

DATA ON THE RUN

> Tired of missing your daughter's soccer game? Wish you could sneak off to the gym for an hour during the workday? Technology can help you be two places at once. Sound like too much multi-tasking? In fact, by empowering business owners to confidently step away from the business, these tools and resources actually promote better work-life balance and allow small business owners to maintain 24/7 productivity and security without 24/7 hours at work.

Put Your Data in the Cloud

Many florists are still storing critically important documents, including payroll, tax information and marketing plans on a desktop, creaky hard drive or dusty server beneath a desk. If a natural disaster strikes, your laptop and drives are stolen or your desktop dies, your data will be gone, too, unless it's in the cloud.

The cloud is a redundant server, managed by data center experts, that you access online. With cloud storage, your data is safe from fire, floods and tornados, secure from theft and accessible from anywhere, anytime you need it. When you update your spreadsheet on the road, the data syncs immediately, so that your manager back home has instant access to the same information.

For business data, ask your point-of-sale provider about their cloud-storage options. For regular backups and personal data, including Microsoft Word and Excel files, as well as photos, etc., consider the following free services:

- Dropbox.com provides users with 2 GB of complimentary space. Users

simply need an email to sign up. If you want to give your employees individual accounts, get 1 TB (about 220 million pages of text) of cloud storage for five users at \$795 a year; \$125 a year per additional user.

- Google Drive (drive.google.com) provides 5 GB of free storage per single account. For \$5 a month or \$50 a year, you can gain access to Google Apps, the company's suite of business productivity tools. Check out more here: www.google.com/enterprise/apps/business
- Microsoft has a comparable service in Skydrive (<http://skydrive.live.com>), which offers 7 GB free cloud storage for single accounts (more if you buy the Microsoft Office 365).

Broadband Everywhere

If the constant, fast and reliable Internet connectivity required to do cloud computing isn't in the cards, consider business-class cable or fiber optic since these come with Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that guarantee how fast the vendor responds and gets service back up and running. (Four hours is the typical SLA response.)

Expect to pay about \$100 a month and up for at least a 15 Mbps or faster connection. That's 10 times faster than a T1 line, which usually costs hundreds per month.

When you're on the road, a Wi-Fi (some call it Mi-Fi) or hotspot card allows you to share a data connection with several devices, for around \$40 a month for about 4 GB of monthly data. That's plenty if you travel a few times a month and don't watch too many videos, which can be real data hogs. For an additional \$20 a month, you can turn your smartphone into a hotspot and share its data with your laptop or other mobile devices.

Going Mobile

Speaking of smartphones, if you don't have one, get one, since more than half your customers are using them to find or call your shop and, who knows, even order flowers on the spot.



The market is flooded with choices but there are really only two platforms: Apple iPhones or devices running Google's Android.

When pressed to choose between the two, consider the following issues:

Device choice. Apple offers only iPhones while Android features plenty of models, the most-talked about of late is Samsung Galaxy S4, set to be released in late April. Although choice is good, managing different types of devices can be a challenge. Apple also has a proven history of providing regular updates to its devices; Android does not.

Security. Apple iOS is a closed system. Android's system is open. Although "open" may sound good, from a security perspective, it's a serious problem. Apple vets apps submitted to its app store while Google does not. In addition, malware is a growing problem with Android (search Android malware 2013).

Champion for Windows Phone? Or Blackberry 10? I love them, too, but we have to consider marketshare as well, and Apple and Android are tops. We'll check back on these two in a year. And speaking of marketshare, the tablets to consider are Apple's iPad; from Android, the ones I'd recommend are Samsung's Galaxy Tab or Asus Transformer Pad. 📱

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HAPPENIN' APPS

You've got your mobile device, now get the best apps to help you be productive away from the business. Go to www.safnow.org/moreonline.

Cloud Covering

Still have questions or want to learn more? Be sure to check out the upcoming **SAF Webinar "Living and Working in the Cloud, and the Latest Mobile Tools**, 2-3 pm on May 21. Go to www.safnow.org/webinars to register.