2017 Year End Small to Medium Business IT Outlook

What is the biggest concern business owners have regarding IT?

What is interesting about this is that we hear two entirely different concerns from two different camps. The two concerns are not new – they are as old as the IT industry. Nothing has changed for the average small business, other than the sophistication of the solutions. Often, change and new technology is frightening to the business owner, and justifiably so.

For Our Clients

For our clients, since they already feel in control of their IT they ask, "Hey, what would it add to our monthly costs to do X?" In other words, they dream about building things strategically and proactively and then try to figure out the resources necessary to do so.

For Non-Clients

For non-clients, who largely operate their IT "department" by using what we call a "break-fix" model (i.e. IT breaks, they call someone to fix it) what we hear is simply concern and fear of IT as a whole. They distrust technology marketing and sales. They experience psychological anxiety regarding the long-term consequences that technology decisions - both the strategy and investment - have on their business. And very specifically, they fear increasing IT operations costs with no controls and poor outcomes based on past experience influencing their view of the future. In essence, they are reactive, and deliberately do not engage with IT until it is just plain broken.

The Game Changer

You didn't ask about this, but for us as humans, watching the client evolution from fear to proactively driving the ball down the field is exciting. Watching worry, anxiety, stress, and "Oh @$&^$" transform into strategic, deliberative action and dreaming about the future is satisfying to us. It would be nice if all of life were this easy.

How does NERDS react to IT Business Concerns?

NERDs brings a track record of successful long-term planning and executive-level strategy alignment to our small and medium sized clients.

We are flexible and implement technology that is ahead of the market; this enables rapid deployment when we identify a solution or product that provides better productivity, usually at a low marginal cost.

When you work with The NERDS Group you won't be bogged down with concerns about security, uptime, or other IT headaches because the NERDS Group handles it all as part of the base infrastructure. Most of our clients don't want to know all the minute details and get overloaded with technical mumbo jumbo. Instead we have strategic discussions about how to effectively achieve system reliability and security for their IT needs so they can focus on growing their business.

Backend Refresh? It's in the Contract

Q: I love the fact that you handle all of our back-end IT needs, but what happens when we're looking at a large bill for an equipment refresh?

A: We handle the entire technology lifecycle, it's in the contract. The only time we'd need to discuss a refresh is if there is some aspect of your technology that we don't currently manage and you'd like us to integrate and manage it. Otherwise, new stuff will just magically (more appropriately, NERDly) show up when the old stuff has passed the replacement point.

Ready for an IT Upgrade?

Q: I am a small growing business and my current IT "staff" is my brother-in-law who has a full time job. What can NERDS do to support my growth affordably?

A: NERDS has worked hand in hand with many companies in order to transition from a friend or relative helping out on IT to a more professional and efficient IT department. NERDS even has a preliminary engagement program with no contract. With this introductory plan, we work with your company at a reduced hourly rate for a set number of hours in order for us to address initial concerns, all while you get to know NERDS and NERDS gets to know you.
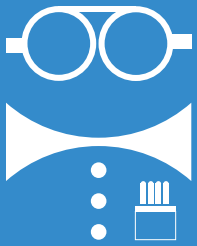
This is perfect for growing companies. That way the ground work is laid down firmly, before too many haphazard computer systems spring up.

Trust but Verify

Q: All of my team is out in the field. I don't want to be big brother but how do I track their efficiency?

A: This is a data science/analytics question more than a technology question. The technology exists, we just need to strategically decide which one to deploy. If you can accurately define what "efficiency" means to you, we can find a system and metrics to track it. However, if you use the wrong definition, you'll get the wrong answer. Phone-based timekeeping, GPS in company vehicles, doing statistical analysis on some metric of work volume per unit time and similar techniques can be employed. We can talk through scenarios to try to find the system that makes the most sense.

Message from the
Head Nerd

I'm Paul Johnson, the CEO here at the NERDS Group. I'm delighted to present to you our year end report.

