Technology can either be a competitive advantage or an overhead expense. Your attitude and your vision largely determine how your firm treats technology.

We have spent the last few months discussing the right type of products to consider for use in your firm, but how do you make the decisions to acquire and deploy the technology that is right for you? Key considerations for late 2007 and heading into 2008 are included below, but you should think about your infrastructure first (cabling, switches and servers) and then about your desktops, laptops and applications.

If you are a smaller firm with fewer than 10 people, your best strategy for 2007-2008 is to minimize your upgrades and save your money for the big upgrades that you will need or want in 2008. The danger of the "stay where you are" strategy is that if you have a failure during tax season, your replacement machine(s) could cause you all sorts of new grief because of hardware/software incompatibilities.

Hopefully, if you have a failure, you will be able to pay for a repair and stay on your old technology. You should use the management strategies outlined here to understand what will have to be done in 2008 or 2009, and consider doing a few of these projects now.

If you have more than 10 people, you need to work your way through the management strategies outlined below, and make a proactive decision that fits your firm's business plan.

Management Strategies for Technology in 2007-2008

I. Make sure your infrastructure is right.

B. Managed Switches. If your switches are old,
they can fail, which puts you at risk. Buying a switch because you have had
a failure will be a reactive purchase, and you are almost certain to get the
wrong product.

- Cisco or HP.
- 1GB to the workstation.
- 10GB will appear more and more to servers, then to workstations.

C. Firewall, VPN and/or wireless replacements needed?
If you have not updated your firewall in the last three to four years,
you are likely to have old technology that is not protecting you adequately.

D. Phone system okay? A phone system can trigger
many cabling, power and switch decisions.

E. Communications lines have enough capacity? Vendors
can provide monthly statistics in addition to your perception of speed and
performance.

F. Power systems adequate (UPS, surge, generator)?

II. Consider the health of your servers.

A. Everything seems okay? Review your plan for replacement.

- Will new servers be blade servers, traditional rack mounts or towers?
- Will server virtualization be used?
- Will traditional disks/RAID or alternate technology like SAN (Storage Area Networks) be needed?

- Any special applications that require new servers?

- Disk capacities okay?
    - 60 percent full or less is optimum.
    - 80 percent full — problems will begin to occur.
    - 90 percent full — problems will occur regularly.
- Backup strategies okay?
    - Backup window short enough not to affect productivity?
    - Internet backup considered (such as www.efolderbackup.com)?
    - Continuous Data Protection (CDP) desired to protect files on an ongoing
      basis.
    - Backup to disk, either on-site or off-site, desired?
      (www.tapesucks.com)

III. Make a strategic decision to move or stay.

A. Move equals Windows Vista and Office 2007. Stay equals Windows XP and Office 2003.

B. Move equals Windows Server 2008. Stay equals Windows Server 2003.

C. Move equals Exchange 2007. Stay equals Exchange 2003.

- You do not have to change Office versions to upgrade Exchange.
- This product, like most new Microsoft operating systems, will require 64-bit
  hardware.

IV. Consider your software licensing strategy.

A. Use the paid version of MPAN (www.microsoft.com/cpampan)

- Etc.

V. Stay strategies.

A. Build a financial war chest for the major upgrade that will be required in future years.

B. Upgrade your cabling and switches if you are going to stay in the same building, particularly if partners own the building. Watch the timing of this upgrade, and have it coincide with the release of the CAT 6af standard if possible (probably in 2008).

C. Invest in training for your people on your core applications like tax, practice, audit tools, and important supplemental applications (Adobe, wealth management, etc.).

D. Understand the risk of new desktops/laptops not supporting Windows XP, forcing an adoption of Microsoft Vista.

VI. Move strategies.

A. Decide on the version of Vista you intend to deploy (Business without encryption, Enterprise or Ultimate to get Bitlocker encryption).
Plan your upgrade to Office 2007.

B. Load at least one machine with Vista and Office 2007.

C. Test compatibility of your applications on Vista.

D. If applications are not compatible, build virtual machines

probable).

- Plan your training program.
- Acquire new hardware.
- Register the OEM OS under your Microsoft Open License program within
  30 days of purchase.
- Deploy the workstations.
- Begin end-user training.

F. Expect extra expenditures for software upgrades and additional training.

VII. Start after 10/15 and be done by the beginning of December if possible!

As a proponent of the value of technology as a competitive edge, the next 12 months continues to look difficult from a technology support perspective. I hope I am wrong for your sake and that your upgrades and conversions are all as painless as possible.

Technology