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Taking a Look at a Manufacturer's IT



Manufacturing products is still a major part of the western economies; and, like other businesses, manufacturers are using information technology to fuel and manage their supply chains and business processes. We'll take a short look at what IT manufacturers use, and how it helps them forge their business ahead.

The Production Labyrinth

The process of creating products can be quite the maze. If you make the right decisions, operations can go smoothly, but if you take the wrong turns, you could be facing a no-win situation. The use of IT can help navigate the modern...



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About Directive

We are a technology consulting firm specializing in technology implementation and management for businesses. We're known for providing big-business, Enterprise-Level IT services to small and medium-sized businesses.

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Inefficiency is a Business Killer



Inefficiency is not something that you plan for. It just happens. It happens when processes get too big, have too many moving parts, or are bogged down by excessive oversight. It happens when purposes for certain tasks change or are abandoned altogether. Other times efficiency has a different look to it and makes your optimistic projections look foolish. Whatever the reason, inefficiency is more the rule than the exception, and it's costing your business plenty. This month, we take a look at what efficiency actually looks like and how to do your best to achieve it.

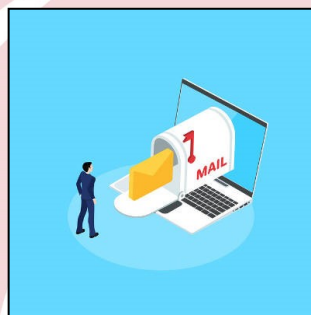
Employee Productivity

You want your business to be more productive? Join the club. Every business that has ever opened its doors has revenue-costing inefficiencies that they are forced to deal with. Some overcome them, some don't. If your business wants to confront it's inefficiencies, it has to start at the beginning and define what efficient looks like. Since inefficiency can come from any part of your business, it's a decent idea to separate your search for inefficiencies into departments, or even specific workflows where you can define what efficient productivity looks like for that certain task. This definition is effectively your criteria for claiming inefficiency, and should only change if process or workflow changes.

Another determination is how much things change. Are you constantly tweaking your operational plan to try to draw as much out of each of your workers? Most changes that you make to workflows, no matter how small, are going to cause some initial inefficiency. Think about it: If someone has been doing something the same for a while and you ask him/her to do it differently to save time, it seems, unless you have evidence that it will work, that

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Business Email User Tips



Email is one of modern society's best ways of staying in contact on both a business and personal level, but only if you're effectively utilizing it. We'll help you implement best practices and other methods to get the maximum benefit of your chosen email solution.

Stay as Organized as Possible

How many emails do you receive on a daily basis? It's likely that, as a business owner, you receive countless messages that all demand a certain level of attention. The problem with this is that it quickly becomes a cluttered inbox, complete with a mish-mash of messages that may or may not have been responded to recently. You can organize your inbox into messages based on importance, sender, topic, etc, all to improve the way you navigate your inbox.

Set Aside Time for Emails

That being said, you should also set aside time throughout the day to deal with your emails. This time should be specifically for responding to emails, and only that. This is because you could easily get sidetracked if you try to multitask. Remember, if the message is important enough that it warrants immediate attention, then whoever sent it will call you and address you in a more direct manner. While emails are important, it's important to remember that they are a medium that is, for all intents and purposes, passive. You send an email because

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How to Secure Data Using Passwords



All that stands between hackers and your accounts' data, be it personal information or sensitive business info, is a measly string of characters that may (or may not) be complex enough to thwart their attacks. We're talking about your passwords, and for many businesses, they are the only thing protecting important data. We'll walk you through how to make sure your passwords are as complex as possible, as well as instruct you on how to implement additional security features to keep your data locked down.

How to Create a Secure Password

The ideal password is generally easy to remember, but difficult to guess, all while utilizing a plethora of letters,

numbers, and symbols. Unfortunately, all of this combines to create a situation that makes remembering a password practically impossible without some sort of aid or program. We recommend putting together a password that is an alphanumeric representation of a phrase that you will remember.

"All that stands between hackers and your accounts' data, be it personal information or sensitive business info, is a measly..."