In these four quick pages we are providing some valuable information based on recent discussion of questions and concerns with our current clients. We hope this information proves to be useful to you and your business.

I welcome your calls or emails to discuss any concerns and objectives. My staff and I look forward to another 20 years of providing first rate IT Service to the DMV area. If you have a few minutes, check out one of our favorite clients and philanthropies, Warrior Canine Connection and their adorable puppy cams.

the NERDS group
Network Engineering &
Resources Development Specialists, LLC

The NERDS Group
1911 Tech Road
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904
(301) 622-7995

Head Nerd's Favorite Apps

Q: As the CTO of a booming IT company, what is the single app that helps ease your mind and productivity day to day?

A: For me, Asana is the king of the non-technical apps we use. If you are not familiar with it, replace "Asana" with whatever your favorite to-do list manager is. But that's unfair to Asana – it's much more than that. Think of a to-do list for your team crossed with project management tools, available on every piece of tech you own; phones, tablets, laptops, and whatever else.

It makes coordinating across departments, teams, clients simple. While we are happy to pay for their $9/month premium subscription, the free version is awesome for small teams. Asana allows you to use it seriously, until you decide the premium cross-team features are worth it.

Honorable Mentions:

Evernote: For random research and capturing data throughout my life, personal and professional

Timer: Some sort of timer on my phone. I am being much more cognizant of time these days. I track how long I am on calls, on the treadmill, etc. I also am experimenting with Pomodoro techniques, working for 20 or 25 minutes, then a break of 5 or 10 minutes.

Kindle: I don't love Amazon, but I do love reading. I use the app on my phone and tablet.

MyRadar: It really helps to know if I need an umbrella and different shoes when I have a meeting two hours away.

Waze: Despite living here all of my life, our clients are all over the area. Now that there's real time traffic avoidance, I rely on it to keep my day moving without delays.

Calendly or ScheduleOnce: These are the two main players in the calendar/meeting app space. These services allow your contacts to schedule time with you; they can check your availability without seeing the details, eliminating the chain of back and forth emails trying to find a time.

IT with a little extra...

Q: I know you guys run my network and backend software but what happens when my printer breaks and I have a presentation in an hour?

A: Realistically, we can only do so much. Send us the document and the address of the presentation. If Google Maps says the nearest staff member to you can make it in time they'll print it and meet you there. Short of keeping a spare printer or other device on hand, if a physical item breaks, we fix it as quickly as possible. In the mean time we will of course try our best in concierge-like fashion to find you a "right now" solution. After all, we are NERDs, not magicians!
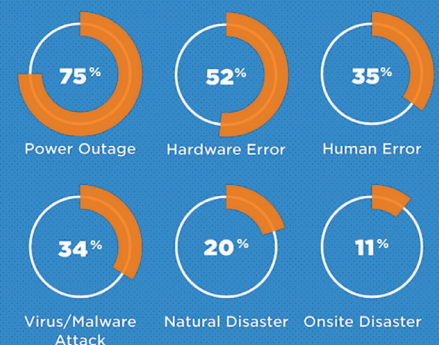
How have you saved a client's bacon?

Q: Please share an example of an instance when during your time with NERDS that you or your staff saved a client's bacon.

A: Our model is built to keep you up and running, so this issue doesn't arise often. We routinely recover files and documents but that's not heroic – that's an everyday pain in business. We resolve these routine issues before it is actually painful. It matters to our clients, though. A lot.

Most Common Causes of IT Downtime

Power outages and **hardware error** are still the top causes of IT downtime events, but one in three organizations report having been hit by a **virus** or **malware attack.**

Downtime Events Small Business Have Experienced in the Past 5 Years

75%	52%	35%
Power Outage	Hardware Error	Human Error

34%	20%	11%
Virus/Malware Attack	Natural Disaster	Onsite Disaster

https://www.zetta.net/resource/state-disaster-recovery-2016

iPhones, and Androids, and Tablets, Oh My!

