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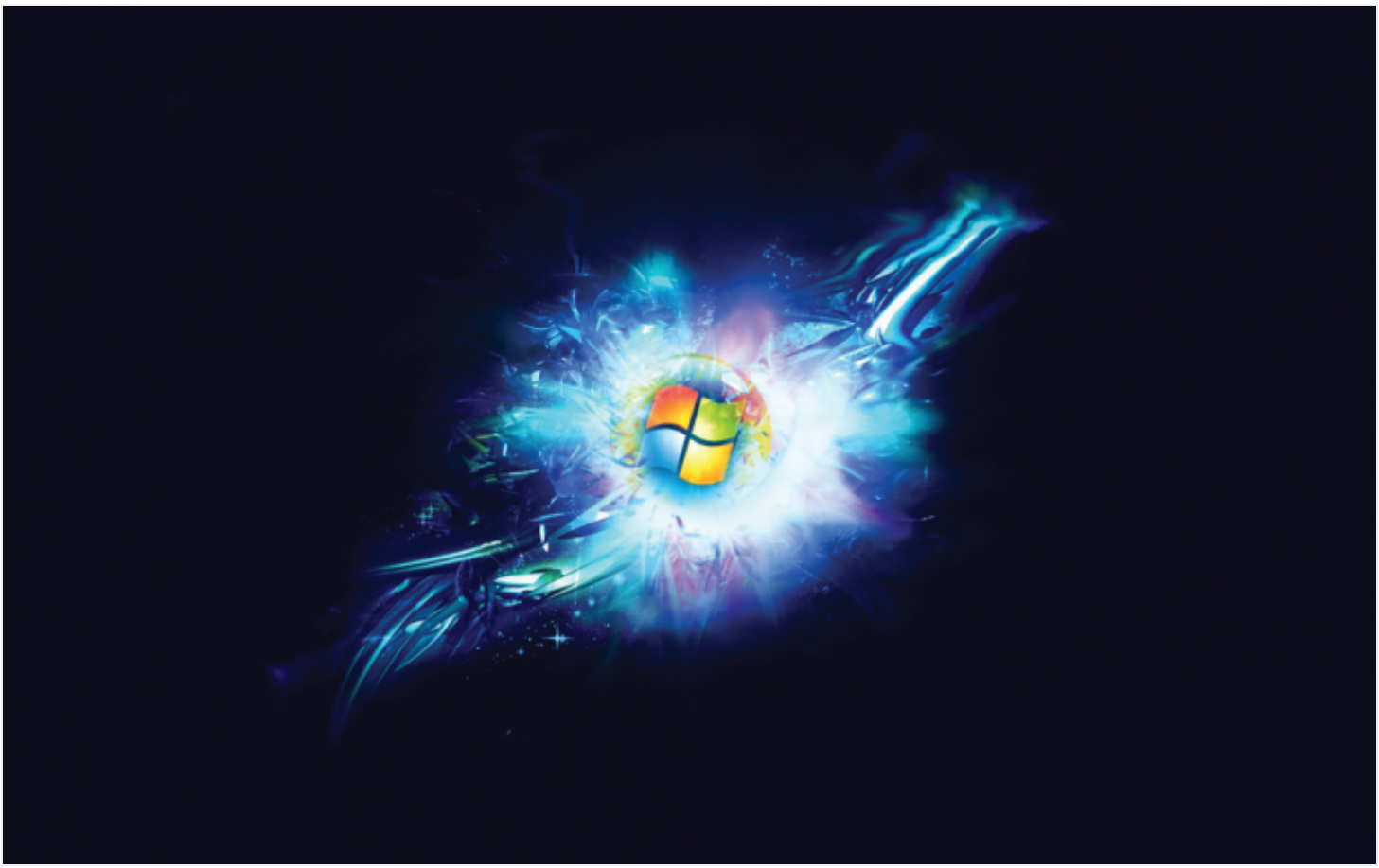
Randy Johnston • Jun. 06, 2014



A Top Technology Initiative Article

This year is the year of delivery for many new hardware and software products. Which are ready for production? Which should be implemented first? You know that every technology does not need to be implemented. You further recognize that there are many good technologies that are not needed in your firm. In an ideal situation you have choice between three or more products. Beyond that, your expectation is that all products work as advertised or promised, but know from experience that is sadly not the case.

