

ANTI-VIRUS FOR FREE!

As business people, we are all aware of the threats posed by computer viruses. In order to avoid losing valuable data, businesses spend thousands each year on the latest and greatest anti virus software (usually supplied by one or two security software firms). However, most of us are also aware that installing these security programmes tends to slow our computers down.

There is a solution to this problem and it's free! Microsoft Security Essentials is free to download. It tends not to slow down your computers as it is designed to run very efficiently. Microsoft Security Essentials includes antivirus and antispyware, rootkit protection, and real-time detection courtesy of Microsoft SpyNet, the cloud-based service that compares file behavior across computers.

The user interface is simple and straightforward with tabs for home, update, history, and settings. From home you can run a quick scan, full scan, or custom scan, and a link at the bottom of the window lets you change the scheduled scan. In the Settings window you can set schedules for scans, select default actions and create white lists. An advanced tab allows you to set the programme to scan archives, removable drives, create a system restore point, or allow all users to view the history tab.

According to various industry reviews, the software offers good virus detection and is light on system resources. The fact that it's available, free of charge, makes it irresistible to businesses.

CLOUD COMPUTING

Cloud computing seems to be a business buzz word at the moment. But what does it mean for businesses? Simply put it helps save time and money while providing firms with greater flexibility.

Cloud computing results in cost savings because it uses shared IT resources located in data centres to provide services. This means that users benefit from economies of scale since the service provider purchases servers and storage in bulk. These cost savings are then passed on to the end users. The biggest cost saving for businesses comes from the fact that they no longer need to invest as much capital in hugely expensive servers and storage as this is all provided by the cloud computing service provider. Most cloud computing service providers operate on a per-user per-month payment model which means that a business only pays for the resources it actually needs. This compares favourably to investing in servers where you generally buy a higher spec system than you need so that you have extra capacity for extra users in the future (at extra cost). Until you have the extra staff this spare capacity is simply wasted.

Another reason to consider the cloud is to reduce or remove the need to get caught up in operating and maintaining technology. The service provider maintains their servers (and looks after software upgrades) at their own cost. Cloud computing also makes working remotely easier. In this day and age where many of us work from home from time to time, we can now do so efficiently and effectively.

REDUCING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

As everyone in business knows, work is a source of stress. A certain amount of stress is a good thing. It encourages staff to get to work on time, to deliver projects within deadlines and act in a professional manner. However, beyond a certain level, stress can become counter productive – for example if a business is under staffed and over worked, the staff will be under huge pressure and will suffer the negative effects of too much stress. Fortunately there are many ways to mitigate stress levels in a business.

1. **Communicate with your staff.**

Much of an employee's stress comes from not being sure about where they stand. Staff need feedback about their work in order to feel appreciated. If your staff feel that you value their work, they will continue to put the effort in.

2. **Set out responsibilities and don't be afraid to delegate.**

Frustrating situations can be avoided if staff members are familiar with their job responsibilities and what is expected of them. They can then set their own parameters within which to work. If they are to be an effective part of your team they should be encouraged to take on new responsibilities (delegated to them by management).

3. **Encourage autonomy.**

Business people hate being micromanaged and feel devalued when they are forced to fit their personal working style into the corporate machine. Instead, employees should be allowed to get the job done in their own way. Essentially management states the tasks that are to be delivered and the staff then go off and work out the best way to achieve these goals. This creates a situation where staff feel ownership of their respective projects and put in a greater effort as a result.

4. **Support employees.**

In order for employees to do their jobs, they need to be given support. Managers should help them get rid of any red tape that could be preventing them from doing their best. An open door policy for management's offices can help achieve this.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMERS

It is impossible to build an effective marketing strategy without knowing your target audience. By finding out as much as you can about existing and potential customers you can work out how they make their buying decisions. You can then adapt your sales methods and techniques to fit your customers' needs. That's where market research comes in. Researching your market helps you to understand the buying habit and behavior of customers. Since the customer behavior and buying habits keep changing according to the trends in fashion and new innovations, your market research should be undertaken on a continuous basis.

There are many different ways to gather information about people. Whether you choose primary research methods (such as getting customers to fill in a feedback form or questionnaire) or secondary research methods (using existing resources such as data from the central statistics office) depends on what you need to know about your customers.

Once you have gathered your information you will need to process it into a format that you can use. It's often a good idea to try to categorize your target market into different segments. Once you have done this you will be able to build a strategy which will target specific categories and enable you to reach your target audience.

Now you have to ask yourself which groups of people you want to sell your product or service to. No matter what size your company is, you can't develop an effective "catch-all" marketing plan. Every business has limited resources. Some firms have more money but they may not have resources such as time or manpower. Therefore every business no matter how big must choose specific target categories to market the product or service to.

For quotations or general advice, please contact us on 0845 2151 4000 or email us at: sales@professionalindemnity.co.uk