7 Small Business Technologies to Gain an Edge in 2016

Small business is more competitive than ever before. Companies feeling the pressure look for every advantage they can get. In markets where products are similar, companies must find a way to differentiate their offerings or, as is often the case, compete on price. Regardless of the strategy, having a cost, productivity or service advantage, puts them ahead.

Technology as a Competitive Advantage

Small business owners looking for a competitive advantage should consider the benefits of investing in current technology. Studies show that having the latest technology helps small businesses to outperform competitors and grow revenues 15% faster.

Putting the latest technology to work in your business can generate an excellent return on investment (ROI). Increased productivity, enhanced collaboration and a more professional image represent some of the benefits that accrue to the enterprise.

Newer, faster technology elevates service to new levels. Transactions are completed faster, responsive websites attract more customers from all devices, and back-office tasks take less time, yielding happier employees and vendors. Increased security and fewer errors protect the reputation of the business.

Deciding which technologies to invest in can be an overwhelming task for small business owners. IT consultants with a track record of increasing revenue growth are a good place to start. Here are seven technology investments that can pay big dividends for your small business in 2016.

1. Remote Access

Cloud applications provide remote access, but most small businesses still manage some applications on local servers. Windows Server 2012 with virtualization means that remote access to all of a company's applications and files is possible without moving them to the cloud.

Windows Server 2012 delivers enterprise-class capabilities at a small-business price. The built-in anywhere-access features are impressive, making it easy to deliver security-enabled remote access for everyone you might want on your network, including satellite offices and field employees.

With anywhere access to your files and applications, small businesses are equipped to attract new clients with better on-site presentations, enhanced collaboration and innovative new services. You're also likely to see increased productivity and less downtime. Allowing people to work from home securely will help you attract employees.

[Microsoft Office 365](#) also provides the advantages of anytime, anywhere access with the ability to also work offline. You'll get more productivity from employees and avoid expensive downtime during Internet outages. [Office 365 migration services](#) are available for a modest fee.
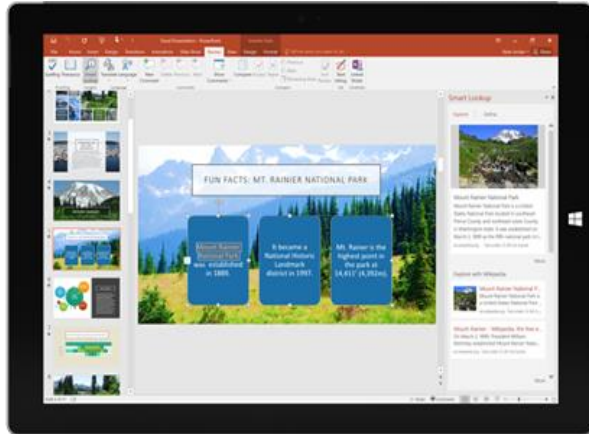
2. Software Updates

Software Updates such as Windows 10 and [Office 2016](#) offer collaboration and productivity improvements that can provide an edge. In Office 2016, the Attach Recent Files feature in Outlook alone makes the upgrade a winner.

The new capabilities delivered by features like Real-time Co-authoring, Tell Me and Smart Lookup can provide tangible benefits for small business owners and employees, starting today for those who upgrade.

If you haven't already, consider [upgrading to Windows 10](#) as well. New features like Cortana and the Edge browser make Office 2016 plus Windows 10 a complete solution for getting things done. Also consider an [outside evaluation](#) to bring all of your software and systems up to date.

3. Network Security

No one can afford downtime of the loss of reputation from a security breach that compromises customer data. Protecting the business against security threats keeps you in the game when others falter. Effective network, mobile and email security is available for an affordable monthly fee.

Modern business networks include remote access for employees, customer Wi-Fi, wireless printing and Mobile POS devices. Regrettably, only 9% of small businesses have wireless/mobile security. Current Internet threats and increasing [HTTPS embedded attacks](#) pose significant risks but only half of small business networks have Internet data security.

Many small business owners don't think that they will become a victim of a security breach and underinvest in network security. Yet, cyber-criminals aware of the small business security deficit target small businesses 60% of the time. Wireless access and email are common attack point.

4. Disaster Recovery

Many small businesses never recover from local and regional disasters. A disaster recovery solution gets you back in business ahead of the competition, helping you gain market share. New disaster recovery technology has made it more affordable.

eMazzanti Technologies worked with Microsoft to develop a Disaster Recovery as a Service (DRaaS) solution, a component of eMazzanti's Business Continuity Suite, to combat the high cost of disaster recovery solutions for small businesses.

If the customer's primary location suffers an outage, customers can run their applications from the secondary site for as long as necessary. They don't pay for expensive compute cycles until they need them, when an outage occurs and the secondary site kicks in.

5. CRM

A customer relationship management (CRM) solution increases sales and improves relationships with customers and vendors, yet 71% of small businesses don't use it. Implementing one that fits your business can provide the edge that you seek.

Although there are many CRM choices, if you currently use Microsoft Office applications, the Outlook integration of Microsoft Dynamics CRM alone makes it the logical choice. eMazzanti works with a worldwide network of solution providers to find the right CRM application for you.

With Microsoft Dynamics CRM 2015 for Outlook, you can continue to use the familiar Outlook interface with access to CRM data offline and the ability to send Microsoft Word mail-merge form letters, email, faxes and quotes to contacts, accounts, or mailing lists.

6. Business Intelligence Tools

Once the domain of big business, affordable business intelligence dashboards and tools provide support for faster and more informed decision-making, yielding a distinct competitive advantage for a small business.

BI tools increase productivity by replacing labor-intensive spreadsheets and help owners and managers to see the big picture. Microsoft Power BI Pro puts business intelligence in the hands of small business. Built-in integration with common applications makes this solution a winner for small business. Custom business intelligence solutions can meet the unique requirements of your business.

7. Inventory Management and POS

Retailers lose sales from outdated inventory and shortages of popular items. Having a modern, secure POS solution and infrastructure is the foundation for a profitable retail operation. The Microsoft Dynamics RMS (Retail Management System) offers small and midsize retailers a complete inventory and point of sale (POS) solution that can be adapted to meet unique requirements.

Retailers gain control and visibility with flexible inventory tracking and management, supplier histories and purchase orders. Managers identify sales trends in every department or category, evaluate operations and financials, track results from sales and ad campaigns, and set and monitor business policies across stores.

The Right Technology Partner

A sure way to create a technology competitive advantage is to work with a technology partner whose business is helping small and medium businesses grow revenues with technology. You'll save time and money in the long run with expert advice and implementation services and solutions that fit your business. With eMazzanti providing the technology and services, you can concentrate on running the business.