Of course, if you make so many of these, you might forget which ones apply to that particular account. This is where password management comes in. You can create a "master password" that acts as the gatekeeping password for your many accounts. Password managers store your passwords in a secure database where they are only called on as needed, keeping you from having to remember them all.

Two-Factor Authentication

Passwords are best utilized alongside a secondary method of authentication. This could be in the form of a passcode sent to your mobile device via text message or phone call, or it could be a biometric code of some sort like a thumbprint. Regardless, a secondary method of authentication means that your account is less likely to be infiltrated, as it effectively means twice the work for any hacker attempting to break in.

Directive can equip your business with password managers and two-factor authentication tools that will optimize data security and ensure your accounts will have a minimal chance of being compromised. To learn more, reach out to us at 607.433.2200.



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Inefficiency is a Business Killer

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you are likely digging your own efficiency grave by changing a completely functional process to try to get more out of it. It's true that most people work at the speed they need to to be the most effective. If you think that you need someone who works faster, it's not necessarily an employee-related problem, it's likely a company-related problem.

In truth, most times, when a business thinks it is having a problem with their productivity, they mean that the people that work for them aren't pulling their weight. The question becomes how do you quantify a productive workforce? Today, more and more companies are using Key Performance Indicators (KPI). These are measures that allow decision makers to evaluate strategic performance, as well as employee performance. Taking time to understand how your business, and your employees, can be most effective to help you meet your organizational goals is just as important as having the resources in place to do so.

One thing is for certain, making work harder on your employees is not going to result in better productivity. Your business is a second home to your employees, and the lion's share of people show up regardless of what is going on in their lives. The happier they are to spend a quarter-to-a third of their lives working for you, the more you are going to get out of them. That's not to say that there shouldn't be performance metrics, and that you shouldn't do everything you can to track their performance, but if you are making their lives outside of work better by providing the wages, benefits, and working conditions conducive for productivity, you will get more out of them.

Automation

In the productivity end, efficiency is built from having a good plan on what needs to happen, and executing that plan. If the plan shifts after some time, it's fair to expect that efficiency will take some time to catch up. Unless, that is, that plan includes automating

portions of the workflow. People like to act that automation is working against people's interests, but nothing could be further from the truth. Automation builds efficiency, which allows for more productivity, which allows for more revenue, and higher profits, and if those profits are reinvested, more jobs.

Automation works to build efficiency. That's its one benefit, and it will cost you. There are many ways that a business can leverage automation into profitability. One is by utilizing a tool that automates all the little things. A properly-working business typically has many different facets, and no matter how few people there are working these facets, they'll have to be maintained. So while payroll, accounts receivable, customer/vendor support, human resources could all be headed up by one person, with a software...



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Business Email User Tips

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it's easier to do than make a phone call, so if it's truly important, you can rest assured that the sender will make it known.

Utilize Alternative Communication Methods

If you're having trouble keeping your email inbox clear of messages, consider the nature of these messages. Are they urgent? Are they short messages that require a considerable amount of back-and-forth to resolve the issue? If the answer to all of these questions is yes, then perhaps you can save some time by simply using another method of

communication to handle them. Instant messaging is a great way to keep small issues that require back-and-forth communication from derailing productivity, as it is generally a quick and easy way of getting ahold of someone without wasting too much time on either end of things.

Make a Phone Call

Similarly, if there is something that needs to be explained more efficiently than a long-winded email could allow, then take the time to give someone a call. Or, better yet, consider setting up a meeting for face-to-face interaction. You might be surprised by how much

time you can save simply by not monkeying around with your email, as this means that words cannot be misconstrued or taken out of context.

Directive can help your business best utilize its solutions, whether it's as simple as providing email best practices to managing a full-fledged network infrastructure. To learn more about how we can help your organization utilize email to the best of its ability, reach out to us at 607.433.2200.



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Around the Clock Support Keeps You In the Game



All businesses need help with their technology, whether they realize it or not. The question is how they

receive that support. Some organizations have access to an in-house IT department that can act as an IT resource to on-premise employees, but others might not have employees dedicated to this role.

