

Technology News You Can Use

October 2006 - Issue XX

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Letter from the Chair - [John Dickson, Denim Group](#)

I am happy to wrap up another fun-packed year leading the Chamber's Tech Council. As some of you have heard, I was excited to be tapped as the North Chamber's Chair Elect for 2007, which means I have a whole series of new challenges to look forward to in the not-too-distant future. As you might imagine, I'm very excited to have the opportunity to contribute as Chair Elect next year, and Chairman in 2008. However, I will miss working with the Chamber's Technology Council.

As I wrap up my three year run as Chairman of

the Technology Council, I want to thank the Council members and Debby Zucker from the North Chamber staff. They provided the energy and enthusiasm to build the organization to be the most dynamic chamber of commerce technology committee in the region. Evidence of their successes abound. You don't have to look any further than this newsletter to see the influence the Tech Council has had to improve the technology IQ of member companies. From the CIO Resource Guide, to the Distinguished Technology Speakers Series, this year's Tech Council has begun a tradition of delivering high quality events and products. Given the momentum that this group has built, I am deeply confident that next year's Tech Council will build on these successes and will continue to deepen and broaden their influence on the business community in San Antonio .

I am also happy to pass the baton to Zandra Pulis, Technology Chair for 2007. Zandra Pulis, who is from CPS Energy, is already off and running for 2007 - please support her by participating in next year's Tech Council or by attending our first major event of the year, the CIO Panel Luncheon on March 6, 2007 at Oak Hills Country Club.

Again, thanks... I look forward to serving the Chamber in a different capacity next year as Chair Elect.

John Dickson

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Taking advantage of Virtual Private Networking (VPN) Technology
by [Rob Kraus](#)

In today's business world access to mission

critical applications and processes is very important for the growth and support of your business. How do you stay connected and harness the power of what the Internet has provided all of us? Environments today are more dynamic than they were ten years ago. Think about it, not to long ago if we needed to access files and applications for our customers, it meant driving to the office and physically accessing the data from our desktop computers. In modern day work environment we are able to accomplish many of the same tasks while at home, on the road, or even on a secluded beach while sipping down a margarita!

How is this possible you ask? Well, it's really no secret and we can thank Virtual Private Networking for this great flexibility. For many years traveling users, telecommuters and the general public have been using Virtual Private Network (VPN) to stay connected to the office or home while away. Even as I write this article I have a VPN connected back to my corporate office and am replying to emails to catch up on my days work.

What is a VPN? A VPN is an extension of your existing network architecture. After you connect to the internet with your normal dial-up, DSL or cable connection, you use software to create a secure tunnel through the Internet to your office or home. This tunnel encrypts the data you send in the tunnel to keep it confidential. VPNs were created to allow users to send sensitive data and communicate with remote networks securely over the Internet.

Let's use this example to help explain. John, the Vice President of Acme Foods, is traveling as usual meeting with clients in a different state. On his trip John realizes he forgot a few documents back at the office on the server. Since John has his laptop with him and has software

configured to allow VPN access to his office he is in luck! John simply needs to fire up his laptop, connect to the internet, and connect to his office with his VPN software. Once he is connected, it is just as if John were sitting at his desk in his office. This example is a very high overview of how VPNs work, but I think it makes our point. This type of VPN is commonly referred to as a “Remote-User VPN” or “Mobile-User VPN”.

Now that we are experts on how to let our remote users access documents via VPN software, let’s talk about another scenario. Let’s say that Acme Foods just landed a large contract and will be expanding their infrastructure. Right now they have one corporate office and will be opening two smaller branches. The main office is located in San Antonio , Texas ; one branch office will be located in Medford , New York and the other in San Diego , California . The branch offices will still need to access files and email located on the San Antonio servers. How do we accomplish this? You guessed it, we set up a VPN! The concept is very similar to how John connected to the office while on his trip. In this example though we are not moving all over the county, the offices are going to be set up and have a dedicated internet connection such as DSL, Cable, or T1 for example. In this type of situation we would establish what is called a site-to-site VPN. This type of VPN is created between two or more devices that are VPN capable. Setting this type of VPN is pretty simple once we determine how we want to set it up. In our case we are going to have both of our remote branches connect to the San Antonio office. First we set up what we call “VPN” policies on our San Antonio VPN device (a VPN device can be a dedicated VPN endpoint or a firewall that is VPN capable). These policies let the device know to expect a connection coming from both the New York and California offices.

The policy also holds information on what type of encryption to use, how long the tunnel should stay up, what networks to allow traffic to and so on. Once the San Antonio device is configured, then we create similar policies at each branch office. If all goes well the VPN will create an encrypted tunnel through the internet. Now users in the San Diego and Medford office are able to access documents and email in San Antonio securely! Not only will it be secure, but it will seem as if you are accessing files and folders on your own local network.

