LME Services

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8 Steps to a Modern Work Process

Let me start by saying that our aim at LME Services is to use our expertise to help you accomplish your goals. It may sound cliché, but that goal is what sets us apart from the competition. While other IT and Online Marketing companies use their expertise to make money OFF you, we try to make money FOR you. Our "value proposition" isn't to sell the hardware and software with the best margins, it's to provide something that's hard to find these days, **reliable access to experts**. My father, Leon, started this company over 20 years ago to help people navigate the tech sphere and, while the landscape has changed, that goal hasn't. We are a group that likes to sit down and review the key technological aspects of your business with you because IT needs to make sense. When you understand what we do, why we are doing it and how your competition is using these 8 tools to surpass you, then you're ready to get started. Because every businesses needs are unique, the information in each of these 8 areas has to be broad. Our goal is merely to make you aware of them and have you ask yourself, could we be doing it better?

"IT may seem scary but its goal is simply to prepare you for success by custom-fitting the best available technological tools to your business."

Thanks for reading,

Joe Engelking
LME Services

What's inside

1. Reliable Communication

First and foremost, any stable modern business needs to have a constant and reliable communication line to their clients, suppliers and employees. 15 years ago that meant phone lines but today internet drives the bus. The internet provides access to data, email, news, your employees, projects, heck even your phones are using the internet (VOIP anyone?). So let's think about this, if the internet is your most important line of communication and your means of access to everything important that runs your business, shouldn't a reliable internet connection be a major point of emphasis? Whether your internet connection is down for 5 minutes or a week, we are talking about impeded productivity, or "downtime". So how do we avoid downtime, I'm glad you asked.

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Points of Emphasis

- "Internet drives the bus"
- Do cabling right the first time
- Pick the right networking equipment

What's covered in this section

1A—Reliable Network Infrastructure

When you have a properly configured network infrastructure in place you can expect 99.99% uptime and when we say "reliable infrastructure" we mean 3 core things, 1) the thing that provides your internet access (the modem), 2) the thing that protects that internet access (the router/firewall) and 3) the things that connects all your employees to the internet (switches, wireless devices, Ethernet and cabling).

The Modem – Modems are typically a very reliable piece of hardware and can be left untouched. Some modems come with built in router functions that can causes issues when a separate firewall gets plugged into it but, for the most part, a modem supplies you with internet and can be left alone. If you're reading this however and you suspect that your modem may be the cause of your internet issues then the fix is typically quite simple, call you're ISP and tell them you want a new one. If they fight with you and say the modem is fine, simply tell them "No, it isn't and no matter what your diagnostics say I want a replacement". While you are at it, ask if they have a faster internet connection available in your area and weigh the cost increase to increase in production (see Section 5B for more on internet speeds).

Router/Firewall – (**Note:** routers and firewalls are basically the same thing, the term firewall typically describes a router that has more advanced features). Routers can be a little more complicated than modems. There are a lot of different brands to choose from with a whole assortment of models that offer anything from wireless and VPN to NAT and advanced routing so if you have an office with a lot of servers and security concerns you are going to need help picking the right one. An improperly configured firewall causes internet connection issues, opens you up to hackers and leaves you vulnerable to negative dings in security audits (especially those needing HIPAA compliance). Simple offices without servers or advanced routing may be able to just plug in a router and work but when you start trying to define what exactly User A can do relative to User B and what can come in but not out, you need to choose the right brand, the right functionality and right expert to manage it

Network Switches – Network switches are those intimidating blinking devices that seem to have a thousand cables running in and out of them. The goal of these devices is to turn your one internet connection into as many as you want, quite simply a 24 port switch means you can connect 24 devices to your network. Switches are quite simple at their core and allow you to easily connect a multitude of devices to your network.

