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The evolution of technology over the past 20 years has been fascinating. I felt so advanced when I got my first good computer, but I soon realized that to keep my geek status I would have to keep up with the latest in not only computers, but also all of the devices that help the computer be more productive. After all, where would we be without monitors, projectors, external data storage devices, PDAs, all-in-one printers, scanners and copiers? We'd be back in 1970, that's where.

Of course, if you don't want technology just for the sake of technology — if you want your investments to actually do something — then weeding through the glut of hardware and gadgets on the market can be a challenge, especially since they all make lofty promises that usually include the magic phrase “productivity enhancing” or some version of the word “streamline.” Well, I've weeded the garden a bit for you, and here are some items that I find impressive technologically and that will provide most small firms and other small businesses with realizable benefits. Furthermore, all of the items in this article cost (or at least start at) under \$1,000, keeping them in the realm of possibility for small practices.

Monitors

DoubleSight Displays — DS 1700S; DS 1900S Multi-Monitor System – Starting around \$700

No longer considered just a luxury, double and triple-screen monitor systems have been tried and tested by accounting and tax professionals. Even a Microsoft-sponsored study showed that productivity increased by 30 percent or more when these professionals added more viewable workspace. How do they help? By allowing the user to keep full-sized versions of two, three or even more programs open and in view at the same time. This could be your tax preparation program and client source

documents, or prior year returns or your research tool. How about multiple

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Epson — GT-2500 Business Workgroup Scanner — \$599

The newest scanner line from Epson (www.epson.com), the GT-2500 is a flatbed model that also offers a super-fast 50-sheet automatic document feeder that can scan up to 27 pages per minute. It can also scan large documents up to 8.5 by 14 inches. The scanner doesn't sacrifice quality either, with resolution capabilities up to 1200×1200. Productivity tools include automatic duplexing (two-sided scanning), one-button scanning functions, USB 2.0, and support for PC and Mac. The GT-2500 Plus model also sports a network-ready card for using the scanner in workgroups and productivity software including Adobe Acrobat and ScanSoft PaperPort.

Fujitsu — ScanSnap S500 Color Document Scanner — \$495

We've loved the ScanSnap S500 Color Document Scanner since Fujitsu (www.Fujitsu.com) debuted it a couple of years ago, and it's still a boost to any office that handles many documents that are to be stored electronically. Most other scanners simply create an image or picture of a document, but the ScanSnap can turn it directly into PDF format with the push of one button, allowing documents to be easily e-mailed or filed. The PDF function also lends itself to bookmarking and search capabilities.

Printing

HP Color LaserJet 2840 Multi-function color laser printer — Starting around \$800

HP's 2840 (www.hp.com) is one of the most affordable high-quality color laser multi-function printers on the market, providing small and mid-sized offices with a network and Wi-Fi-capable printing/copying/scanning/fax solution and much more. The scanning and copying functions are enhanced by a 50-sheet automatic document feeder, while the machine also offers network management tools,

document management functions, memory card slots for direct photo printing and

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available in TIFF, JPEG or PDF format. Various special copy options include a clone feature, auto fit and scaling. The input tray holds up to 250 sheets up to legal size.

Laptops & Workstations

Fujitsu — LifeBook A6020 Laptop computer loaded w/Vista Business – \$999

Fujitsu's (www.fujitsu.com) LifeBook series has several options under \$1,000, but, if you want the Business version of the Vista operating system, the A6020 model provides an excellent, yet cost-conscious option for small businesses. The laptop computer houses an Intel dual-core processor, integrated Bluetooth and 802.11a/b/g wireless, and a DVD-RW. It also includes a point-and-write touchpad, a spill-resistant keyboard and Shock Sensor protection for the hard drive. Security features include biometric (fingerprint) security, Trusted Platform Module, SmartCard and support for CompuTrace tracking software.

Backup & Data Storage

Maxtor — Shared Storage II Starting at \$250 for 320GB; \$530 for 1TB

Maxtor (www.maxtor.com) offers several external hard drive products ranging from 160 gigabytes to 2 terabytes, and one of the best aspects of data storage is that the cost of it continues to fall as capacities increase. For instance, the 1TB version of the Maxtor OneTouch costs the same as the vendor's 500GB did just two years ago. While there are plenty of options here, most of Maxtor's products are geared toward backing up a single workstation. The Shared Storage II, however, offers automatic backup for all of the networked computers in an office, with 1TB of storage capacity. As an alternative or addition to its backup functions, the system can also essentially act as a file server, allowing authorized users to access and work on stored files from any networked PC, Mac or media/entertainment system.

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it-all handhelds, offering music and video capabilities, wireless Internet and e-mail, GPS mapping functions, push-to-talk capabilities, Bluetooth and support for EDGE. Furthermore, the Pearl offers one of the best cameras on such a device. The Pearl has a 1.3 MP camera, while the Curve's comes in at 2.0 MP. The Curve and the 8800 also offer full QWERTY keyboards, which should give some relief to frequent text, IM and e-mail users.

Hardware?

Now that you've gotten your office hardware situation in hand, it's time to talk about your hardware. Yes, as in your clothes. Check out the SCOTTEVEST website (www.scottevest.com) for an array of digital-minded apparel for the discerning geek. From vests and jackets, to t-shirts, pants, shorts, hats and sweats, this fashionable line of clothing is designed to properly carry and conceal your PDA, phone, iPod and other devices.

Hardware • Technology

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