Businesses generally fall into two categories: they either have an in-house IT department that handles everyday maintenance and support, or they forego important updates and support in favor of saving money in the long term. Unfortunately, "saving money in the long term" doesn't really equate out to saving anything, as they might

experience frequent issues that make it difficult to get work done. Furthermore, the more you ignore important maintenance and upgrades, the more likely you are to experience crippling disasters, like hardware failures, hacking attacks, and software crashes. Some small businesses might not even have the budget required for the minimal IT administration assistance, and it is a dangerous prospect to think they can go without it.

Let's take a look at the more fortunate scenario, the one that assumes that your business has an IT department on-premises. Any business that has IT resources at the ready know that it's a great boon to their daily operations, but any administrator or IT worker knows that they have a considerable amount of work to do. When they aren't answering countless questions asked by a business' staff, they are working to make operations more efficient and

streamlined through the implementation of new solutions.

The same can be said for the opposite scenario. If an organization is so focused on the future and improving operations, they might be willing to suffer from temporary issues, including those experienced by the everyday employee. How can your business ensure that this kind of innovation is still a driving force without forgoing the kind of IT support needed to keep your employees in proper order?

A help desk solution from Directive is one way your business can fill the gap left in the absence of qualified IT technicians in the office, but we can also supplement your current IT resources by applying our collective knowledge to their current problems. It's the perfect way to show your employees that you care about both making progress with innovation and the everyday struggles they face.

To learn more about implementing a help desk solution, reach out to us at 607.433.2200.



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Ransomware Shuts Down Doctors' Office - Is Your Business Protected?



Let me ask you a question... let's say that you're about one year from your projected retirement, when a ransomware attack encrypts all of your files. What do you do? Pack it in and retire early? This is precisely the situation that the practitioners of Brookside ENT & Hearing Services of Battle Creek, Michigan, have found themselves in - and it may not be over yet.

What Happened to Brookside ENT?

Typical of a ransomware attack, the malware began by deleting and overwriting all of the practice's data - every medical record, bill, and upcoming appointment. A duplicate of each file was left behind, locked behind a password that the person or persons responsible promised to provide in exchange for a \$6,500 wire transfer.

Under the advisement of an "IT guy," Dr. William Scalf and Michigan state senator Dr. John Bizon didn't pay the ransom, as they couldn't be sure that the password would even work, or that the ransomware wouldn't return in the near future. As their IT resource determined that the attacker

hadn't actually viewed any of the records, this event technically didn't need to be reported as a breach under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Nevertheless, without access to this data, the physicians saw little choice than to retire early.

Well, kind of. As they had no means of knowing who had an appointment scheduled, the physicians had little choice than to wait around the office for a few weeks and see whomever showed up.



Why Throwing in the Towel May Not Be Enough

From a purely academic point of view, it only makes sense that the medical industry would be one targeted by ransomware. Not only do its establishments rely greatly on the data they have stored, there is an urgency to this reliance that cannot be

denied. Think about the possible ramifications if a medical practitioner was unable to properly diagnose a patient and recommend treatment because of some unavailable data.

Of course, the strategy that Brookside ENT has adopted to close up shop doesn't leave its owners off the hook, either. They could still find themselves in plenty of regulatory hot water.

For instance, a ransomware attack (paid or not) could be considered a reportable incident under HIPAA, or even an instigation of a negligence-based legal action. Any patient could invoke HIPAA rules if their data was in digital form and have an investigation started by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Civil Rights, simply by leaving a complaint.

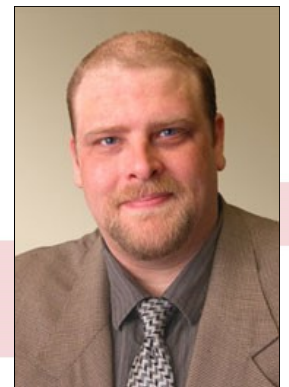
How You Can Protect Your Business from Ransomware

While the best way to keep...



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We partner with many types of businesses in the area, and strive to eliminate IT issues before they cause expensive downtime, so you can continue to drive your business forward. Our dedicated staff loves seeing our clients succeed. Your success is our success, and as you grow, we grow.



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