Although we have covered a lot during the article, there is still much more to cover. The basic idea behind this article was to give you an idea of how you can use the power of VPNs to help your business, employees and customers stay in touch. In matter of fact, I submitted this article to the North Chamber via my hand held phone while connected through VPN to my office! (Please don't tell the boss I'm out playing golf)

Here are some useful links to help you understand how VPNs work and what they may be able to provide for you and your organization:

http://www.vpn-info.com/type_of_vpn.htm

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virtual_Private_Network

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Requirements for Long Term Architecture by [Mel Indyk](#)

Enterprise architecture (EA) groups need to guide the execution of IT projects, but the architect's value should be based in their understanding of target architecture than on their

skills as technologists. To be credible, the target architecture must be based on credible assumptions about future business requirements. Getting those future requirements is not a simple matter of asking business management for them, and analyzing them is not the linear technique used to develop the design for a project. Instead, use a combination of requirements aggregation and scenarios to gather and analyze long-term requirements. This will lead to more credible architecture with appropriate flexibility and evident business value.

Every IT project is aimed at addressing a defined set of business requirements. The architecture that the EA group defines must also be based on an understanding of requirements, but there is a difference between today's requirements and future requirements. Today's requirements are defined by the business and are directly incorporated into project designs. Future requirements both near-term and long-term have to be arrived at and analyzed differently, as dictated by how they will be used. The future requirements are used to guide project and application portfolio decisions, develop target state architectures, and guide road maps.

BUSINESS REQUIREMENT USAGE ACROSS ARCHITECTURE PLANNING TIME FRAMES:

*Architecture time frame : Today's projects ---
Near-term 6 to 12 months --- Long term 2 to 5
years*

*Architecture process: Solution design ---
Portfolio planning --- Architecture visioning,
road map development*

Type of requirements: Defined Bus Req. for

projects --- Bus plans drivers and needs--Bus trends and forecasts, long-term strategy

Key questions: What is the best solution for in-scope bus needs --- Are we leveraging synergies -- Are we building the right capabilities?

Process: Requirements definition and solution design --- Requirements aggregation --- Scenario based planning

Recommendations:

- *Put requirement aggregation and scenario development into your planning process. EA Groups must have a defined planning process for developing and validating target architectures and road maps which will result in building credible visions.*
- *Reserve some time for developing a long-term vision. A common trap that EA groups fall into is becoming so consumed with current IT projects that they fail to develop and validate the long-term architecture that their current advise should be based on. EA should reserve 10% to 20% of their time to perform longer-term planning.*
- *Engage in the portfolio planning process. Between long-term vision and the list of currently active projects is the selection and prioritization of projects for the upcoming plan year. Architecture involvement should not be confined to developing project solution designs after a project has been selected. EA groups often pursue a strategy of "opportunistic build-out" of the architecture and by engaging with the business and IT management before the project portfolio is defined, EA groups will create more opportunities to progress on the road*

*maps that connect "to be" architectures
with today's project prioritizations.*

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Pixel Perfect

by [Johnny Harvey](#), [Security Service
Federal Credit Union](#)

Optimizing images for use on the Web is driven by striking a balance between weight, or file size, and quality. This seems straightforward, but images destined for the Web often times fall short of accolades. It may not be your intention for an image to be a work of art, but that doesn't mean it should liken a rain-drenched cat either.

To get moving in the right direction:

- Start with quality images to output quality images
- Work with images in the editor's native format
- Export JPEG source images to another format, such as PNG (repetitively saving a JPEG results in successive compression and quality degradation)

The absolute first actions to perform on your image are cropping and resampling, in that order. Cropping the image removes any unwanted outlying areas and resizing reduces the dimensions to match the area you have reserved in your webpage. When scaling the image, be sure to reduce the height and width equally to prevent skewing. Once you have the desired height and width, apply filters or other techniques to reintroduce the clarity lost in the transformation.

After completing the prep work, it's time to export into one of three common image formats

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Mission

The mission of the

for the Web. When deciding which format to use, consider the characteristics of your image, such as number of colors, treatments (e.g., special effects), gradients, and transparency. In finding the balance between file size and quality, format selection is but one part, you should also consider the intended purpose of the image as well as your target audience. Which is more important, weight or quality?

Candidates for the GIF format are simple graphic images with small color palettes, solid colors, and well-demarcated borders. Transparency is supported in the GIF format, but unless the borders are crisp, you'll turn out a graphic having jagged, speckled edges. This is most evident when you've applied a drop shadow. In these instances, the alternative image format is PNG.

