Five IT Trends to Accelerate Your Business

By Debra A. Pierson, PMP, President of Pierson Computing Connection Inc.

An efficient, well-run information technology platform is essential to every business, but it's a competitive advantage for companies who can forecast what employees and customers will need from their systems.

During 18 years of installing, configuring, and connecting IT services and systems for large and small customers, I've noticed five distinct trends that can accelerate any business.

1. **Collaboration**–Technology that enhances teamwork, increases productivity, and sharpens communication among teams, divisions, and continents is a business advantage. Communication breakdowns are costly and disruptive. Video conferencing systems such as Google+, web conferencing like Go ToMeeting, and even FaceTime on the iPhone can be used as collaboration tools.

   Whether you have one conference room in Harrisburg or 500 across the East Coast, businesses are discovering that interactive whiteboards, (including the well-known SMART Board brand) are essential to their conference and training rooms. A technology almost exclusive to schoolchildren has evolved into a significant tool for increased collaboration in the workplace.

   For example, the PolyVision eno Board is an interactive whiteboard that doubles as a standard conference room marker board. Providing "backwards compatibility" to those not as technically savvy, it is also a state-of-the-art electronic whiteboard with web surfing, data sharing, PowerPoint and spreadsheet capability, and Microsoft pen tools to mark up documents in real-time. When combined with web conferencing tools, even coworkers who are not physically in the conference room can participate.

2. **The Cloud** – Companies are moving to service-based computing systems. Google Apps and Google Docs are examples of cloud computing where data remains in one place with easy access for all employees. In a measure to reduce government spending on technology, *The Wall Street Journal* stated on August 9, 2011: "Instead of spending a lot of money upfront buying new systems that it runs itself, the government is shifting to a more flexible model in which it uses or rents online applications run over the Internet. That shift helped drive the government's recent decision to shut down 40% of its 2,000 data centers over the next four years. Companies that

offer these new so-called 'cloud' services stand to benefit the most from the new federal strategy."

The cloud enables small businesses to "stay focused, be more collaborative, and bring products to market more quickly, because they've got access to the kind of infrastructure that only large companies used to have,' says Judith Hurwitz, president and CEO of Hurwitz & Associates and a coauthor of *Cloud Computing for Dummies* " (*PC World*: "Should You Move Your Small Business to the Cloud?").

3. **Data** –In today's workplace, we have more data than we can absorb, so the key is making business sense out of the existing data. Data mining tools are available to help businesses make better real-time decisions regarding customers, products, and services. Using Facebook Insights for data mining, companies can discover and predict consumer behaviors and trends in real time. "CIOs increasingly help their public and private sector organizations cope with complexity by simplifying operations, business processes, products, and services. To increase competitiveness, 83 percent of CIOs have...plans that include business intelligence." (*IBM: The Essential CIO*).

4. **Mobility** – Our smartphones are getting smarter, and more businesspeople are carrying tablet devices like iPads to connect faster and increase accessibility. Thousands of applications are available *daily* to customize mobile devices for individual industries and situations.

   From apps that manage projects and people, to those for specific industries like machining, commercial driving, and construction, these aids allow businesses to make better use of their employees' skills and minds, turning them into knowledge workers valuable for the new economy.

5. **Green** – There is a continued, sustained movement to save energy costs with our technology use. Servers are smaller and more energy efficient, and companies are finding ways to power and cool data centers in ways that reduce operating expenses.

   School districts, government agencies, and health care facilities are now working with energy performance specialists to lower energy costs. Quick changes that save energy include replacing older CRT monitors with more efficient, flat-panel monitors that have auto-power save features built in.

   In the data center environment, replacing individual servers with blade servers is an option. A blade server is a stripped-down server computer, designed to be housed with 10 or more other blades in an enclosure, thus reducing power consumption, network cabling, management, and space constraints. Over the past five years, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has been migrating to blade servers, providing significant power and cost savings. The IBM blade servers are 23 times faster than their older, individual servers and provide a 96% reduction in energy costs.

   "Just 10 years ago, computer equipment consumed far more electricity than the current EPA Energy Star products. As computer power use has dropped, so has its associated heat gain, which has correspondingly cut building air conditioning loads. New energy standards will accelerate this downward trend in energy use, as future building codes will require computer

systems to be powered down during unoccupied periods," says Dan Kerr, Director of Energy Services for McClure Company, in Harrisburg.

Understanding IT trends and making changes to hardware and software systems is game-changing for companies. The only resource more influential than IT are the people powering the technology.

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