good I.T. support company helps you develop a technology plan that keeps things stable and reliable, while being flexible enough to adjust to the changing needs of your business.



2) Be Proactive

The reason so many businesses associate I.T. with “stress” is because they’ve primarily had a “putting out fires” approach to I.T. support company. They wait until something breaks, then call the I.T. company to come fix it. This “break/-fix” approach to I.T. doesn’t do your business any favors. The bottom line is that downtime = lost money.

Here’s something many business owners never stop to consider: If your I.T. support only makes money when you have problems, guess what you’re going to have? Problems! However, a proactive, “Managed Services Provider” (MSP) model of I.T. support works in just the opposite way: Both your business AND your I.T. support company are actually more profitable when YOU HAVE NO I.T. PROBLEMS. Everyone is happiest when your I.T. systems work flawlessly. This is a WIN-WIN situation.

Managed I.T. service providers accomplish this by having a preventative and proactive (vs. reactive) approach to your I.T. support. Some key components of proactive I.T. support include: 24/7 monitoring of your network, automated maintenance, managed operating system updates and security patching, constant review of system performance, and more. It’s ultimately cheaper to prevent problems than it is to try to fix them afterwards. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” as they say.



3) Security

Along those same lines (prevention vs. reaction), another key to Stress-Free I.T. is keeping security central to everything about your business's technology. While any honest I.T. company will admit that NOTHING is absolutely 100 percent guaranteed to protect a business from any possible threat, any person with common sense would rather be 99.9 percent protected than only 25 percent or 80 percent protected.

Some key components of business I.T. security include: Putting in place a "business-class" firewall that provides gateway, first-level protection for your whole network; anti-virus, anti-malware/anti-exploit software on all devices (and constant monitoring to ensure it receives all updates); anti-spam and content filtering; encryption (especially vital in certain businesses); password policy; central employee/user account management; Group Policy Object programming; and more.

Do YOU want to think about all this and keep it all running and up-to-date? Maybe you don't mind, but many prefer to have a managed I.T. service provider do it.



4) Backup and Disaster Recovery

Again, proactivity and prevention are central, guiding principles in achieving Stress-Free I.T., and this brings us to Backup and Disaster Recovery (BDR). Fire, flood, theft — they do happen. You also have the typical everyday problems of data corruption, accidental file deletion, hard drive failures, antivirus and malware attacks, and more.

Any of these can result in data loss. Not "if," but WHEN they happen, often the last line of defense is having a solid BDR solution in place.

Unfortunately, many businesses ignore Backup and Disaster Recovery entirely. Others know that having backups is something they "ought to" do, but never quite get around to it. Still others know it's important to try "something," but they usually end up with inferior solutions that don't actually meet their needs. We often hear from people who "thought" they had backups, but, as it turns out — they didn't have a viable BDR system that actually comes through when it really counts. Roughly 40-60 percent* of small businesses never reopen their doors following a disaster!

So what's the solution? A few key aspects of BDR success include: First, have I.T. experts plan a solution that specifically fits your business needs. The experts will take into consideration such factors as the laws that govern your industry (especially healthcare, finance, government, etc.), your business data retention requirements, how long you could afford to be down if you had a disaster, your budget, and so on. Second, they will plan for you to have multiple copies, on multiple media, in multiple locations, and automate the whole system to avoid human error. Third, they will continuously monitor the system to ensure it's running as scheduled. Last, they will regularly do test file recovery to ensure your data remains viable (uncorrupted and usable) and is actually recoverable when it needs to be.

In a nutshell — hope for the best, but plan for the worst. Get backed up and stay backed up. If you understand the need for having insurance on your car or home, you understand the importance of BDR for your business. Almost anything else can go wrong with your I.T., but a solid BDR solution can be your saving grace.

*Small Business Association — www.sba.gov



5) **Have a Reliable and Proven I.T. Support Partner**

Most business owners aren't technology experts. It is, however, important to have someone in your corner who understands both technology AND your business. When I ask business owners how their current I.T. support is — guess what the most common answer is: "Fine." Unfortunately, their understanding of "fine" usually means this: "When something breaks, I call them, and they come fix it as soon as they can. The End." That might have been "fine" 20 years ago, but with technology such a key factor in the success of most businesses today, a great business I.T. support company doesn't just fix computers! They also:

- Have enough staff to respond quickly when you have an urgent need
- Monitor your systems 24/7 and keep things updated and running smoothly
- Often detect and fix things before YOU even know there is a problem to fix
- Provide a fully staffed Help Desk that any user can call whenever they need help
- Use industry-best tools that enable them to provide the support you need
- Implement widely trusted products into well-planned solutions
- Are manufacturer-trained and certified as to the technologies they implement
- Are recognized within the I.T. industry for their level of service and support
- Get to know your business's mission, priorities, budget, goals and vision
- Introduce you to technology that transforms your life and business
- Maximize your efficiency, productivity and profitability

- Help you develop your one-, three- and five-year I.T. budgets
- Regularly participate in your management meetings
- Manage your I.T. resources: hardware, software, warranties, licensing, services, etc.
- Liaison with other technology vendors to ensure big-picture success
- Provide you with regular reports of what's going on with your I.T.
- Have great client references you can talk to, who are, hopefully, even in your industry
- Are "customer service-obsessed," and treat your network, your business, your staff and YOU as if you're their life blood — because you are!

The "average" I.T. company doesn't provide this level and scope of service, but YOU want one that does. The bottom line is this: Most business owners don't want to think about I.T. — they just want it to work. They want someone else to keep it all working well, so their employees can stay productive, which means they can focus on the business they love. This is what Apex Technology Management provides!

So Here's the Big Sales Pitch:

If you don't have an I.T. support company that offers the type of managed services and support we've talked about here, we'd love to speak with you.

Give us a call at 1-800-310-2739 right now while it's on your mind.

Ask for the Business Development department, and let us know how we might serve you, and help your business get to the next level!
