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Great Tips for Better Holiday Photos

By Greg Holden
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What's the problem with holiday photos? All too often, they fail to capture the feeling of the season. Most holiday pictures look interchangeable. Your photos of family members lined up and smiling look the same as those of every other family.



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Understanding the Value of a Value Added Reseller (VAR)

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VARs have a variety of perceptions about them. Some of these perceptions are right on. Some of them completely miss the mark. The truth is the right VAR can help most businesses more than they realize. Can the right VAR help you?



Technology is critical to run almost every business today, and in most cases, can offer both competitive and strategic value to your business. The problem is many businesses don't think about their PCs, printers or servers as providing a competitive advantage or as strategic business tools. Even as a fundamental business tool, many think that there is little difference in the basic capabilities across the huge variety of technology devices on the market today. Having been in the industry for almost 20 years now, I can tell you that there are many differences worth noting when comparing computing products. I can also tell you that when used appropriately, there are both competitive and strategic advantages to be gained from technology.

This is where your local VAR steps in. They are experts in technology; it's what they do. They can help you navigate the basic task of ensuring you get the right technology tools to support your business and then show you how to drive business success from that technology.

Consider these areas of expertise and guidance VARs can offer and think about how they could help your business:

Business continuity and disaster planning: What would happen to your business should a natural or man-made disaster strike? Are you truly prepared to manage through a catastrophic data loss? Many businesses are not and research shows that as high as 75% of companies without a business continuity plan fail within three years of a disaster.

Data protection and security policies: Is your business protected from hackers and in compliance with local, state and/or federal regulations? If you manage customer records, especially sensitive data like personally identifiable information, there are countless laws on how you manage that data and enormous legal and civil penalties that could cost you should that data get into the wrong hands.

Unified communications, collaboration and content management: Enhancing your business capabilities in these areas can help you to reduce costs, improve productivity and efficiency and result in better overall communications both internally and externally.

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Buyer Beware

Don't Expect Consumer-Grade Technology to Meet Your Business-Class Needs
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- When you walk into a business meeting, do you wear pajamas?
- Do you let your children manage the accounts receivable for your office?

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Business Continuity Tip

Build a team.

It's a tall order to expect one person to efficiently develop a comprehensive recovery plan by themselves. After all, they have to account for every reasonable interruption across the entire business. There are just too many moving pieces. There is power in numbers and at worst, two heads are better than one. Assembling a team will give you the ability to share information, brainstorm, and create a natural sounding board to bounce off ideas.

During an actual recovery, having a team provides additional advantages. If the team leader is not available, others will be familiar with the plan and can execute it. This built-in redundancy to your recovery response helps ensure a quick and efficient return to business as usual.

Quote of the Month

Remember, if Christmas isn't found in your heart, you won't find it under a tree.

- When you buy business technology, do you choose products designed for home use?

The pricing on consumer-grade technology is tempting. But the lower price can end up costing your business dearly, in both productivity and cash.

Ways to Save Time and Money, by Not Going Home

"While you may be saving money now, you're spending more in the long run," says Austin Smith, founder of Digital Son, a Cisco Registered Partner. "One of the worst things that a small business could do would be to go to a retail establishment and purchase home gear for their business. Home equipment is just not designed to provide feature sets that businesses need."

Cisco customers report that products that are designed for doing business are worth the price premium in at least four ways, because they enable them to:

1. Integrate Business Technologies

Combining the technologies that a business uses makes processes more efficient. Work gets done better, and faster.

"Our jobs are far easier now that we have the Cisco integrated system, which connects our reservation system and our CRM [customer relationship management] system," says the sales account manager at a restaurant-resort business with 37 employees. Previously the company used a variety of consumer-grade products at each of its locations.

"The efficiency in time is enormous compared to the systems we had in the past," he says. "Time is money, so for a salesperson this is very important."

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The Customer Comes Second

by Craig Kitch www.CraigKitch.Com

In September of 1990, I was in the final stages of my application process to join one of the world's most renowned hotel companies, Marriott. My challenge would be to take the helm of a problematic hotel with service issues and put it back on track for Marriott's standards of excellence. The final interview was with a Vice President at the corporate headquarters in Bethesda, Maryland and I was on pins and needles, to say the least. As the interview came to a close, the VP had one final question: "Craig, who would you say are the most important people in your hotel?" "The customers", I announced with enthusiasm, thinking that I had slam-dunked that one. My interrogator leaned forward on his elbows, looked me straight in the eye and informed me that I would never be successful with their company if that was my attitude. I got the job anyway but I have never forgotten that conversation or what I learned about my "true" customers during the ensuing years.

One of the secrets of truly great managers is that they understand that their role is to take care of the employees first and then the employees will take better care of the customer. Think about it. When staff members have needs that are not being met by management, discontent and complacency set in and lower morale. Unhappy employees very seldom go above and beyond the call of duty to give the customer a stellar experience. When service complaints arise, management typically finds the person "at fault" and verbally coaches them about the importance of working harder and making sure the customer is always right; then documenting their personnel file in case it happens again. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out where this scenario is headed.

Why is it that we do a great job in our businesses of taking care of machinery, inventory and merchandise and we all but ignore the needs of our people? In most industries, people are the number one resource and payroll is one of the highest (if not the single highest) expense item in the budget. It is your staff who depicts the values of your company to the public, so why not do all you can to ensure that they are cared for. In my hotel management days, I subscribed to a management philosophy that I called MBWA (Management By Walking Around). All this meant was that I journeyed throughout the hotel on a regular basis and asked my staff how they were doing and what they needed from me. The desired effect was for them to have the tools and support they needed to do their jobs well.

Here is the bottom line: if you do a great job of taking care of your staff, they will be sufficiently

Charlotte Carpenter

LOL

motivated to take care of your customers. In a world of heavy handed corporate demands and threatened layoffs, who wouldn't work their rear end off to keep a job where they actually felt appreciated? I guess it is a bit of a conundrum, but if managers make the employee first in their mind, then the customer really does come first in the end.

Craig Kitch works with managers to reduce conflict and improve communication so that everyone can stay focused on their jobs. He began his professional life as a broadcaster, where he learned the power of the spoken word. He took those skills with him into the hospitality industry where he had a very successful career for over 20 years. Working in management, Craig developed the skills necessary to pull teams of people together and lead them to accomplish ambitious goals. He eventually became a "turn around specialist", using those skills to remedy problematic properties.

Today Craig runs his own business, Kitch and Associates, and is dedicated to improving the lives of managers. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Greater Nashville Hotel and Lodging Association and he is President of the National Speakers Association for the State of Tennessee. For more information go to www.CraigKitch.com or call 615-378-0120.



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