Wireless Connections - Wireless technology enables you to be connected to the internet without needing a cable. More and more this technology is replacing the need to have CAT5 Ethernet cables running to every office. Picking the right wireless devices is important though, because cheap wireless AP's can mean weak single strength, dead spots and constant drops in connection. It should be noted that some routers come with wireless built in so make sure you don't have multiple routers plugged into your network at once as this almost always cause's issues. So instead of buying a Wireless Router buy a Wireless Access Points, these devices remove all the advanced routing features and make supplying wireless simple.

Wired Connection- Having a properly cabled office is important because CAT5 cabling provides more connection reliability that wireless. With wired

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Points of Emphasis

- Get a UPS or surge protector for important machines
- All companies need a centrally managed file location
- Look into secondary internet costs

What's covered in this section

Wired Connections – Having a properly cabled office is important because CAT5 cabling provides more connection reliability that wireless. With wired connections you don't have to worry about signal interference, dropped packets or dead zones. Having a properly labeled and diagramed patch panel makes managing your connections easier and allows for easy diagnosis of network issues. Going cheap on cabling will cause issues down the line as knowing exactly where a cables running and having it setup correctly the first time means wasting less time fixing issues in the future.

1B - Internet Redundancy

There are a multitude of options in this arena but it all boils down to 2 main solutions, the Cloud or a local server. Every staff needs a properly structured place to store and access data because time and money are wasted when your staff has to hunt for data. Time wasted searching, restoring and re-creating ads up to hours and ultimately days that can be easily saved when a properly organized system is in place. Do you want to be the company with all its files scattered from computer to computer or the one with a neatly organized file cabinet? (**Note:** This mystical thing called "the cloud" is really just a server in somebody else's office that you are paying rent to instead of buying your own)

1C—Backup Power

If constant power is an issue then look no further than backup power generators. Whether its 30 minute battery or fuel driven generator, backup processes can be put in place that can allow for up to 48 hours of power while your connection is down. Again, factor your cost to the amount of money lost in emergencies.

2. Centralized Data Storage

There are a multitude of options in this arena but it all boils down to 2 main solutions, the Cloud or a local server. Every staff needs a properly structured place to store and access data because time and money are wasted when your staff has to hunt for data. Time wasted searching, restoring and re-creating ads up to hours and ultimately days that can be easily saved when a properly organized system is in place. Do you want to be the company with all its files scattered from computer to computer or the one with a neatly organized file cabinet? (**Note:** This mystical thing called "the cloud" is really just a server in somebody else's office that you are paying rent to instead of buying your own)

2A - A Local Data Server

There are a multitude of options in this arena but it all boils down to 2 main solutions, the Cloud or a local server. Every staff needs a properly structured place to store and access data because time and money are wasted when your staff has to hunt for data. Time wasted searching, restoring and re-creating ads up to hours and ultimately days that can be easily saved when a properly organized system is in place. Do you want to be the company with all its files scattered from computer to computer or the one with a neatly organized file cabinet? (**Note:** This mystical thing called "the cloud" is really just a server in somebody else's office that you are paying rent to instead of buying your own)

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Points of Emphasis

- Servers are a big up front cost but cloud costs more long term
- Choosing the right CRM means choosing your needs

2A—Local Server Options

A computer – A computer can store data just as well as a server only it lacks the advanced features that you will see listed below. For small, simple offices a computer with a managed folder structure can work just as well as a server and can allow multiple users to access and update data in a centralized place.

Server – (Windows, MAC, LINUX, etc.) Servers are the standard for file storage because they are faster, more reliable and better suited to handle the vast amount of traffic that is going to be coming its way. You think your computer is slow now, wait until you have 20 other people trying to access it. Servers have a wide array of functions that separate it from PC's and make it the ideal solution for larger offices. PC's cannot create domains or user accounts, easily tie devices together and are quite frankly not built to handle the high workload demanded by a larger staff.

NAS – (Network Attached Storage devices – Seagate drives, Drobos, thumb drives, etc.) – You have to be careful with keeping all of your data on a NAS because if that device breaks, disappears or in any way is disrupted than your entire file base is gone. NAS' can be used as centralized storage device but are recommended only is very specific situations and if a computer or server isn't cost effective.

