Is Virtualization Right for your Small Business?

Server Virtualization has been around for a while but has quickly become more popular for small businesses due to the long-term costs saved when your servers are virtualized. What exactly is server virtualization and how can it benefit Upstate New York businesses?

Read the rest Online!
http://bit.ly/HvQiyo

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.

Visit us **online** at:
newsletter.directive.com

4 Spring Cleaning Practices to Improve your IT

As the days get longer and the weather gets warmer, it's a good time to step back and look at ways to rejuvenate your day-to-day operations and do some spring cleaning. These practices won't cover dusting up cobwebs but will offer a few practices to improve your overall IT.

Start Monitoring your Network
For small businesses, there's always room for improvement and IT is a great place to start. IT Monitoring can detect issues that are lying dormant on your network and workstations and help technicians resolve them before they cause big trouble for you later. It's much cheaper to find and detect issues than it is to deal with them while they cause havoc.

Managed IT providers such as Directive offer Monitoring services to prevent issues before they happen. There is a lot of value in this; businesses that monitor their IT see significantly less downtime and lower support costs overall.

Policy Management
It's time to step back and look at how your organization manages policies on your network. Technology trends have been changing very rapidly and employees often bring their own smartphones and tablets to work to improve their mobility and supplement productivity. This is great, but it is forcing businesses to think about how to establish policies for bring-your-own-device situations.

What To Do If My Credit Card is Stolen

Global Payments, a credit card processing firm, announced that as many as 1.5 million credit card numbers were stolen due to a security breach last month. Issues like this seem more and more common place in the news and it is important to know what to do if you suspect that your credit card has been hacked.

You receive an alert that your credit card number (or any other piece of personal information) has been stolen, or you observe a bill or debt for something you don't recall purchasing. What do you do? The First and most important step is to be aware of your accounts and personal information. Review your credit card statements carefully each month and look for anything you don't recall purchasing. Often, banks will monitor activity on your credit card, especially for known issues or odd discrepancies (like out of country purchases) and either alert you or simply deactivate your card immediately to prevent further fraud. Even though this is an inconvenience, this extra level of awareness can save you a lot of time and hassle.

Securing your Wi-Fi is More Important Than Ever

Does your Wi-Fi require a secure password to allow users to access your network with their mobile devices? And no, the word "password" is not a suitable password. If your wireless network is easy to gain access to, you are opening up your sensitive data to anyone within range.

Cracking into Wi-Fi networks isn't complicated for anyone who really wants to do it, especially if you are only securing your network with WEP encryption. WEP is the most commonly used encryption available on wireless routers, and it only takes a couple searches on YouTube to find tutorials on cracking WEP Wi-Fi networks to gain access in just a few minutes.

Businesses shouldn't use WEP to secure their wireless networks, but instead should at least use WPA or WPA2. If you aren't sure what type of encryption your wireless network is using, contact Directive at 607.433.2200 to make sure you aren't leaving yourself open for localized threats. If you know your Wi-Fi doesn't even have a password, we can enable that security for you.

Once a user can log onto your wireless network, they can start using your internet connection, but from there they could possibly be able to get deeper into your network and cause some real trouble for you. While requiring a long, secure password to log devices onto the network is inconvenient, businesses need to enforce this to prevent sensitive corporate data from getting into the wrong hands.

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Protecting your Data from Disaster

"As a business owner, when should I worry about implementing data backup for my company?"

The answer comes in the form of another question, "How much do you value your business?"

It doesn't take much to cause data loss. A simple power outage at the wrong time, a hardware or software malfunction, and even simple user error can be the source of a disaster. Businesses put a lot of time into documenting processes, collecting data on customers, and building internal documents and templates so that day-to-day operations can run smoothly. These things don't just fabricate out of thin air - they are the end result of a lot of time and money.

Let's take a theoretical business example:

A small business consultant office has four computers and a server. Let's assume the four users process about 20 clients per day, documenting client data, ongoing projects, contracts, and an application runs from the server that collects and manages contacts and accounting information. Things are a little ad hoc and different documents and data are stored on the individual workstations and not in a central repository like on the server, minus the CRM system.

> *"So many things can go wrong and cause data loss. Can you recover?"*

As mentioned before, a lot of things can go wrong that cause data loss: viruses, power surges/outages, lightning, fire, theft, hardware malfunctions, etc. The list goes on and on. Let's assume our theoretical business consulting firm experiences a virus that causes a hard drive in one of the computers to become unusable.

This isn't even the worst-possible scenario, but that means any data that was exclusively on that workstation would need to be recreated. Current projects that were mapped out on that computer would need to be put on hold, any contracts and client data stored exclusively on it would be lost. Data would need to be reentered and reorganized. This data could be the culmination of work over the course of years. You can't recreate that overnight - it takes a lot of time and money to rebuild.

Before long, the amount the company spends on restoring that data manually could be thousands. Deadlines would need to get pushed back, and reputation could drop due to the issue. This is why studies show that more than half of all companies go out of business within a year after a major data loss disaster.

Ask yourself, how much do you value your business and its data? Are you confident that your business could resume normal operations quickly after a major loss of data?

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Do Employees Work Better from Home?

Technology today makes it easy for businesses to let employees work from home. Offering secure remote access gives employees the flexibility to work on the road, at events, or from home as if they were at their desks in the office. Is this good for small businesses?

"It's amazing how someone's IQ seems to double as soon as you give them responsibility and indicate that you trust them... People are smarter than you think. Give them a chance to prove themselves."
- Tim Ferriss, 4 Hour Work Week

There is a lot of fear that if employees that aren't attached to their desks they aren't as productive. After all, how can you tell they are working effectively instead of slacking off?

