Small Business Software You Don't Have to Think About

Managing IT is a complex proposition, and small firms don't typically have the time or resources to do it. What customers need is a set of integrated software that not only solves their most pressing business problems by helping them work smarter, but also manages itself.

All the Great Work Without IT Overhead

As a small-business professional, you have to work hard and smart to stay ahead. Regardless of the field in which you're competing, you devote long hours to keeping customers happy and growing the operation. Small-business workers must fill many roles, often engaging in sales, customer service, project management, and business development all at once. Working hard is no longer enough. To make your business more efficient and your people more productive, you have to work smart as well. Technology, or rather, utilizing the right technology, is a key component in improving the way you do business. Not only does technology make it easier to get things done, it also reduces the overhead associated with the manpower needed to manage your business.

The primary reason we use information technology is that it makes communications and business management tasks easier and faster to carry out, thus enabling your business to compete more effectively in an increasingly competitive market. If used effectively, information technology should serve as the central nervous system of your business. If you store customer information, you must have a database. If your business computers are connected to one another and the Internet, you must have a network. If you collaborate on documents and files, you must have shared servers and resources. And if you keep all this crucial information protected (and in almost all cases, you must), you must have back-up and security technologies in place.

The problem is, you're a businessperson, not a tech guru. How do you know what technology is right for you? You know how to use the PC to support your daily activities, but how can you manage the increasingly complex world of business IT? New technologies are being introduced every day, regulatory requirements are growing stricter and more far-reaching, cyberthreats are evolving, and the pace of business is speeding up. How can you ensure that IT supports your business goals, instead of becoming a headache and a cost center in itself?

A recent quote from Kennesaw State University Professor and IT expert Herb Mattord sums up the problem neatly: "Many IT frameworks are designed without constraints in mind, when in reality small and midsize businesses don't have the specialized resources or budgets to implement recommendations in-house, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage compared with large enterprises."

There's no doubt that the Internet has opened more opportunities for small businesses than ever before, but it's also created a global playing field in which commerce is conducted 24/7/365. In many industries, that means that every operation needs to be up and running virtually all the time, because a delay or outage will lead to lost business and lost customers.

The Cost of Downtime

Every business owner knows that just a few hours of downtime can be catastrophic. If a system outage makes it impossible to access key files, respond to urgent customer requests, or submit payment claims, your ability to recover and resume operations in a timely fashion can spell the difference between success and failure. And system outages can be triggered by a number of different issues, from virus attacks to hard drive crashes to system freezes.

Any computer or network that's tied to the Internet is susceptible to attack, and hackers are increasingly targeting specific businesses to steal private data and commit identity theft. In fact, according to a June 2008 report from security research firm iDefense Labs, over 15,000 business workers were targeted between winter 2007 and summer 2008. Victims included large and small companies, schools and government offices, and science and engineering firms.

Most attacks are aimed at Microsoft Windows environments. According to a November 2007 article by Paul D. Kretkowski on the ITSecurity.com Web site, seven of the 10 "worst virus attacks of all time" targeted vulnerabilities in Microsoft products, specifically.

You don't want to fall victim to an attack. If your systems are compromised, it can take hours, even days, to fix the problem. Worse, if hackers steal key information or sensitive customer data, not only will you have to remediate your systems, but you may also have to report the breach and pay for fraud protection on each customer account.

Network security tools do exist, but those tools often require frequent, manual updates and can interfere with network performance or each other. For example, a spam filter might conflict with a virus filter, and cause a slowdown on incoming e-mail. Fixing the problem requires an expensive IT resource, and means that you will have to pay for an on-site visit that was not in your planned budget.

And while it's critical to have integrated security software to minimize issues, your business needs other protection to keep downtime to a minimum. It is important to have a seamless method to back up data so you don't lose your information and halt your productivity. Every company needs to have its critical data and systems backed up in case an

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outage occurs and the business needs to recover. Even an accidentally deleted file can cause downtime and delay, so companies need a system that ensures their information will be there when they need it.

That's easier said than done. Many companies do not have the solutions necessary to electronically back up their data. And for those that do, many use traditional back-up systems that require one to manually initiate the back-up process. Further, even when the data is backed up, if there is a failure on the storage device such as the hard drive, recovering the information—assuming it can even be recovered—is a time-consuming and costly affair.