3. Customer Relationship Management

Having a properly configured approach to managing your company's business interactions makes the difference between a happy client and a lost client. There are a host of CRMs with a multitude of varying options that can amount to way more or way less than you need. The key to managing customers and providing ease for staff is to choose the CRM with the features that are most important to your interaction with clients. Breaking up client information into multiple systems creates wasted time and increased frustration so at the outset you need to identify which CRM features are the most important and then let LME help pick the best tool for you.

What's covered in this section

The Conversations – Your email can be managed any number of ways, what matters is, how do you want to be able to sort and control all of that communication? Do you want staff to share emails, contacts and calendars or do you want your staff to have independence and privacy? Is it important for you to be able to easily sort through all the communication you have had with a client? What information needs to be gathered about your conversations with your clients?

Clients– The second and most important category is how do you want to store, update and access all the data you have on your clients? CRM's allow you to keep as much or as little information as you care to input. Are you a small company that needs a spreadsheet or simple database or are you a company that needs instant access to all of a client's history? When you decide how much information you need to have stored on clients and how that information needs to be accessed, then it comes down to implementation and process.

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Points of Emphasis

- Backup the important data
- Test Quarterly
- Ask yourself "What happens if X stopped working"
- If you plan on working remotely, pick the right computer

What's covered in this section

4. Data Redundancy

If your server/cloud/laptop/PC were to suddenly crash and be devoid of all the work and information you have stored on it, what would you do? Do you have someone to call? How long can you afford to have your data access down? Do you have a plan/product/solution in place? If you have a backup procedure in place, is someone testing it to ensure it works? The backup report may say things are fine but do you know that for sure? These are the questions that, when answered, will save you when something catastrophic takes place. Unlike the slow drain of a faulty PC or a poor work process, a dead server with no backup can leave you crippled and unable to walk again. The key to avoiding a catastrophe is to follow a simple process

Backup – If you don't have a backup plan in place, get one. Carbonite or Crashplan works for fine for backing up data on a PCs or laptops. With servers you probably need a more heavy duty program like Acronis, AppAssure or Symantec. When you know what hits the fan, you need a process in place that will allow you to restore the applications, settings, configurations and data that are integral to your business. So diagnose what is important and back it up.

Test the backup – Once you have a solution in place, do test restores every quarter. I and every other tech have dealt with backup programs that have big green check marks that say the backup is successful but when a restore is run there are all types of issues. Being emailed about the status of your backups is important, but testing to make sure it's working, is even more important.

Have a plan – Now that your devices are backed up and confirmed to be working, ask yourself how you will work if devices A, B or C go down. What happens if your mail server goes down? What happens if your modem goes down (we covered this already so I'm sure you've got a backup internet line). The key is to ask, what would happen if this went down and how could we work around it. Keep data backed up on another server, have spare devices, route email through a smart host, whatever it takes. There are solutions for all these issues and most of them are budget-friendly.

5. Anywhere Access

This one has become very important over the last several years because most, if not all, systems need be accessed from anywhere. So the question becomes, what do you need constant access to and how do you want that access to perform. Some programs or apps require a lot of information to be passed back and forth, so in order to reduce lag you need make sure the devices (the one at the office and one you are using to access the office) are built with remote capabilities in mind.

Operating System – Windows or MAC? These are your two options and quite frankly, it comes down to your personality for than it doesn't the machine as they have more things in common that they do apart. People will argue both for and against both but to keep things simple and avoid choosing sides take a look at this brief article and let that help you choose what your prefer. What's-the-difference-between-a-mac-and-pc

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Points of Emphasis

- Pick the right hardware or suffer from lag and delays
- Look for internet speeds of at least 10MBPS download
- If your not represented online, your falling behind

5— Anywhere Access

The Hardware– After you have chosen the operating system you are comfortable with you need to choose the right hardware. There is the **processor** (you don't want the lowest option but you also probably don't need the high end), **RAM** (at least 4GB, but 8 to 16 is ideal), the **hard drive** (SSD's are faster and have lowered in price), **hard drive space** (at least 250GB, and if you have a lot of pictures and music stored then you want at least 1TB) and a **video card** (the built in video card is fine unless you want to have multiple monitors, in that case check the specs to confirm how many monitors the video card can handle).

