Systems that support your business

Most businesses function more effectively with some form of IT

Every business needs some way to record its activities and manage the paperwork that is involved in buying and selling products or services. Some very small hobby businesses are simple enough to do all this on paper, however most businesses function much more effectively with some form of IT. From emails, social media and websites to accounts software, document storage and customer databases there is software, a platform or an app to help out and, let's face it, using the right IT can make life a whole lot simpler and quicker.

Hardware and software

Whether you are starting out or already in business, it is worth regularly reviewing the hardware and software you use to make sure they are the best ones for your organisation. It is helpful to make a list of all the tasks that are needed to manage your business and then think about the IT systems that help you manage those tasks more effectively.

As your business grows consider how your needs are changing and whether, for example, you are predominantly working from one place or need to be mobile, how you might communicate with your customers better, the management information you need and of course, how much IT experience and knowledge you have or are gaining.

Packages that can make your business's administration and management easier include:

1. A customer relationships management system (CRM) which is a database of the customers you interact with that allows you to gather and record information in an organised way so you know more about them and can give them a better service.
2. Accounting packages will enable you to record your financial activities so that you understand how to manage your finances and know how your business is performing. Most accounting packages can be both on a computer or hosted in the cloud.
3. Document management systems that allow you to share documents rather than having them only on one computer in your office.
4. Industry specific systems such as stock control for manufacturers and retailers or project management for developers and consultants for example.

For many businesses the traditional model of having a server and network of local computers in an office is giving way to cloud based applications which are hosted on the internet. The advantage of these is that the information is accessible from any device with an internet connection and so is particularly useful for people who do not work in an office all the time. The disadvantage is that the business providing the service is hosting your data so you need to be confident that they have all the appropriate security measures in place to keep you data secure.

Keeping your systems secure

It is important to consider the threats to your IT systems and how you will respond to attacks from hackers and viruses. Having an effective IT security policy is very important to making sure your IT is as secure as possible, but also think about how you back up data as this will help you respond to a successful attack if you get one. Simple steps such as installing a firewall, anti-virus software and changing default passwords will go a long way to making your system secure.

Training your staff

If IT is not an area you feel very comfortable with, use a reputable IT specialist to tell you about the different options, help you install the systems you need and then keep them secure on an ongoing basis.

Before you start, create a chart or process of all the data and documents that you use and what you do with them which will enable you to identify what functionality you will need from a system. It will also help you create a list of ‘must-have’ requirements that you can use to select the most appropriate hardware and software to meet you business’s needs.

Think also about the ongoing support you will need which could be technical support for the software packages you choose as well as regular updates and patches which you will want to keep up-to-date.

Relevant Links

- Get Safe Online
- The National Cyber Security Centre
- Systems and Hardware
- Your online behaviour
- Technology & Data

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