



Making IT Work

Following on from our [May newsletter](#) which looked at how IT can be used for significant business advantage this time we look at some tips and ideas for any business owner about to embark on an IT project or invest in new systems.

Part Two – Putting the chicken before the egg

Imagine the scenario, your business is growing, you and your staff spend more and more time out of the office or working from home, you've got more clients than ever before and you need to keep a track of the contact you have with them and the sales you make.

You make a decision. You decide to invest in a new CRM package, and at the same time to provide all the staff with Blackberries so they can collect emails on the move and keep their diary with them.

Now – who can help us buy the software and equipment? You call in an IT specialist and tell them what you've decided and ask them how much they'll charge you to make it all happen.

But hold on – have you put the chicken before the egg?

All too often when we are asked to advise business owners were that's exactly what's happened. Although they acknowledge they are not the IT experts (far from it, most of them admit they don't have a clue) they have made some big and potentially expensive decisions without taking any advice.

Luckily – provided, of course, they haven't already placed an order for the equipment it's not too late to pause for a moment and consider the decision.

At Bronte we use a checklist of questions to help all clients before they make final choices.

Don't Get Caught up in the Latest Fad

The biggest challenge for the uninitiated IT buyer is to avoid making the wrong choice on equipment and software. Many are the small business owner and home PC user who are regretting a hasty purchase of a new PC which came with Windows Vista installed. With users reporting everything from lack of proper drivers and application compatibility to poor security protection and general usability it's been one of the biggest flops Microsoft have ever experienced.

The lesson? Choose solutions that are tried and tested, avoid the cheap off the shelf option for business use, it's rarely the right one and of course take advice from an expert, who in any even may be able to get you a better deal on equipment than you can get yourself.

Bronte is an approved supplier of Dell computer hardware, offering a 20% discount on standard Dell rates.

On the subject of new hardware, look out over the next few months for the launch of **Microsoft Small Business Server 2008**. It promises to provide many of the features demanded by small business owners, such as e-mail, Internet connectivity, internal Web sites, remote access, support for mobile devices, file and printer sharing, backup, and restore—all at one affordable price. We will be monitoring the product very closely before installing it for any clients.

Bronte IT Decision Checklist

1. Why are you about to make the practice? What's driving the change in IT? What are the two or three most important factors?
2. What are you trying to achieve with this investment in IT? What's the end goal?
3. How do things work in the business at the moment? What type of information is handled and how does information flow? How many people are involved in the business? Are there any external bodies you need to communicate with? What systems do you use for things like accounts, case management, order taking, contact tracking and sales management?
4. What budget have you set aside to invest in IT and how has this budget been arrived at?
5. What level of skill does your staff have? How receptive are they to change? Will there be any resistance to using new IT systems?
6. What are your business plans for the future, for the next 12 months, in 3 – 5 years? Do you have any growth or diversification plans?

Only once the answers to all of these questions have been established can a decision be made on the most appropriate IT solutions for any given scenario be made.

In the example mentioned earlier Blackberries may not be the correct choice for remote workers, instead a laptop with Wi-Fi connection which can link to the office server and provide access to the CRM package might be a must. Or it may be realised that given the growth plans of the firm the first investment should be in server capacity and IT security.

Only by considering the complete business picture, looking at all aspects of finance, customer and client contact, staff capabilities, working practices and operating systems with the right decisions be taken.

At that point you can start to get technical, start to consider the options in terms of hardware and software, not before.

Get it wrong and you'll feel you've wasted money and worse still could end up with a system that really isn't fit for purpose. You've bought a frozen chicken when all you really wanted was an omelette!

For any business considering an investment in IT infrastructure or new software Bronte Business Networks offers a free consultation to go through the Bronte IT Decision Checklist. Even if you are half way through the process it needn't be too late.

To arrange a consultation email [Julie Eyre at Bronte Business Networks](#) or call Bronte on 0121 506 9230.

About Bronte

Bronte Business Networks offer a full range of outsourced IT services, tailored to your business. Whether you are looking to install a new network, update your software, add to your hardware, need help maintaining an existing system or require an emergency response, you can be sure of a personal, professional and prompt service.

To find out more how you can make the most of your IT visit www.brontebusinessnetworks.co.uk.

Subscription Details

Bronte News is emailed to subscribers monthly. Feel free to pass on to friends and colleagues. To subscribe [email us here](#).

If it has been sent to you in error we apologise, if you wish to unsubscribe [email us here](#).

© 2008 Bronte Business Networks. All Rights Reserved

**Blythe Valley Innovation Centre, Central Boulevard, Blythe Valley Park,
Solihull, B90 8AJ**