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FIRM MANAGEMENT

Technology Tools for Saving Time

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Randy Johnston • Mar. 13, 2014



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As part of a mission to provide you the latest in technology tool insights, watching the trade press, attending events like the annual Consumer Electronic Show (CES), accounting shows and speaking with vendors creating products provides the chance to vet products for your consideration. This year is starting off with some interesting new tools for your consideration.

So, What's New?

Changing software is hard, and most of us avoid this unless we have no alternatives. Because of that, we often wind up in a suite of products and choose supporting software tools to complete the tasks at hand. On the other hand, hardware gets old and wears out, much like cars do. Some of us routinely change cars, not because we need to, but just because we want something different.

Others have a plan to replace cars at 60,000 miles, 200,000 miles or at the end of the lease. Unfortunately, sometimes cars unexpectedly get replaced because of accidents or other items beyond your control. Computer hardware is much the same way. We choose to replace the hardware at 3 years, 5 years or when it fails and it is too expensive to repair. When we make hardware changes, we are often forced to make software changes to support the new hardware.

For example, touchscreen hardware works much better with Windows 8.1 than it does with Windows 7. On the other hand, we can change the way our hardware works by replacing the software, much like replacing the standard engine by putting a high performance engine in a car. We sometimes do this with our computer hardware by updating the operating system and installing more RAM or a Solid State Drive.

What are some of the technology tool changes we should consider now?

- Scanners
- New generation wireless access points
- Upgrades for writing technologies, such as the [Livescribe 3 Smartpen](#)
- Conferencing displays for our conference rooms and offices
- Touch screens in formats from desktops to laptops to slates to wall-mount displays

- 4K support for computers and TVs
- SaaS-based personal finance document management
- Battery recharging capabilities for smartphones and tablets
- Many more...

What technologies from this list can you use almost immediately? The mainstream scanning vendors of Fujitsu and Canon have all introduced new products with improved features this year. For most of you, you should be buying different models of scanners in any of your replacements or new acquisitions from these vendors. An example of a single product that has an impact on QuickBooks, QuickBooks Online, Xero, and FreshBooks is the NeatConnect Cloud Scanner and Digital Filing System. This product is \$499, available now, and also allows scanning directly to generic services like Microsoft's OneDrive (formerly called Microsoft SkyDrive) as well as NeatCloud, Evernote, Box, Dropbox, Google Drive, Email, FTP, SD card, and Neat's Desktop Software.

After scanning, the product performs optical character recognition (OCR) on the documents. It can then map the results at a field level in several popular accounting products named above. Installation and operation are simple, because the product is connected wirelessly and has a single button to perform the scan function. One concern for the product is the recurring cost of cloud storage and the introduction of yet one more document management system for these accounting products.

Wireless technologies are being delivered to support the new 802.11ac gigabit standard. While major vendors like Cisco and SonicWALL should deliver their products by mid-year, the home technology vendor, Belkin, has introduced the Linksys WRT 1900AC Home Router, which has a retail price of \$299. This product uses the new gigabit wireless network standard 802.11ac and can send and receive at 1.3GBps wirelessly, more than double the speed of 802.11n and 24 times faster than 802.11g.

The software included with the unit can perform more sophisticated SSL VPN (Secure Sockets Layer virtual private network) functions and represents a wide array of new wireless products with radically greater speed. Belkin acquired the Linksys division of Cisco in early 2013 and is using the intellectual property acquired to innovate during the past year. Many of you should replace your wireless access points (WAPs) this year.

In past columns, we have described the benefits of the LiveScribe pen. This product traditionally required special paper and allowed you to take notes while recording

speech. Later your notes could be used to play back specific speech that had been recorded. The new LiveScribe 3 version supports the Apple iPad with handwriting recognition and integration into note taking tools like EverNote. Even without the handwriting recognition and interfaces, the way this product now works on paper and on the iPad make it a technology tool worth trying.

Upgrading your conference room or office for productivity is possible with new touchscreens and conferencing software provided by many different vendors. In addition to connecting Apple TV and McTivia units for smartphone, tablet and computer wireless connections, video conferencing is more practical than ever between offices and between a firm and their clients. Besides the inexpensive video conferencing possible through Skype, Lync, Facetime, Oovoo or Vidyo, vendors like Samsung, Citrix and Cisco have made conferencing easier with their eConferencing product, GoToMeeting and WebEx.

It is probably one year too early for 4K TV, but 4K will become more common for our computers this year. DisplayLink 4K is a new USB 3.0 adapter that can support 4K monitors. Add-on vendor Targus had developed a universal docking station for 4K, the ACP7101 USZ.

This USB 3.0 universal docking station and power supply device, supports the following connections: Integrated gigabit Ethernet and 5.1 audio, up to a 90W laptop power supply, the device supports dual 2560×1600 displays over DisplayPort or DVI-I, and is compatible with HDCP 2.0. The product ships during the first quarter of 2014, with pricing to be determined. These types of devices will allow 4K monitor to be connected to laptops and desktops alike. Further, vendors like Toshiba showed their 4K laptops at CES in 2014.

Software as a Service (SaaS) has made innovation on a large scale possible for small and large publishers alike. One of the interesting technology tools using this technology is FileThis. FileThis.com is an automatic statement retrieval and storage product, according to CEO Brian Berson. Consider using this product in firms that serve high net wealth individuals or for yourself.

The product is designed to retrieve all statement, *automatically, on a reliable schedule, 24/7*. FileThis securely **fetches** your online statements, bills and other documents from companies like American Express, Chase, Anthem, Amazon, and many more without you having to login to every site individually. In effect, FileThis is your personal assistant that gets the job done. It is an online app that gets statements online from vendors and works with cloud storage tools. The pricing is free for up to

6 accounts, used weekly, with 500MB storage. There is a premium version for \$2/month, for up to 12 accounts, used weekly, with 1GB storage and an ultimate version for \$5/month, for up to 30 accounts, used daily, with 10GB storage.

Another change to watch for is battery recharging capabilities. For example note the Fuel Cells in this picture from CES:

Also available is the Upp Personal Energy Device, which is \$199 at Brookstone, available in the first half of 2014. This technology is already being deployed in Africa. Although the pricing of refills is unknown at this time, Upp™ conveniently powers and charges all your compatible hand-held electronic devices via USB. Just connect the Upp fuel cell to a replaceable Upp fuel cartridge and experience instant energy gratification from replaceable fuel cartridges. Stay connected with your favorite device on the move and liberate yourself from the wall socket forever.

Pictured is Ron Rabinowitz, CEO of Duracell PowerMat (picture by Brian Tankersley). Duracell Powermat Charging coming to Starbucks. You will purchase a power receiver (colored loops) and put on the table, which will transmit power to your phone wirelessly. This wireless charging uses the BMA standard (which is different from the Qi standard currently available on many devices) and will be available on 5+ phones on AT&T in 2014. Power charging units can be monitored remotely and non-functioning units can be identified via wireless diagnostics.

But remember, please...

Just because a new technology is introduced doesn't mean it is right for you. Do you have the business need? How will this technology tool help your personal productivity? What does it do for others? How much training and maintenance is needed to support this technology? Will the vendor remain in business? How long has the product been available?

New technology products can be intoxicating and invigorating, but you should not purchase while under the influence of a great sales pitch. Step back and understand your needs, application and the return on investment before spending your hard earned cash. It is perfectly fine being an early adopter, but try technologies out on a limited number of users, in effect, sandboxing the idea. If the sandbox works and the business case is there, adopting the latest technology tools can give you a competitive advantage and help you provide better client service while giving you more time for the things you like to do, too.

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