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technology. Microsoft has released a revision to their Windows Server operating system, Windows Server 2012 R2, a better and faster database with SQL Server 2014, and a new email server with Exchange 2013.

All of these applications are ready for production use whether in-house or at a cloud provider. Windows 8.1 received an update in April 2014 that made the product more usable and secure that must be applied to continue receiving updates in the future. Microsoft also deferred to clients that wanted the more traditional navigation approaches of Windows 7 available on non-touch hardware. A good rule is that if an application works on Windows 7, it will work on Windows 8.1. The benefits of Windows 8.1 make using Windows 8.1 today rather than Windows 7 a wise choice. Microsoft also delivered Microsoft Office 2013 Service Pack 1.

For all users that "wait for the service packs to be delivered" no longer have to wait since Windows Server 2012, Windows 8 and Microsoft Office 2013 all have major service releases available today in the open market. An unexpected bonus from Microsoft is the delivery of an updated version of SkyDrive, now called OneDrive, that includes encryption at rest, regulatory compliance and a low price per user. To my knowledge, secure cloud storage and transfer has never been cheaper. In addition, the integration experience of OneDrive into Windows 8 and Microsoft Office is natural and smooth.

Second, accounting software vendors have not been idle, either. Entry level SaaS products like Freshbooks, SageOne, Wave and QuickBooks Online have all had notable upgrades in both user experience and features. Most traditional premise-based products, almost all of which can be cost-effectively hosted today, have had upgrades during the past year. For example, QuickBooks, CYMA, Sage 50, Sage 100, Sage 300, Sage X3, Dynamics GP, Dynamics NAV and more have all received new features added, more integration capability built-in, and updates to support mobile and web technologies. Third party tools for Sales Tax from Avalara or reporting from

BizNet Software have notably improved their offerings and programs, too. If you

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However, the practical business applications have to be established before you should make any roll-out plan. Although I like the video and picture taking capabilities of Glass, the wearability factor is only part of the benefit. Intrusiveness, "geeky" appearance and eye health are all concerns.

Fourth, protection technologies need updated. The advancements in this area aren't as rapid as other technologies currently, although there were notable changes in the prior few years. We need stronger and better firewalls, anti-virus, encrypted drives, encrypted email and portal technologies. Extensions of our protection with Mobile Device Management and multi-factor authentication with hardware keys as well as biometrics will become far more standard as we understand our risks and needs.

Fifth, vertical specialty products such as tax software, engagement managers, practice management, wealth management, and others have seen notable upgrades this year. Examples here include BillQuick, OfficeTools and Commercial Logic in addition to the big publishers of CCH, Intuit and Thomson. Most publishers are looking at the future, and they believe it will include mobile, web, and social networking for business. As publishers retrofit their technologies for the new mobile worker, they are reimagining the possibilities of working in a different way.

Finally, server, desktop and laptop hardware and displays are all getting a make-over this year. New generation servers have twice the performance with a 30% savings in electricity. Laptops using the latest processing chips promise up to 17 hours of battery life in late 2014 and beyond. Screen resolution is going to advance from HD to 4K or Ultra High Definitiion (UHD), a resolution roughly four times greater than that available today. Augment this with touch and the way you work will be quite different by the end of this decade. At the time of this writing, I had just completed installing the first office with ONLY touch screen equipment in use. Every desktop

(all-in-one devices), laptop, tablet, and phone in use was touch screen. The

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fall into the less competitive "me too" group.

Using leading edge technology can be frustrating as vendors try to make their technology compatible and current. If you have tolerance, you will have the opportunity to work with some of the most innovative people in your field. Do you see rewards being considered a market leader? There is so much change and so little time, you need to act now!

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