

Top technology trends for 2012 will help firms move forward

For small and midsize businesses, 2011 was an exciting year when it came to technology. From tablets, mobility and security to social media and cloud computing, there's even more in store for 2012. To help you plan for the year ahead, check out our picks for some top technology trends:



TECH 4 BIZ

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TABLETS AND BEYOND

If you thought you've seen enough tablets, wait until the next generation lands in 2012, including the iPad 3, tablets based on Android 4.0, and Windows 8 tablets.

For agile businesses that successfully leverage tablets, it can bolster competitive advantage and achieve greater work efficiencies. However, there are also security and management challenges that will need to be addressed. The challenges are trying to manage so many disparate platforms and the risks inherent to managing rapidly evolving devices.

MOBILITY AND SECURITY

The ever-increasing availability of wireless devices, including laptops, tablets, mobile phones and collaboration tools, is turning the traditional office into an untethered workspace that can exist just about anywhere, anytime. Remote workers are surfing the Web, communicating with colleagues and others, and accessing data and applications critical to the business – much of it outside the protections available through the corporate network or virtual private network.

With the flexibility and opportunities to enhance productivity also come challenges for IT departments to monitor and secure the online interactions of remote workers. The key is that no single security solution will work. It's important to review your security practices on an ongoing basis to help ensure the greatest number of security holes are discovered and resolved before something happens.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BUSINESS

The rise of social media in daily life has paved the way for "social business" in the

workplace. According to a recent study, about 50 percent of small and midsize businesses use social media, and 25 percent plan to do so within the next year. Companies proactively and strategically use social media to communicate and share content are more satisfied with the business results versus those that have no strategic social media approach. As new tools take shape, social media "haves" will gain business ground on the "have-nots" in an exponential manner.

MOVING TO THE CLOUD

With cloud computing, it is entirely possible for businesses to set up an online presence without purchasing a single hardware server. Services such as online storage, B2B services, Web hosting, email, collaboration and productivity suites can be obtained with nothing more than a credit card.

Moving forward, we expect more and more businesses to embrace this trend as a means to circumvent traditional infrastructure and hardware barriers, making use of online services so they can concentrate on their core business.

PUTTING DATA TO WORK

The overarching trend is that data continues to grow and, in 2012, more organizations will actually use that data, rather than just collecting and storing it. Organizations are finding ways to turn the explosion in size, volume and complexity of data into insight and value through more flexible and user-friendly business intelligence tools. End-users are less likely to return to a solution that is clunky and difficult to work with, and instead are demanding those that are easy to use and deliver information relevant to their jobs.

In short, 2012 is all about new ways to interact with our devices and one another and share content – all while improving productivity and saving on costs. The pace of change with technology is blisteringly fast, but following these trends will hopefully get you well positioned as you assess your technology needs and priorities for the new year.

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