Q. I run a business where most of my team is contractors, what do I do about them plugging their own devices into my IT systems?

A. Tell us about it and we'll design the network to deal with it appropriately. There's a laundry list of ways to lock the network down, and conversely, make it accessible in secure fashion. Which one we pick depends on what the business does and the level of access contractors need to your systems.

The Explosion of Endpoint Devices Means there are Now 1.5 Billion New Ways to Steal Data, Passwords, & Money

ENDPOINT SECURITY RISKS

1 Physical Access
2 Malicious Code
3 Device Attacks
4 Communication Interception
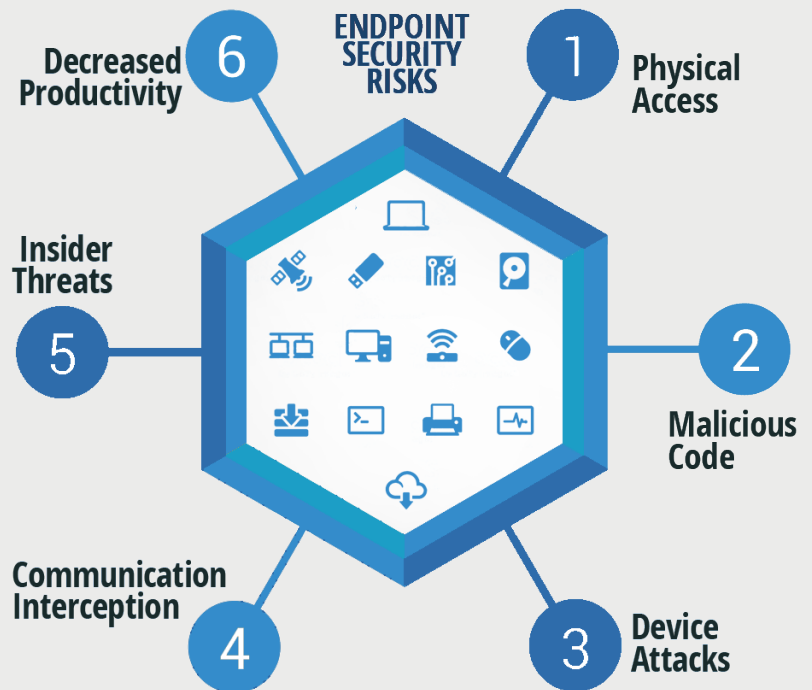5 Insider Threats
6 Decreased Productivity

Payroll Problems?

Q: I hate my (anonymous) payroll company. They work just fine but they constantly harass me. Do you guys do payroll?

A: Things we'd be happy to not do for you include plumbing, human resource management, and rocket motor design – not to mention payroll. We feel your pain from an empathy standpoint! Let us know what other technology vendors you use, i.e. VOIP, printing systems, vertical applications, etc. We do work directly with your technology vendors and manage them for you. That way we can seamlessly integrate their products and services into your IT environment with little worry on your end.
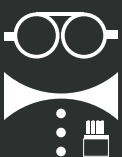
Baffled by Bitcoin?

Q. I run a small business, we have a retail POS and I keep hearing about Bitcoin and Ether, do I need to worry about crypto-currencies?

(BTCUSD) Bitcoin Price Today
$4447.00 ▲ 3.9% +167.00000
Volume $61,681,910.00
Open 4280.00
High 4462.08
Low 3898.80
03 Sep 2017 ▼BTCUSD: (O: 4516; H: 4701; L: 3898.8; C: 4447)

A. Don't worry about Bitcoin. Bitcoin is the major cryptocurrency worth mentioning since the exchange rate is just under $4000 USD per BTC (as of this writing) and the market cap is high. Still, Bitcoin payments in real life are exceptionally rare. Accepting Bitcoin at the point of sale can be useful as a marketing tool in certain markets, but not many. Mostly hobbyist technology markets and the darker side of the internet are where you'll find Bitcoin.