Another untoward effect, color banding, occurs when exporting an image to GIF when the source contains more colors than available. You'll want to avoid the addition of dithering (think drop shadow) or export of images in the GIF format that have color gradients like that found in photographs. A viable substitute in this instance is the JPEG format.

For images such as photographs, potentially having millions of colors and high detail, the preferred format is JPEG. If you have a photograph that also contains sharp transitions, such as that with the addition of text, exporting as a JPEG will result in artifacts around those transitions. For these images, having characteristics best suited for GIF and JPEG, export in the PNG format to maintain quality. As well, when transparency is required and you're working with an image that would otherwise be suited for export as a JPEG, PNG is ideal because it can provide natural shading while maintaining the detail offered by JPEGs.

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

If you would like more information about any of the Technology Council's programs, would like to participate or need information on becoming a member of the Council please contact the [North Chamber](#).

By now, it should be apparent that PNG is the go-to format when either GIF or JPEG cannot meet your needs. PNG does have one significant drawback, the most popular browser, Internet Explorer (IE), does not fully support it. Microsoft's release of IE 7 (October 2006) does support PNG transparency, but you still need to consider the omnipotence of previous versions. To ensure transparent PNGs display correctly across the last several versions of IE, you will need to employ JavaScript and or proprietary code.

The last step in readying an image for the Web is the actual export. Optimization settings vary between formats, each affecting the weight and quality of an image, but it is the compression setting having the greatest influence. While all three formats use compression, you have no control over the level for PNGs; it does the work for you. Control of JPEG and GIF compression is via the Quality and Lossy controls, respectively. The lower the percentage or the higher the number selected, the greater the compression and, in turn, the lower the quality of the image. As the compression increases, reducing the document size, you may notice the introduction of artifacts. This is when the other export options come into play, make adjustments as needed, and/or ease up on the compression.

Voila!

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Website Design - Part II
by [John Tomblin](#), [DataTitan](#)

Everything you always wanted to know about website design...but were afraid to ask. Part II

Last month, we talked about some key concepts in starting any website project. This month we're going to talk about domain names, hosting and "look and feel" considerations everyone should weigh as part of their web presence.

Rule 4: Domain names. When you buy a home, you make your sure your name is on the deed of trust, right? Purchasing domain names are no different. When you buy a piece of land, there is not another like it anywhere on the planet. The same is true of domain names. Cars.com and Cars.net are similar...but in the Internet world they could not be further apart. That said, when purchasing domain names, be sure you are the "registrant" of record for every name you own. Go to www.netsol.com and click the "WHOIS" link at the bottom of the page. From here you can confirm your domain ownership information. If you are not the "**registrant**" of record...you may not be the registered owner. Not being the "**registrant**" can then lead to other problems if you ever decide you want to move, transfer or sell your domain name.

Except when creating a new "buzz" word never before seen, many of the best domain names are simply no longer available. The best window for purchasing domain names ended a decade ago. As a result, consider different naming schemes for your website (e.g.: if you want to purchase www.gosimon.com and discover it's taken (and I guarantee it is), try www.gosimontoday.com or www.gosimonsanantonio.com). Most importantly, make your best attempt to brand a website with a [.com] extension. Lastly, when you purchase your domain name, make sure you also purchase as many extensions associated with your domain name as possible. This helps you protect your brand, (e.g.: If you purchase www.jewelry.com, be sure you also purchase www.jewelry.net, .org, .biz, .info, .us, .

name, etc.) There are many domain name extensions, so the more you purchase, the more difficult you make it for competing brands to pick up similar extensions and tap into your market. This is critical when you want to not only drive consumers to your [.com] address, but protect your brand as well. Of course, the absolute best method to protect a name is to apply for and obtain a trademark.

Rule 5: Hosting services. Often overlooked, hosting is a requirement for all websites no matter how large or small. Without it, there is no way for Sally in Syracuse to reach Billy's website in Boston . To fulfill this need, all websites must be "parked" on a server creating a "web" of server's constantly sending and receiving webpage and content requests around the globe. These companies are called Internet Service Provider's or (ISP's). So, once your site is built, you'll need to "host" or "park" your website with an ISP who can serve your needs. Do you need lots of bandwidth for your site? How many email accounts do you need? Do you sell merchandise on-line? Do you have online videos? Do you require Secure Socket Layering? Talk with your web design firm who can help you find answers too many of the questions you need to answer before choosing an ISP.

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An IT Strategy for Small Business by [Mark Kreipe](#)

Why? Let's first consult Wikipedia.

Strategy - A **strategy** is a long term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal, as differentiated from tactics or immediate actions with resources at hand.

A **Technology strategy** is a planning document that explains how information technology should be utilized as part of an organization's overall business strategy, and should be designed to support the organization's overall business plan.

