Expert IT Solutions Newsletter

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This time around we'll look at one interesting trend in technology for small businesses – Software as a Service (SaaS) as well as the ultimate portable computer.

Software as a Service

Most small businesses aren't in the technology trade – they're in the business of being lawyers, mechanical engineers or wedding planners. But they need technology to be as efficient as possible in whatever field they work in, and also need to use technology to enhance their services or even offer new ones – made possible by IT.

Up until a few years ago, the only way to really achieve a base level of technology in a small business was to invest in a server that provided the foundation for business enhancing software. Recently however the concept of "renting" or paying by the month for someone else to purchase the servers, install, configure and maintain the software to offer services from a remote location has become popular.

The bottom line is that it's more cost effective to have hundreds or thousands of businesses run their workloads in large datacentres instead of having a server in each of those businesses. You need less people to manage and maintain them, you can increase the level of security and you get great economy of scale. This is called public cloud computing, and when you rent the software as a service it's called SaaS. The use of cloud services tend to follow the curve of reliable, cost-effective and high speed internet connectivity, hence they're more popular in Europe and the US than here in Australia as those countries have much better internet infrastructures.

You probably already use some cloud services personally such as Hotmail, Gmail or DropBox but these are consumer services, generally free and supported through in-application advertising or through selling your personal information to advertisers.

For businesses it's important to look at SaaS services through the lens of reliability, security, privacy and guaranteed levels of availability. This generally means you have to pay a monthly fee because if someone is offering you something for free you have to be aware that (as no-one can run datacentres for nothing), there's got to be a hidden cost somewhere.

There are many thousands of cloud providers out there, offering services for email, collaboration, data backup, customer relationship management (CRM) and accounting, just to name a few. Popular SaaS applications are Office 365 from Microsoft which provides email, collaboration, document storage and communication services, Salesforce for CRM, OneDrive Business for data storage and Xero for accounting. Expert IT Solutions is monitoring the changing world of cloud services for small business and we recommend or resell services where it is the best solution for a particular situation; cloud services aren't always the right answer to a business problem.

If you're considering the cloud for some of the IT services your business is consuming today or you're looking at new services, please contact us at cloud@expertitsolutions.com.au and let us help you out.

Windows to Go

In the last couple of issues of this newsletter we've looked at tablets and smartphones as tools for small businesses to make their work more streamlined.

This time we look at the most portable PC ever – Windows to Go on a USB stick. This little miracle, the same size as an ordinary USB stick provides a full Windows 8.1 experience, provided you have a PC to put it in. Simply turn off any modern PC, insert the stick (a USB 3.0 – "super speed" port is preferred but USB 2 works remarkably well) and turn the PC back on. It'll start from the stick instead of from the internal HDD. Once started, it behaves just like an ordinary PC, you can install applications, configure settings, even customise the wallpaper and of course save documents that you're working on.

If you have some staff working from home and you want to give them a customised experience (complete with remote connection to your server) or temporary staff that you don't want to have to purchase a whole new PC for, they could bring their own laptop but start it from this USB stick to provide a secure desktop to work from.

We have a couple of these sticks ready to go (pardon the pun) so if you'd like to trial one of these for your business, let us know at WindowsToGo@expertitsolutions.com.au.

Next month we'll explore what to look for in malware protection software and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS).

If you have any questions or suggestions for topics you'd like covered in this newsletter, please email me.

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