

12 Common Technology Mistakes (and How to Avoid Them)

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If you're not particularly tech-savvy, the notion of buying, maintaining or learning about technology for your business can be difficult and alarming.

Everything from social media to gadgets you use to lack of knowledge can affect your efficiency as a small business owner. Your schedule is loaded with events during the week and on weekends; don't let technology inefficiencies get in the way of running your business. Here are 12 common tech mistakes and how you can effectively avoid them.

Improper E-mail Etiquette

While smartphones are so popular these days, we find ourselves using them to communicate in multiple ways: call, text, e-mail and surf the web. We use smartphones so much that the language we use to text and e-mail closely resemble each other. We need to take time to make sure e-mails remain professional and we are not using language — or abbreviations — you would in a text message. We find ourselves becoming dependent on auto-spell correct and forget to actually proof our e-mails before we fire them off. Remember — you are the professional, and you should communicate like one. You only get one first impression, so make it a great one.

Not Using Cloud Computing

At any place and at any time of the day, you are able to access documents, files, images and even your home or office computer, thanks to cloud computing. It eliminates the need to carry around dozens of unneeded folders or a jump drive. Services such as Dropbox, Google Drive, SkyDrive, SugarSync and Box.net offer free document storage that you can access as long as you have an Internet connection. They also offer a paid subscription if you need larger storage space. Setting up a remote desktop connection will allow you complete access to the computer of your choice. I will say use cloud computing with caution. Even though it is safe and secure,

you are still placing some of your most important documents on the Internet that are accessible if your username and password were ever given out.

Jumping on the Bandwagon

Technology is a fast-paced environment. New apps and services are coming out every minute of every day. Make sure to do your research before jumping on the bandwagon with new technology products, services and devices. Usually products or services offer a free trial before you have to sign up. Ask questions, see if any colleagues have used the platform before, and read reviews. Consumer and online reviews provide some of the most upfront and honest feedback on a particular service. For every service you're looking for, there are probably a hundred options and only a few that will be the best fit for you and your business. QR codes, for example, are the latest fad, and many people use them because they feel they have to; but when used improperly, the result is ineffective.

Afraid of Change

People are afraid of change because they are scared of the perception of failure. We become comfortable with our everyday habits, and the idea of switching things up makes people cringe. Technology is always changing and adapting to new ideas and functions. You need to be open to the changes and look for the benefits they bring, and not the fact that something is different. Every change made to a service, product, app or device is with the intent of making the specific item better. Sometimes companies fail at that, but most times there is an enhancement. Every time that Facebook makes a change, for example, the news feed is flooded with friends complaining about the difference. They fail to forget it is a free service, and that each and every enhancement is with a goal in mind.

Improper Response Method

At times we become creatures of habit, but when communicating to prospective clients, we need to adapt to their method of communication. For example, if a client e-mails you, it is expected that the response would be via e-mail as well, unless noted otherwise. Also, texting is not considered e-mail. I've found it a bit interesting when a client texts me with a question. Texting is meant for more of a personal touch, unless the client texted you first. If they call you, you follow up with a phone call. Let the client decide what method of communication they prefer — not you.

Lack of Website Maintenance

Many small businesses invest a large amount of time and money in developing a beautiful website. But the problem is that the last time they paid any attention to it was the day they launched it. Think of your website as your lawn: you need to mow it weekly, add fertilizer a few times a year, and sprinkle a little grass seed every now and then to make it look beautiful. Your website is not much different; it needs maintenance to keep it looking fresh and up-to-date. Make it a priority to spend time making updates or add money in your budget to have a professional do it for you. Your website and every other piece of marketing is how consumers perceive your business. If it appears unorganized and out-of-date, that is the way your prospective clients will feel about you.

Purchasing Extended Warranties

While purchasing an extended warranty may seem like a good idea at the time, it is generally proven that it is not worth it. Typically the price you pay for a warranty on a computer, TV or other large purchases actually covers the entire cost the retailer paid for that product. With that being said, each and every person is different. Some people are harsher on the products they use, and it might not be a bad idea to have extra coverage. Items that don't do much travel, such as desktops or TVs, probably don't need a warranty. Cell phones and cameras that are used on a daily basis should have coverage only if it includes water damage.

Failing to Back Up

It is important to always back up your files on your computer or any added drives. Not only for IRS purposes, but for ease of mind, take the proper steps to back up everything. Many businesses fail to take the simple procedures of doing this and it ends up biting them in the end. Storage space is not an issue, and Apple and Microsoft make it easy to set up a schedule that will automatically back up every single file while you are sleeping. Keep in mind that data recovery is possible; however it can be painful and expensive.

Too Much Travel Time

Let's face it — gas is not cheap these days. Even though we feel that face-to-face meetings are important, thanks to video conferencing services such as Citrix or even Skype, certain meetings are possible while staying at the office. Telecommuting can also save you trips into the office and provide a working environment that may actually be more productive. As a REALTOR®, your schedule can be hectic at times, and these tools will help free up time in your busy day if you take advantage of them.

Throwing Old Technology in the Garbage

I may be a stickler for being green, but you can't just simply toss your old cell phone or printer in the trash when you are finished with it. Each item contains hazardous material that needs to be properly disposed or can damage the environment. Instead, consider spending a few minutes to polish and resell your old tech item. A few minutes on Ebay or Craigslist can save you a few bucks in disposing fees and put a little back in your pocket. Just because you don't want your old monitor doesn't mean someone else doesn't.

Not Using Social Media

Think of Social Media as a cocktail party, but without the constraints of time or space. Compared to a cocktail party, the social media environment is more public and easier for people to listen in. The goal with any social event is to meet people and start conversations. You as the REALTOR® are viewed as the professional and should be adding value to any conversation. Be helpful, answer questions and in return ask questions and trust others' advice. Facebook and Twitter are excellent for building an online presence. Keep in mind these four main goals with social media: 1) Be Found, 2) Connect and Engage, 3) Create a Community, and 4) Promote Content.

No Security

One of the most important tools you do your work on is your desktop, laptop or smartphone. It is your lifeline, and failing to take the proper steps to prevent viruses, spam or theft is just lazy. McAfee and Norton provide anti-virus software and Internet security. Along with protecting your computer, you need to take the proper steps to secure your smartphone. Your smartphone carries more sensitive data and it is crucial to have it password-protected in case it ends up in the wrong hands. iPhone and Android both have apps available that will locate your phone via GPS in case it is ever stolen.

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