



TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

## Technology News You Can Use!

July 2006 - Issue XVII

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### Notes from the Chair - John Dickson, Denim Group

By [John Dickson](#), [Denim Group](#)

#### The burden of early adopters.

Are you the type to go out and buy the latest handheld device in order to take advantage of a couple of new features? Are you likely to dive in with both feet and purchase the new iPod just so you can be the first one on the block with the coolest technology? If so, you are in a select group of people the IT industry refers to as "early adopters." It is you that are the most prized targets of technology marketing efforts - if you buy and use the latest toy, you are likely to influence your more risk adverse colleagues to go out and buy the new toy too.

My name is John Dickson and I am an early adopter. Yes, the first step towards recovery is to admit you have a problem. Of course, this problem manifests it in less serious ways than other problems, it is a problem nonetheless.

### Distinguished Technology Speaker

Larry Olson - CTO for State of Texas

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### Technology Council

- Mission
- The mission of the Technology Council is to
- promote the technology industry and educate
- businesses on technology-related products and
- services. This Council harnesses the power of the
- rapid growth of technology and addresses industry
- issues by offering best-in-class programs featuring
- the policy makers, visionaries and experts shaping
- the industry.

Ongoing programs offered and supported by the Technology Council;

1. CIO Breakfast Series
2. CIO Resource Guide
3. CIO Panel - Distinguished Speaker
4. E-Tech News You Can Use

1. **Overspending for the newest stuff** - For example, the plasma big screen TV you can buy now is far cheaper than the early models that came out a couple of years back. The most egregious examples are new tech gadgets that come out before the holiday season - typically they encounter a price reduction in the New Year. If you are willing to wait a little, many times you can get good deals when manufactures cut prices up to 30%.
2. **Technical Support is miserable** - In the early stage of any product rollout, you will encounter shaky technical support. Sometimes you get to talk directly with the engineers that built the product given that the technical support crew can only perform superficial first and second level support. Patience is the key here.
3. **Products Don't Work as Advertised** - You don't know it but many times the earliest purchases are part of an "extended beta" program whereby you get to put the product through its paces for the first time. Be prepared for frustrated evenings again with tech support.
4. **Do it Yourself Support** - Witness the most sophisticated smart phones being sold by the major carriers - many times you are likely to be able to solve the problem yourself first if you stick with your trusty friend "Google" and understand how to structure a good search. There are several support sites on the Internet that enable smart folks to figure out problems themselves. If you don't feel comfortable doing this, don't be mad if you spend more time on the support line.

Having said all that, if your business views IT and communications as a competitive edge, consider becoming an early adopter. That way you can keep ahead in your industry and let your customers know that you are thinking a couple of steps ahead. You can also be cool, which is ultimately the reason why I buy all this stuff!!

Sincerely,  
John  
Chair

## Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity

By [Terry Snow](#)

### Basic Questions for Companies of All Sizes

It's no secret today - businesses rely on data to provide the information they need to make sound management decisions. Therefore, it is not surprising that discussions of "Disaster Recovery" and "Business Continuity" are usually considered topics of relevance to the high-flying corporate types with large IT centers, complex operations and a plethora of data that drives their business. Four-inch binders line the walls of data centers, each containing check lists, tasks breakdowns, phone numbers and guidelines for recovering a company's data in the event of the inconceivable - the dreaded disaster! Can you imagine what would happen to shareholder value of an oil and gas exploration firm whose entire data base evaporated due to a disaster - all their data from seismology and geological surveys gone, dissipated, in the

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blink of an eye!

What about the value of data to the small and medium-sized business? If the data of an SME is lost forever, is it not more catastrophic - personally and financially, relatively speaking, to those individual owners than for the millions of shareholders of that large publicly traded oil and gas company? Arguably so! Yet, many small and medium-sized businesses tend to overlook the need for adequate disaster recovery and business continuity plans. Does disaster recovery and business continuity have to be a complicated exercise? Not really. In fact, a solid "DR" plan can begin with a simple survey of your operation. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you survey the various aspects of your DR and Business Continuity Plan.

#### **Security:**

What are your policies for the following and how well are they being met?

- Physical Site – How secure is your site with respect to locks, fire suppression systems, monitors?
- System Access – Do you have user profiles and passwords that change regularly? Do you limit access to applications and data to only those who require such access?
- Network Access – Do you control and monitor internet browsing, email, and downloads? Do you utilize firewalls?

#### **Backup Strategy:**

What is your backup strategy and how well are the requirements being met for the following?

- Full Backups – Do you do full system backups? These provide a snapshot of all data on a system to establish a starting point for recovery.
- Incremental Backups – Do you perform backups that only capture and save data that has been added or changed during a specific time period. Do you need to?
- Cumulative Backups – Do you perform perform backups that save all data that has changed since the last full backup.
- High Availability - Do you perform immediate replication for high availability? Do you need to?

#### **Off Site Storage Strategy:**

How well are backup media protected?

- Locations – Have you defined where your backup media will be stored?
- Move Schedules – Do you need to rotate your media onsite and offsite? Where is your media moved and how long will it stay there?
- Storage Methods – If you are storing off-site, how will your media be stored - slots, containers, hosted through an on-line storage vendor?

#### **Process Automation:**

How well does your current environment guarantee system activities occur on time and complete correctly?

- Activation – Are your processes simple enough to run manually or do you have certain recurring processes that can be automated with technology?
- Message and Event monitoring – How important is error reporting during the backup process? Do you

need a system of notifying you or your administrator in the event of a failure?

