

Seminar provides tools to make IT a competitive advantage for companies

By Shari Katzer
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The success of a business is significantly dependent on its Information Technology (IT) system.

"IT is great and it can improve a lot of things—productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, certainly collaboration that you couldn't do otherwise—increase professionalism," said Jay Sperl, director of business operations and development for Infrastructure Networked Business Solutions, a Microsoft Certified Partner. "But I would point out it's a very special tool."

Sperl spoke to a group of business and technology professionals May 16 at the Richland Community Center about common problems associated with IT systems and how these troubles can be avoided.

Information Technology is defined as the hardware and software, telecommunications, database management and other information processing technologies used in computer-based information systems. It also includes the computer-based tools used to work with information and support the informational needs of an organization.

Though all business organizations need IT, Sperl warned his listeners against overbuying.

"If this is good, I'll buy three times as many of them," is a policy to avoid, he said.

Company managers with this viewpoint spend a great deal of money on equipment they don't need, Sperl said.



Jay Sperl (right), director of business operations and development for Infrastructure Networked Business Solutions, speaks to a business owner about using Information Technology to a company's best advantage.

"We all know we pay a bit of a premium to have a laptop," Sperl said, relating a story about an administrator who was provided a laptop by his company. "He never traveled. There was no business need for him to have that."

But, business owners can also become resistant to purchasing new equipment because they believe what they currently use is adequate when it really has become insufficient for business needs.

"Three years later your IT professional tells you you need to replace this," Sperl said by way of example, and the business owner replies, 'I spent big bucks on this.

It can't be replaced.'

So, when purchasing new software packages and equipment, company administrators must remember that new programs will be ineffective if employees don't know how to use them, Sperl said. New software might have the capacity to minimize staff workload and increase efficiency, but people need to be trained how to use it.

"Training—it has direct correlation to your cost—your risk of data loss," he said.

On the other end of that spectrum, Sperl said business owners and managers

can't allow employees to become so set in their ways that they refuse to learn how to use the new technologies and revert to old methods of data storage and information transmission.

"The point is, why do we buy all this stuff in the first place?" he said. "Are we trying to get more productivity out of our people? A lot of times your IT systems are there to try and save you labor costs."

New software packages are set up to do business in a specific way and the company needs to adapt to new methods.

"How many businesses are running in QuickBooks?" Sperl said. "They started that way and they're afraid to migrate away from it."

Sperl also spoke of the critical aspect of good anti-virus equipment because it protects crucial company information.

"What's really important, really urgent?" he asked. "Your anti-virus. Do you have an up-to-date definition? Is it automated?"

Though warning that IT can be misused or underused, Sperl said if the right equipment and software is purchased and utilized to its best advantage, IT will strengthen a business and simplify procedures.

"It's also new ways of doing things, looking bigger, growing your business," he said.

JURY DUTY, From page 1

However, the Administrative Office of the Courts found that the number of jurors needed for trials in Benton

County's court system was more than the program could afford to pay. Trial rates have increased in Benton County since the original research to calculate costs associated with each test site was conducted.

"It turned out that Benton County would be prohibitive for us to include in the study," Ferrell said.

But Ferrell said lawmakers are enthusiastic about the pilot plan and its potential impact on the jury system.

"This is a step in the right direction—in making sure the jurors are reimbursed," Ferrell said.

"If a juror pay raise is found to be effective in yielding better summons' response rates in a more cross-section of the community, it would greatly support making a case for increasing juror pay statewide."

-Wendy Ferrell
Communications Manager
Washington State Administrative
Office of the Courts

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