So what's a small business to do? How do you stay competitive and agile when beset with pressures from customers, competitors, regulatory bodies, and hackers?

The answer is IBM Lotus Foundations Start, a small business solution from IBM designed with your business in mind. Lotus Foundations Start is, essentially, instant IT in a box. The solution consists of a server, storage, messaging and productivity tools, and security software packaged together —with virtually no ongoing IT support required. The solution can be set up in under 30 minutes, and it is sold through a set of trusted IBM Business Partners who are focused on selling to small businesses. Many are small businesses themselves, so they understand the cost pressures, technology issues, and headaches you face, because they experience them as well.

The Right Approach to Small Business IT

IBM Lotus Foundations Start can help your business grow and thrive by taking the IT burden off your plate and boosting productivity and performance. It's an all-in-one solution that combines hardware and software to form an appliance. The server, the hardware portion of the appliance, has the software, security, and storage capabilities pre-installed. And if you already have a server, you can even buy just the software and load it onto your own system, provided it meets a few basic memory and processing requirements. Lotus Foundations is an ideal solution for small businesses with little or no IT support. A local IBM Business Partner takes care of the installation and management, taking the burden off your shoulders and putting the trusted expertise of IBM to work managing your IT needs. And in the unlikely instance that there is a problem, since the solution is entirely from IBM, the Business Partner doesn't have to worry about knowing the ins and outs of servicing software and hardware from different vendors.

Lotus Foundations Start also offers file and printer sharing; firewall, anti-virus, and anti-spam protection; e-mail, calendaring, and contacts; secure remote access; data back-up and disaster recovery features; office productivity tools; and automatic system updates. You read that right—it updates and manages itself.

Lotus Foundations Start is also self-diagnosing and self-healing, so it can detect and remediate many problems on its own, with no need for

IT personnel to intervene. Security is auto-configured and managed without any intervention from the business user. These capabilities help reduce problems from happening in the first place. And in the rare event that a problem occurs, your Business Partner can actually connect to your system remotely, and diagnose and fix the problem without ever having to visit your office.

The solution includes a firewall to protect the network from intrusion and malware, and a virtual private network (VPN) that enables remote workers to access business resources securely from any Internet connection.

Back-up and data recovery are also a snap with Lotus Foundations Start. The solution backs up your data to a removable hard drive as often as every 15 minutes. And if you purchase a second back-up drive, you can swap out the drives and store the secondary drive securely in another location. If something happens to the primary drive or even the server itself, the secondary drive can be placed into a brand new Lotus Foundations server, and with the touch of a button, all your information will be restored in a matter of minutes.

On the productivity front, Lotus Foundations Start comes complete with a host of easy-to-use applications and collaboration tools, enabling smoother and more efficient operations for your workers. With the award-winning IBM Lotus Symphony software, you get fully featured and intuitive spreadsheet, word processing, and presentation functionality. Lotus Symphony gives you the ability to import, edit, and even save work as Microsoft Office files. That means you can still easily share files with those who may not have moved to Lotus Symphony. And it also means that you no longer have to worry about purchasing pricey Microsoft Office licenses.

IBM Lotus Notes and Domino are also included. Like Lotus Symphony, these tools are intuitive and easy to grasp for all employees. Lotus Notes and Domino enable users to access e-mail and share calendars, documents, presentations, spreadsheets, all from a single interface, saving time and increasing productivity.

Conclusion

With IBM Lotus Foundations Start, small businesses have the tools they need to work smart in today's increasingly competitive and fast-paced marketplace. Instead of IT getting in the way of the business, Lotus Foundations Start provides a comprehensive offering that includes all the essential software a small business needs in an easy-to-use, managed environment. This seamless approach to business IT creates an all-in-one solution that not only dramatically increases employee productivity, but also substantially lowers the total cost of IT ownership for small-business customers. And that translates into continued success for your small business.■

Small-Business Value Proposition of IBM Lotus Foundations Start

AUTONOMICS
- Installs and configures components automatically
- Self-diagnosis and remediation
- Automated back-ups
- Simple data recovery and system restore

SECURITY
- Auto-tunes firewall and filters
- Instant VPN access
- Updates automatically

OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY
- Interoperability with popular file types
- E-mail, calendar, and documents in one interface
- Easy integration with existing tools

Lotus Foundations

Lotus software