It's very typical, and in some cases required, for large businesses to make significant investments in a technology strategy. As above, the goal is to ensure that technology investments directly support the goals of the business. Secondly, these companies want to ensure that they are making the most of the investments by purchasing technology that is compatible across the business.

So why would an Information Technology (IT) Strategy be important to a small business, and what are the differences? For the very same reasons, and one difference is that you waste less time attending meetings.

Many small businesses buy the most affordable baseline components, like PC's, Fax Machines and Printers to begin, and add new components as their customer base dictates. Surprisingly often, the business owner then finds upon an upgrade to a mid or high level system, their printers (or other systems) are not compatible – and are forced to reinvest in something that already works...or did work. They might find they are not able to tie their accounting system in with their customer system, and the result is double entry of the same data. This leads to waste and potential errors.

The IT strategy for any business, regardless of size, really has very little to do with Technology. What am I selling? Who are my customers? What are my business processes? Who are my prospects and how do I reach them? How do I track my sales? What is the

impact if I lose power for 4, 6 or 10 hours during the day?

All of these questions and many more, directly relate to the technology that supports the goal – or the technology to take you beyond that goal. Not asking the right questions...or asking no questions at all...can result in missed opportunities, lost revenue and reinvesting in technology due to incompatibilities.

So what are the basic steps? This process varies, but it goes something like this.

1. Benchmark - Talk with other business owners. Find out what they find to be successful
2. Assess what you have now.
3. Identify where your biggest pains are.
4. Prioritize the pain (in hard numbers – dollars, time, customer satisfaction)
5. Clearly define current and future needs (Not the geek stuff! What your business needs.) based on those pains
6. Match the goal to remove the pain, with potential solutions. Google is a great place to start.
7. Standardize – Pick a company, any company – Microsoft, Dell, Intuit and many, many more. Although most companies try to alleviate integration issues, staying with one provider lowers your total cost of ownership over time.
8. Simplify – there are bundled products, like Microsoft Small Business Server, that come with multiple tools in one package – like Databases, Internet Services and tools to build as you go.
9. Execute and Be Brave – It's not technology – IT IS A PROCESS!!!
10. I don't have a number 10, but a top 10 list is pretty standard. And I'm sticking with something standard.

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Microsoft Office 2007

by [Robert Burdwell](#), [Devry University](#)

The upcoming Microsoft Office 2007 edition is scheduled to deploy anytime from November 2006 to January 2007. Office 2007 includes new interfaces, features, and XML file formats. Office 2007 enhances Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Access, InfoPath, Project, Visio, Business Contact Manager, Office Communicator, Outlook, Publisher, and OneNote along with providing new applications like SharePoint and Groove. There are also a number of enterprise sever options available for Office Forms, Groove, Project, Project Portfolio, and SharePoint.

The look of Office 2007 has several visual changes with new interfaces integrated in Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. Ribbon is one of the new interfaces featured in the core applications. Ribbon provides modifications to the menu bar and realigns the standard and formatting toolbars into tabs opposed to toolbars located horizontally across the application. Each application has its own unique options available for maximizing features. For example, Ribbon displays a formula option to preview a list of available formulas in Excel opposed to using the Insert menu selection or formula bar in previous versions of Office. Galleries are another interface added to the core applications for presenting format options on the page. Users can visually see a number of formatting options on documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. Galleries hold promise since users can make appropriate decisions based a selection of options displayed on the page opposed to the trial and error method of dialog boxes used in

previous versions of Office. The last new interface of Office 2007 is Live Preview. Live Preview gives users the ability to roll over fonts or objects for temporarily viewing alternate states. The benefit of this interface allows users to see changes to content before they are applied. This feature may just reduce the number of hits on the undo button – probably not since most of us continually change our minds.

Office 2007 also includes a new web and collaborative application. These applications meet the necessity for mobility shared by most organizations. SharePoint web applications give users the flexibility to work on core applications from a web browser. SharePoint replaces FrontPage in Office 2003; however, the web application is very similar as its predecessor. Groove is the other new application used for collaboration. Groove is a peer-to-peer application allowing users to share workspaces from different locations. There are a number of features available with this application for providing document sharing, group messaging, and scheduling and assisting with decision making.

The prices for the Office 2007 product editions are comparable to Office 2003. The editions fall into the same categories as Office 2003 with Enterprise, Professional Plus, Professional, Small Business, Standard, Basic, and Home and Student. There will be a learning curve with the new features, interfaces, and applications, but these enhancements will certainly have users eager to adopt the editions. However, organizations need to determine if Office 2007 supports their business processes and goals before adopting the enhanced applications. As found in many articles, most organization may wait until Vista is installed before upgrading to Office 2007.

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