

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Review, Reflect, Renew

By Douglas E. Welch

The end of one year is always a great time to spend a few minutes reviewing the last, reflecting on the good and the bad, and just taking some time to renew yourself for the coming year. This year, I am taking this yearly review a step farther and developing similar reviews for all of my major clients. In this way, not only am I generating further business for myself, I am hoping to help my clients solve some of their technology problems before they ever occur.

One of the first steps of this end-of-year review is to detail some of the problems you may have had over the last year and how you addressed (or did not address) each of them. This provides you the beginnings of a project list for the coming year. Old problems will only get worse. Start with them first. You should also spend some time looking at your successes—the backup system that worked well and prevented data loss on more than one occasion—the new database that cut order-processing time in half. Don't be afraid to talk about the good things. They give you the sense of accomplishment that allows you to tackle new problems.

Next, review all the PC and network systems under your care or guidance, and figure out which needs to be sent out to pasture. Too often, companies replace their computer systems only when they die. Unfortunately, this means that many employees are working with sub-optimal systems. If you have to spend time recovering, restoring or recreating data after a failure, the costs can grow quite high. It is always better to plan for the replacement of a certain number of systems each and every year. This spreads the technological dollars over time and insures that old systems are moved out before they begin impacting productivity instead of enhancing it.

Another, often ignored, task is the planning of software upgrades and replacements. There is really no reason to be caught unaware by software upgrades. Announcements often precede the actual release of a product by months, if not an entire year. When you hear about a new version of your core software, start investi-

gating it. If you can, get involved in the process as a beta tester, so that you always have the latest information about the product.

Furthermore, start planning your budget for upgrading your software today. How many copies will you need? How many hours will it take to install? How much will it cost? Sure, many of these numbers will be wrong. You can't know everything about a new product until you actually touch it, but you will have the process in your mind as the year progresses.

Finally, today is the day to start thinking about next year. The best thing you can do is start marking dates on your calendar. Do you have a trade show coming? How about a quarterly review? Monthly status reports? Weekly sales meetings? You want to mark out any event that could possibly affect your work. You might not be responsible for creating monthly status reports, but do you need to provide more printers, or balance the load among printers so that everyone else can meet their deadlines? You may not have to work over the weekend when the accountants do their quarterly work, but maybe someone needs to be on-call during that time in case there are any technology issues. Think outside of your "technology" box and include any event that you can help run more smoothly.

While the holidays are often seen as a time for reviewing, reflecting and renewing your personal life, doing the same for your professional life only adds to the benefits. Whether you spend a little time or a lot, deeply analyze your work or shallowly graze the surface, you can make important discoveries and improvements in your work. This is sure to reflect on your personal life as well. Imagine how nice your evenings and weekends might be if you know that systems are working and problems aren't going to sneak up on you. A few minutes taken now could bring you and your career and much welcome peace of mind. □

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