

RezNEWS Feature Article: Effectively Managing Your Business Technology Needs

As the New Year approaches it is a good time to evaluate your technology needs for the upcoming year. While "one size" does not fit all, this month's RezNEWS feature article will outline some tips for purchasing new computer hardware and other technology services.

Evaluate your short-term and long-term goals before making new technology purchases. How old are your computers and what other technology needs do you have for the future? How much do you pay for Internet services, web site hosting and marketing? It is crucial to research before you buy. You can look online at **PC World** at www.pcworld.com and **PC Magazine** at www.pcmag.com for the latest technology reviews and suggestions. **Consumer Reports** has a website that is also a helpful source for technology purchases: www.consumerreports.org.

Desktop Computers

The most important piece of technology equipment is your computer system. Any desktop computer that is more than three years old is a candidate for replacement. Computer prices are lower than ever now and it makes sense to replace older computers more often.

Buying Tips

- Spend the bulk of your money on the computer processor and computer memory.
- Look for computers with faster **Intel Pentium Dual Core** or **Intel Core Duo** processors. **Athlon** equivalent processors, made by AMD (Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.), are also desirable. Avoid Intel Celeron Processors which are slower.
- 1-2 GB of RAM (Random Access Memory) is plenty for most users unless you are purchasing a dedicated server.
- Try to find a new computer that still comes with **Windows XP Professional** as the operating system. It is more stable and easier to configure than Windows Vista. If you must buy Vista, get the business addition.
- Make sure you get **Microsoft Small Business** with your computer (with Access, Excel, Word and Outlook). It costs more money but it is worth it.
- Make sure your new machine has a dual-layer DVD-RW which allows you to store more data.

RezNEWS Tip: Dell, and other major online computer companies, allows you to log into their large business website links to configure new computers with special options not available on small business or the home computer purchases. *You can still buy computers with XP Professional this way.*

Laptop Computers

If you need flexibility, laptops are great for productivity on the road and for mobility in a busy office environment. The same buying tips apply to laptops as desktop computers. However, try to buy laptops with 15.4-inch screens as they offer the best combination of size and ease of portability.

Where can you compare and buy desktop and laptop computers?

The Internet is best for comparing prices and configuring computers to your specific requirements. Log on and evaluate what Dell, Compaq, HP, and others have to offer. *Make sure to log into the large business links if a website offers one.*

Computer Networks

Ethernet "CAT 5 or CAT 6" cable network systems are still the best option for most businesses that need to connect computers that are less than 300 feet apart. They are also more secure and reliable than wireless options.

There are new wireless speed options and distance options that make wireless networks more viable. However, be aware that few wireless systems are as reliable as the traditional Ethernet networks. *Therefore, RezStream does not recommend running RezStream Professional on a wireless network.* Security can also be a drawback if the wireless network is not configured properly.

If your computers are more than 300 feet apart, or in different cities, then consider using a robust remote access system like Microsoft's Terminal Services, which allows multiple people to work on the same computer from different locations.

RezNEWS Tip: *Unless you are very skilled, do not consider installing your own computer network. Hire a professional. You will be glad you did!* Make sure you purchase computer equipment that features the same operating system and the fastest computer processors that you can afford.

Website Design and Promotion

Your website can be the source of up to half your revenue. Make sure you have a professionally designed website. Keep your website up to date, including a professionally managed promotion strategy and budget. Devote \$500 to \$1,500 a month on website promotion marketing to ensure a healthy return on investment. While that may seem like a lot of money, you get what you pay for and it should easily generate 300-800% return on investment.

Hire a professional web design company who specializes in hospitality businesses. RezStream offers hospitality specific design, hosting, and promotion of services. Check out our website at: www.rezstream.com/marketing.htm for more information.

RezNEWS Tip: Make sure you track all the revenue that comes from your website. The number one mistake hospitality businesses make is tracking website revenue accurately. You can't market effectively without using a professional website tracking tool.

Offer Real-time Reservations

It is also very important to have a real-time Booking Engine on your website. Why spend all that money on design and promotion if you are not going to allow people to book online? Availability calendars may be cheap but consumers are becoming savvier and they know the difference between request forms and confirmed reservations.

Summary

- ❖ Consider buying a new computer instead of spending money upgrading an old one.
- ❖ Don't cut corners with your website. It should be visual and inviting. And, it should get a major facelift every year or two. Budget at least \$500 to \$1,500 per month for effective promotion. *Make sure you use a detailed tracker on your web pages to accurately measure the success of your marketing efforts.*
- ❖ **Make sure you have a real-time Booking Engine on your website.** You will not be able to track your return on investment of marketing dollars if you do not have a Booking Engine that supports comprehensive website tracking.
- ❖ If you have questions about technology, consult with people in your area. Ask for references from computer experts to make sure you pick the right person for your unique needs. Your local computer shop can often also recommend a good technology specialist in your area.

About the author

Bill Mitchell is co-owner and Chief Operating Officer for RezStream. Bill has over 20 years experience in the hospitality industry with extensive knowledge in management and marketing for hotels, resorts, and bed and breakfasts. Bill is recognized nationally as a featured speaker and consultant for the hospitality industry.