Nothing can prevent a disaster. Mother Nature marches to the beat of her own drum. Hardware is subject to failure. People make mistakes. You can insure your building in the event of fire or disaster. You can insure your equipment from theft. You can even insure lost revenues if your business is impacted by a disaster. How do you insure your data? Through reasonable planning, a business should be able to weather the proverbial storm, pardon the pun, of the unexpected disaster. A good DR plan is the best insurance policy you can get! If you feel you are in need of a good DR plan, or you feel you need to assess your current plan and existing technologies, I suggest you contact one of the many North Chamber companies who provide services in this area. The CIO Resource Guide is a good place to start in finding those providers.

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## The Right Tool for the Right Job

By [Dan Cornell](#), [Denim Group](#)

### How do you Protect your Data?

From the smallest mom-and-pop to the largest multinational, every business has the need to compile, organize, store and analyze data. Implementing an information system for your business can sound daunting, conjuring up images of rooms full of rack-mounted computers and teams of technicians and programmers. Occasionally, however, you need to make a quick business decision—and in all likelihood, you already have powerful tools at your disposal to help you do just that.

Microsoft Excel and Access, contained in the Office suite, are excellent for small-scale data compilation and analysis, but you should use caution when looking at the long term. With these types of quick-and-dirty data structures designed to meet an immediate need, it can be too easy to lose control — and this means a potential loss of valuable, and perhaps irreplaceable, data.

### Excel: The Financial Analysis Swiss Army Knife

It's multi-functional, familiar and inexpensive - but it has its limitations. Excel, Microsoft's flagship spreadsheet application, is an excellent tool for prototyping financial projections, computing statistics and running calculations to feed into other information systems such as an organization's General Ledger. It has a staggering variety of computational abilities, and it is surprisingly user-friendly, approachable and flexible. The danger lies in expecting too much of the application.

Although Excel is capable of creating spreadsheets with very complicated calculations, automating extremely complex tasks can (and often does) create unmaintainable and unverifiable systems. Using a true database system such as Microsoft Access or Microsoft SQL Server for this automation is far preferable in these situations.

Excel also does not have the capability to control who can change functionality and formulas, and it cannot provide version control. One way to sidestep this problem is to store Excel spreadsheets in Microsoft SharePoint site systems. This insures the integrity of your data by allowing you to maintain a history of changes for auditing purposes.

### Database Systems

Moving up the scale, Access allows fairly non-technical users to create sophisticated data-backed applications. While it is markedly sturdier and more robust than Excel, Access has limitations of its own.

First and foremost, Access is not scalable. Once your datasets begin to reach even a medium size (50MB or so), it can be risky to depend on Access to maintain and secure them.

Access also does not support multiple concurrent users. This inability makes it less than useful when attempting to integrate it with applications that require simultaneous access, such as most web applications.

These limitations don't mean you need to toss (or worse, redo) that unwieldy Access database when you're thinking of putting it on the Web. Migrating the data storage functions to Microsoft SQL Server will allow applications to support arbitrarily large datasets and many concurrent users. Microsoft also provides upsizing tools that help to automate the migration process.

#### **Don't Wait for it to Break Before You Fix It**

Every business accumulates data as it grows. One key to successful data management is using the right tool for the right job.

Whenever possible, attempt to plan for the long-term applications of what might appear to be a short-term solution. Many in-place short-term solutions may need to be re-evaluated to ensure they have not inadvertently grown beyond their underlying data storage technologies. There are a number of Microsoft applications available to help support the growth of system structures that are found to be at risk.

While nothing substitutes for accurately assessing and evaluating a business need, the same tools used for a quick fix may also provide the ability to implement a more permanent one.

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## **CIO Governance, and the Marketing of IT**

By [Mel Indyk](#)

This article looks at the management side of the job of the CIO versus a technology topic, and it is presented in the spirit of the CIO job having the role of helping the business thrive on technology change.

#### **CIO Governance :**

Morphing IT Governance from a function to process means the CIO must be catalysts but not owners of change.

The business unit investments dominate IT's agenda, and most firms address them from a business process approach. But many CIO's find that managing these can be difficult. One reason: they take a traditional approach to IT governance, with many trying to manage a unit's business processes from within the unit themselves. But traditional IT governance can't respond to the business expanding need for global processes, consistent customer experience across the business, and flexibility to interconnect and exchange content and distribute content over new multimedia (secured) to support the business partners and joint ventures. Instead with CIOs working as a change catalyst, businesses should create a centralized business process governance, led by senior executives, and involving partners. This process governance will set priorities based on business processes with the business defining what's to be done---not how to do it.

CIOs admit that traditional IT hampers the business growing cross-unit work. Old IT governance can't respond to new customer and competitive demands. Using their visibility, CIOs focus on shared process management responsibilities, and they approach processes incrementally. The business process demands will lead firms to IT maturity.

#### **The Marketing of IT:**

On the marketing of IT, if CIOs do not market effectively it cements its cost center role in the enterprise which is communicating status but not value, fulfilling requests but not solving problems, and partially deploying technologies but not delivering expected results. IT organizations need to embrace the concepts,

terminology and process of marketing—creating marketing plans, executing campaigns, and boosting brand equity. The result will be delivery of the right projects for the right audience, accelerated time to benefit, and increased trust of the IT organization. The businesses that embrace the marketing of IT first will be those with customer-facing technology, shared services, and strong process discipline.

IT's role in the enterprise has changed, and IT needs to work harder to communicate with the business. Marketing moves IT up the value chain. Run IT like a business, and make marketing of IT job one. Marketing helps IT take charge of its own destiny.

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