There have been plenty of studies on this over the years, and the results show that employees who have the flexibility to work from home are more productive. In fact, 67% of businesses confirmed that their staff was more productive, according to a 2008 study by CompTIA Research.

Beyond just productivity, there are plenty of long-term benefits that aren't instantly visible. Businesses can see cost savings by allowing employees to work remotely. Fewer employees in the office means fewer desks and computers, and that reduces electricity bills. It also produces happier, healthier workers who are more satisfied with their jobs, and in return have greater performance and stability. In other words, if employers release the reigns on employees, it can pave the way for better practices, innovation, and better productivity. Telecommuting can be seen as a huge perk for employees raising children, allowing them to be home as opposed to paying for daycare or other supervision.

Is Telecommunication for Everybody?
The real question businesses face is whether offering the ability to work from home is right for them. Obviously some industries don't have that opportunity - manufacturing workers and doctors tend to need to be onsite to perform their best. The roadblock that most companies get caught up on is how productive their staff will be.

These days it's a good idea for businesses to invest in some scalable infrastructure that supports remote access simply because of the benefits of being able to access files and applications from anywhere. These same technologies. . .

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http://bit.ly/HvPGZn

Increase Productivity with Multiple Monitors

For those who find themselves struggling with resizing windows and flipping between documents and getting lost in a sea of open applications on their desktop, connecting a second monitor to your workstation can double your screen real estate.

In some cases, desktop PCs are already equipped with a second monitor port, but if that isn't the case, you'll need to upgrade your PC with a new video card. Be sure to give Directive a call at 607.433.2200 if you are in the market for a new monitor or PC upgrades.

Often, laptops have an extra monitor port so you can connect an extra monitor to provide an expanded desktop. If not, there are other solutions out there that let you utilize your USB 2.0 ports with a special adapter unit that you can plug a monitor into. You don't get the very best image quality this way, but it's usually good enough for basic office tasks.

Depending on your desktop, it may even be possible to upgrade your system to handle more than two monitors. This can really improve productivity. You can keep your email on one screen, display some documents on another, while working on a powerpoint presentation on the third. There is really no learning curve for managing multiple monitors either; simply drag windows from one screen to another as if the monitors were one.

As USB 3.0 becomes more popular, it's possible more display devices and monitors will become available that plug directly into USB ports, but for now the best way is with standard DVI and DisplayPort connections.

If you are looking to improve productivity and just make it a little easier to perform multiple tasks, deploying a second monitor can make a sizable, cost-effective difference. Contact us today at 607.433.2200 to find out what you need to upgrade your workstations to support multiple displays.

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4 Spring Cleaning Practices to Improve your IT

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Directive can help you establish permissions and policies for users across your network and determine who can access what. There's a fine line between restricting too much and not enough, and we can assist you with finding the comfortable medium that makes it easy for your employees to access what they need and get the job done while safeguarding your network and data.

User Training

A little training can go a long ways for employees - from better practices to email management to basic Microsoft Office proficiency, better educated employees can get more done faster and requires less support for day-to-day operations. It's an upfront expense that can improve overall performance of your entire bottom line, and often your employees will appreciate the perk.

File Management

Is your data unorganized? Is it getting harder to keep track of where certain documents and files are on your network? Even worse, is there data that is only accessible from particular workstations?

Spending time organizing and filing your data can increase productivity and make things a whole lot easier to manage. Ensuring that all data is stored centrally on the server is incredibly important, especially when it comes to your backup - most backup solutions don't cover data stored on local workstations, so having it all on the server is a must.

There's no time better than right now to start improving your IT and streamlining your bottom line. For assistance with any of these tips or help implementing any IT project your organization requires, contact Directive at 607.433.2200.

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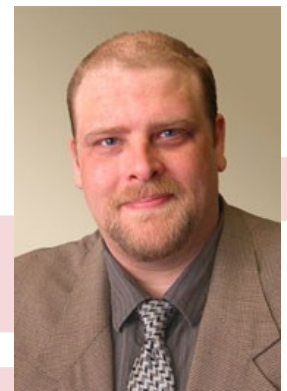
Chris Chase
Solutions Integrator

What To Do If My Credit Card is Stolen

(Continued from page 1)

If you believe you are a victim of credit card or identity theft, you'll want to take action quickly.

Place a Fraud Alert

Placing a fraud alert will help prevent new accounts from being opened in your name. Calling one of the three nationwide consumer credit reporting agencies will generate the fraud alert. The agency you chose will then contact the other two.

TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289 ; www.transunion.com
Equifax: 1-800-525-6285; www.equifax.com
Experian: 1-888-EXPERIAN (397 3742); www.experian.com

With a fraud alert on your account, you are eligible to receive free copies of your credit report - request that only the last four digits of your social security number be printed on this report. Review these reports thor-oughly and check for any discrepancies that are suspicious.
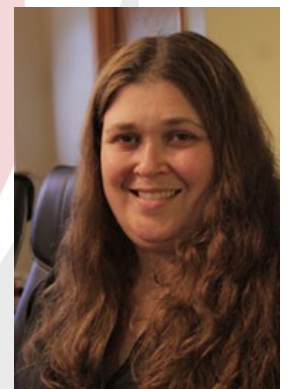
Close Suspicious and Tampered Accounts

Contact your back or credit card provider to close the credit card account. In some cases, additional credit card accounts in a case. . . .

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GOOD IDEA: CLEANING UP YOUR NETWORK.
BAD IDEA: CLEANING IT WITH A HOSE.