

10 Simple Ways to Lower Your Small Business Computer Support

Bills This Summer

By Joshua Feinberg

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Executive Summary

- 1 - When in doubt, reboot
- 2 - Protect against viruses with a strong defense
- 3 - Take a hard line on unauthorized software installation
- 4 - Install power protection before you need it
- 5 - Learn how to use your backup and restore software and tape drive before you have an emergency
- 6 - Schedule proactive maintenance well in advance and during normal business hours
- 7 - Fire up your web browser to get solutions to common Microsoft applications and operating systems problems
- 8 - Use built-in Help features in your software applications
- 9 - Visit a newsgroup for free advice
- 10 - Take notes, lots of them

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### 1. When in doubt, reboot.

Before you consider an issue a real problem and call your small business computer consultant, always reboot first.

Exit out of whatever files and programs you're working on and do a Shutdown and Restart sequence to reboot your PC.

If you suspect the problem involves something hardware-related, such as a network card, modem, mouse, keyboard, or sound card, go one step further. Shutdown your PC. Turn the power off for a minute or so and then power your PC back up again.

### 2. Protect against viruses with a strong defense.

The best way to guard against expensive emergency computer support service calls for virus-related problems is with a strong defense.

Make sure every PC, laptop, and server in your office is licensed for anti-virus software, has anti-virus software installed and properly configured, and most importantly gets refreshed at least once every six weeks with up to date virus definitions, also known as signature files.

### 3. Take a hard line on unauthorized software installation.

Many small business end users in offices of all sizes mistakenly assume a personal computer (PC)

is their personal asset and that they can install whatever software they like.

However since installing unauthorized software can lead to enormous piracy liability, virus infections, and major operating system and application instability, it's in your best interest to take a hard line with your small business staff and co-workers.

Make one person in your office in charge of installing and maintaining all software --- period.

And while you're at it, have this same person keep all software diskettes and CD-ROMs locked up.

4. Install power protection before you need it.

For extensive background on this topic, be sure to check out our article in the May 7th issue of "Tips":

"How to Keep Your Small Business Computer Systems Safe from Summer Storm Damage - Seven Simple Strategies to avoid the wrath of PC electrocution".

See <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com/news/archives/tips050701-ht1.htm>

5. Learn how to use your backup and restore software and tape drive before you have an emergency.

Don't wait to learn about and test your backup/restore system until your CEO inadvertently deletes an Excel file containing the next five year's budget projections.

By then, you'll likely be in a panic and need an expensive call to your small business computer consultant.

Take time to ask questions now and take good notes on how to check to make sure any automated backup routines are running properly, that data is making it onto the tape as expected, and that you can handle any required manual restore and backup procedures.

Also, add a recurring event to your Outlook calendar to test your tape backup system, at least once a month, to make sure you can successfully restore a group of files.

6. Schedule proactive maintenance well in advance and during normal business hours.

The best way to protect against emergencies is prevent them in the first place.

Before your office gets into the usual summer challenges, schedule your small business computer consultant to come in and run through this list of ten basic items. If at all possible, have this done during normal business hours, to keep the cost down and to let your computer consultant see end users in action.

Ask lots of questions and take good notes.

If you're not watching over your small business computer consultant's shoulder at least 75% of the time, you're probably not getting maximum value out of the visit.

If your small business computer consultant refuses to share his or her knowledge with you, find another computer consultant.

7. Fire up your web browser to get solutions to common Microsoft applications and operating systems problems.

For example, with popular Microsoft products like Office and Windows, you can search Microsoft's online Knowledge Base at <http://support.microsoft.com> .

This is roughly the same information that's used by both Microsoft support professionals and most small business computer consultants.

Many of the major hardware vendors, such as Dell Computer (<http://support.dell.com>), also have similar resources available for their products.

8. Use built-in Help features in your software applications.

Don't overlook the integrated help functions available in a particular software application.

For example, in the Microsoft Office family of applications, you can always reach the Office Assistant from the Help pull-down menu.

To learn a few hints on how to get more out of Microsoft Office in general, be sure to subscribe (<http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com/tips/tips-home.htm>) to our FREE bi-weekly "Tips" e-zine, so you can download the FREE special bonus mini-report "Top 10 Ways to Get More Out of Microsoft Office".

9. Visit a newsgroup for free advice.

For example, Microsoft has online newsgroups where you can post questions and get answers from peers and "official" volunteers (called Microsoft MVPs).

Find out about available Microsoft newsgroups at <http://support.microsoft.com> .

Again, many of the major hardware vendors also have similar resources available.

10. Take notes, lots of them!

Chances are, whatever problems and resolutions you tackle this week will be relevant at some point down the road.

Logging problems also gives you a great paper trail for documenting your most common computer support issues.

For help getting an overall handle on your office's technology assets, be sure to subscribe (<http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com/tips/tips-home.htm>) to our FREE bi-weekly "Tips" e-zine, so you can download the FREE special bonus mini-report "How to Get a Handle on Your Company's Technology Assets".

The Bottom Line

In these challenging economic times, your small business still needs e-mail, Internet access, and a basic suite of office automation applications.

However, there's also no reason why you can't take a few simple steps to reduce your utilization of expensive outside small business computer consultants.

Use this issue's How-To "Tips" as a springboard for planning how you can lower your small business computer support bills this summer.

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Joshua Feinberg is an internationally recognized small business technology expert, consultant, columnist, author, keynote speaker, and trainer. He is a published Microsoft Press author, an acclaimed columnist on the Microsoft Direct Access web site, and editor of his own recently launched bi-weekly e-zine, "Tips", courtesy of Joshua Feinberg's Small Biz Tech Talk (<http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com>). Sign up for this FREE bi-weekly e-zine by visiting <http://www.smallbiztechtalk.com> and receive two FREE mini-reports by e-mail.

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