

Fundraising from the IT budget

If, like most organisations out there at the moment you're looking for places to find some extra money, maybe there's somewhere a bit closer to home you should look. The IT budget might often get raided at the expense of the level of service when times get tight but maybe there are ways to do it and maybe even improve the quality of service.

Put your PCs on a diet - fat to thin-client.

A lot of organisation are tied into the standard 3 or 4 year PC replacement cycle, partly because in the old days PCs really did look past it after 3 or 4 years and also because vendors encouraged them along the way. What if you could actually run your PCs until they finally passed away from natural causes and still operate like brand-new PCs right to the end?

Well, there is a way and it offers many other benefits as well. You may be able to turn your old PCs into thin-clients, machines that basically just display the applications and information on screen and deal with your mouse and keyboard input. All the data storage and processing is done elsewhere so the PCs are no longer very important - if they blow up no data is lost, just plug in another one and carry on exactly where you were when the machine stopped. For organisations with remote offices it also offers the benefit of allowing data to be centralised so security issues are lowered considerably.

How do you do it?

A PC can become a thin-client by using something called Microsoft Terminal Services (which is nearly free from Donortec and not much more from Microworx) which takes all the processing that a PC normally does and moves it to one or more powerful central servers. For most common applications your PC is sat there doing not very much as you type or read an email so even if 10 or 20 people are typing or reading at the same time, the load is quite small.

All your aging PC is now doing is displaying everything on screen and taking your mouse and keyboard input. Even a 10 year old dinosaur will happily cope if it can boot up OK. We often tell our customers to stop buying new PCs and get donated ones if they can. They can even keep a spare or two in a cupboard ready to plug in should one of them break.

The cost will consist of the servers, the software and set up costs which will vary depending on the complication of the systems already in place. For those organisations with less than 7 or 8 PCs the numbers may not add up but for larger organisations the numbers can be pretty compelling.

Support

The next big saving that thin-client networks offer is the on-going support - costs can be reduced by 30 or 40% over traditional PC arrangements depending on the types of applications in use. As all of the complication is centralised to one or more servers, the major effort can be concentrated on them to make sure they are secure and reliable. If a client PC has a problem it's unlikely to be anything too tricky as it isn't doing much.

We once implemented this type of system for an organisation with 250 or so users across 25 sites. When they needed to upgrade their database software it took 30 minutes during lunch time. With the old system someone would have had to go out to visit all 250 PCs across the country – so \$50 versus \$10,000!

Some other ways to save the IT budget: get those charity deals

If you're buying new systems or software as a registered not-for-profit there are a couple of easy options available to you to keep the costs down. Donortec (<http://www.donortec.com.au>) work with a number of major vendors including Microsoft and all you pay them is an admin fee for supplying donated software. Microsoft Office is

something like \$25. There are restrictions on the amount of software you can get donated in any one time period and you also have to apply before you can receive donations from them.

Microworx (<http://www.microworx.com.au>) can supply discounted software. Their prices are higher than Donortec's because they aren't supplying donated software, they resell the full products at the charity pricing Microsoft normally charge. The big difference is there are no restrictions on the amount or type of licence so the process is simpler.

Outsourcing your IT

Without wanting to sing our own book too much, the reality is that outsourcing can often offer big savings to organisations whilst improving the quality of service, lowering management overheads and improving best practise.

A typical organisation with a couple of IT staff might be spending \$150k to \$175k in wages and other associated costs. Outsourcing the same sort of IT department can bring the costs down to nearer \$75k to \$100k and there's never holiday time or sick time in there!

The key thing is to make sure you go into any arrangement with your eyes open and make sure you don't get locked into a contract you later regret – if your supplier needs to lock you down for 3 years maybe they're nervous you'll find out what the service is like and go elsewhere!

The Cloud

Anyone who has anything to do with IT will know the cloud is very much 'in' at the moment. There are some fantastic new technologies coming online and companies like Google and Salesforce are working hard to put in place systems that will make the internally hosted system redundant.

Moving to web-based systems can certainly offer big savings and I suspect 5 or 10 years from now it will be the only way to go but it's still difficult for medium sized organisations to do everything online when you have a range of fundraising, accounting, HR etc systems. It also has to be weighed up with the risks involved of someone else holding your data and core applications. If you can see past those issues then this is definitely something to consider.

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