Internet Speeds – If you plan on spending much time working remotely than you need to make sure you are using a speedy internet connection. Whether it is a remote application like LogMeIn or TeamViewer or an RDP or VPN that takes you directly to a server on your office network, slow internet speeds mean clicking and waiting. Make sure to ask your Internet Provider what kind of speeds they offer and aim for the speed in excess of 15 mbps (megabits per second) download and 2 mbps upload. Anything below 15 mbps down and you may not like the results.

6. Online Presence

In order to grow people need to be able to find your products or services online. Networking and print media are important but the number one resource consumers use to locate what they need is the internet. The misconception is that a website alone will suffice but what you really need to do is a comprehensive online presence. What good is a website if traffic isn't being driven to it? Market across as many platforms as you can and increase your presence.

What's covered in this section

Website – You need to have a place that allows you to display exactly who you are and what you do. A website allows you to control the look and information being provided about you. When people hear about you, this is your one chance to make an impression and make the sale without having to say a word. Your goal needs to be turning each visitor of your site into a conversion. When traffic gets driven to your website it either makes a sale or it doesn't.

Social Media Sites– Depending on what industry you are in, you need to put yourself in its corresponding sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, google+, Yelp, Angie's List, etc.) The more places you're in the better because every one of these sites increases your SEO and visibility. **The more places you can be found means more leads and more leads mean more conversions, it's that simple.**

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Points of Emphasis

- An online presence isn't helping unless your driving traffic
- There are a lot of online marketing tools, so picking the right one is key
- Making money is cool

What's covered in this section

7. Online Marketing

The goal of an online presence is to build a brand that converts customers. In order to make your website and online presence successful you need a sales funnel designed to create and then convert leads.

Pull Information– Step 1: Have pop ups from services like LeadPages ask visitors to join a newsletter, sign up for a services or download free information. Get contact information anyway you can, from as many people as you can. This information becomes leads and when you have a lead generation plan in place then you're ready to move them to step 2.

Direct Marketing – Step 2: Send out a newsletter, give things away, provide benefit; it doesn't matter how, just keep in front of them. Call, email, whatever. Turn those leads into sales. MailChimp, Constant Contact, a salesman, a mailer, coupons, anything. The more you reach out to them, the more chance you'll convert. Some people fear that this is will come off as spammy but if you are providing information and value to these leads then your more than that and besides, do nothing isn't any better.

Paid Traffic – Referrals and organic reach is nice because its free but paid traffic is even better. If you have system in place that works, paid traffic is the jet fuel. Paid Traffic is great because for as little as 5 dollars a day you can be supplied with a recurring source of fresh leads. Step 1 and 2 are important but they don't mean anything until you start really getting in front of people and the key to that is to pick the right online marketing tool for your demographics. Google AdWords is great for some while Facebook Ads work better for others. The key is to start with a reasonable budget on a system, get familiar with it, test strategies and then finding the messaging that gets you the best results. Once you have the tool that works best, ramp up your online marketing dollars until you find the ROI threshold and BOOM, you have a sales funnel. This area is changing almost daily and is one of the hardest to keep up on but conversely is the most lucrative. This system has worked for us and is probably why you're reading this "How to".

8. Make Money

This one has become This is my favorite step. Go through each of these steps either by yourself or with us and you will have put your business in place to succeed. Some of these items are simple and some are quite advanced. Take the time to learn, ask questions, test and research new options because with a solid technical work process and online presence you will save time and make money. This isn't a gimmick or pitch this is proven, so stop delaying. very mind.