

Tech Talk



— Tom Warfield

Valentine's Day

There were actually as many as seven different Saints named Valentine, and there is some disagreement about who the "original" one was.

The Feast of St. Valentine was established in 496 A.D. The association of February 14th with romantic love began with Chaucer in the 14th century.

Today, we celebrate with flowers, cards, and gifts. Check out these statistics from the [Society of American Florists](#), showing projected sales and the percent increase over last year!

- Greeting cards: \$823 million, +4.9%
- Candy: \$2.6 billion, +5.1%
- Jewelry: \$1.5 billion, +11.3%
- Flowers: \$1.6 billion, +16.8%
- Dining out: \$8.8 billion, +3.8%
- Clothing/lingerie: \$1.2 billion, +3.4%
- Romantic getaways: \$2.2 billion+5.7%



Focus on Multi-Tasking

In computer lingo, the term "thrashing" means a lot of reading and writing, to and from the hard disk. This usually happens when the system is overloaded, trying to do too many things at once without enough resources. When a computer is given two tasks at the same time, the operating system is responsible for dividing up the work so that both tasks can be accomplished.

Computer scientists have come up with different strategies for doing this. One common strategy is to divide up the computing time into slices, giving a slice first to one task, and then to the other. One task runs for a while, then pauses, and control is passed to the other task. This is known as "task-switching". If both tasks require large amounts of random-access memory (RAM), then the data must be copied back and forth

from the hard disk whenever a task switch happens, and this causes thrashing.

It is much less of a problem these days.

Over time, there have been both software and hardware advances. Computers now commonly have multiple central processing units (CPUs), which makes them capable of actually executing different programs at the same time (although managing this kind of parallel architecture presents its own challenges). Software developers usually try to minimize or optimize memory usage in the programs they write. And memory has gotten much cheaper than it used to be, so we can afford to buy computers with large amounts of RAM.

Unfortunately, the human brain has not kept pace with advances in computer technology. We don't have the luxury of adding more

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Just Make a Work Plan

"Just put all of your assignments into a workplan. They will all fit." In the 1980's, that's the advice one of my co-workers got when she tried to explain to management why she could not finish the work in the time allotted. Management was sure that each month had 20 workdays, and each day had 8 hours. At that time, all projects were estimated based on those 2 assumptions. If you were off schedule, it was your problem and overtime was expected.

We can now create more realistic workplans. We can use a number of sources to gather information about outside events that can have an impact. Let's check our schedule for this month, considering this extra information.

When we first look at February, we notice that it has 20 weekdays. This should leave everyone 4 Saturdays and 4 Sundays for personal time. But wait. The calendar has Monday, February 21st flagged. Does your company observe

Presidents Day? Do any of your customers or vendors observe it? If schools are closed in your area, will people need to take the day off or bring their children to work?

Now let's notice the wording on Monday February 14th. How much work do you really expect anyone to do on Valentine's Day? The bigger your office, the more you should expect bouquet deliveries. You may also need to expect discussions on engagement rings, weddings, and anniversaries. Valentine's Day may even extend into the 15th, since some may celebrate on that night rather than the weekend.

February has a number of major sporting events. The football season ends with the Super Bowl on the 6th. Basketball and hockey are in full swing. NASCAR starts in Daytona. Golf, tennis and other sports are still

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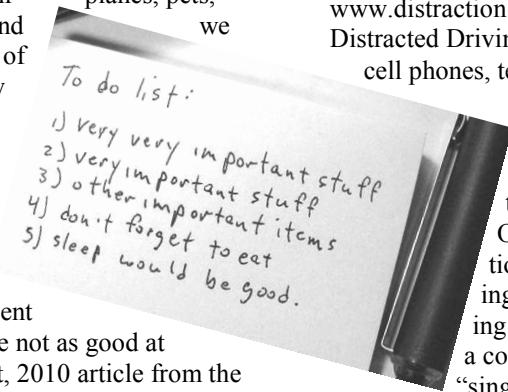
Focus on Multi-Tasking

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CPUs and more memory to our brains – at least not yet! And although it is quite powerful and complex, there is some question as to how well the human brain is able to effectively execute multiple processes at the same time.

Consider the Cave Man. Hunter-gatherers only had to worry about two things: hunting and gathering. Or maybe three things – hunting, gathering, and avoiding being eaten by predators. Throughout history, up until the past 100 years or so, we never lived in an environment with so many different attention-grabbing stimuli. But today, we are on information overload. Advertisements, TV, billboards, radio, cell phones, texting, email, work, kids, neighbors, traffic, airplanes, pets, we either try to satisfy, or try to avoid, all of the competing demands. This is a new phenomenon, and as a species, we haven't had time to evolve.

Many people believe they are good at multi-tasking. They can talk on the telephone, cook a meal, watch TV, check email, and hold a conversation all at the same time. But recent scientific research indicates that we are not as good at multi-tasking as we think. An August, 2010 article from the BBC describes multi-tasking “a good way to do several things badly”, and cites research from the University of California, Stanford, and Cambridge, with these findings:



- Distraction makes people work faster but produce less.
- Students took 40% longer to solve math problems - and suffered more stress - when forced to multi-task.
- The more we multi-task, the less we are able to focus properly on just one thing.
- While some familiar tasks are easier to do simultaneously, genuine high-level multi-tasking is impossible in humans.
- Some people are better than others at switching rapidly between tasks – in particular, women are better at it than men.

Perhaps the most dangerous manifestation of ineffective multi-tasking is distracted driving. If you have any doubt about this, watch the video: just search YouTube for “Bus Driver Texting Crash”. No one was hurt, at least not in this incident. The driver received a 30-day sentence for reckless driving. But clearly the consequences can be much worse. According to www.distracted.gov, the Official US Government Website for Distracted Driving, 5500 people were killed in 2009 because of cell phones, texting, or other distractions.

Certain activities, such as driving, texting, and writing computer programs, require constant, focused attention. These have to be “single-threaded”, and distractions need to be avoided. Other activities require less than our full attention. Maybe it is worth doing some experimenting on your own. If you are in the habit of reading email while listening to the radio while having a conversation, try making one day a week your “single-tasking” day. Force yourself to focus on one thing at a time, and see for yourself whether you have been more productive, or less stressed out, by the end of the day.

Just Make a Work Plan

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holding events. How many plays are reviewed over your office network, or at least during work hours?

Weather is major news in February. It reminds us of the impacts that weather can have. How often does the weather cause people to come in late, leave early, or work from home? How many children have to be brought to the office?

THE LOVE BUG

— Elizabeth Taylor

Do you remember looking in your inbox a little over a decade ago, and seeing I LOVE YOU? I do—it was in my first job out of college, and I remember my inbox being filled with the Love Letter That Wasn't.

Back in May of 2000, the infamous “Love Bug” affected more than 55 million computers and caused over \$10 billion in damage. The alleged 24 year old mastermind, Onel de Guzman, evaded prosecution, because at that time the Philippines did not have any laws against such activity.

With the sophisticated spam blockers and anti-malware programs we have now, it is easy to forget about the chain letters that used to run rampant through our inboxes. But the truth is, without the most recent malware and virus definitions in place, anyone could be at risk.

As our way of showing our love for our customers, we want to offer you a free virus and malware screening. Please call us today at 713-344-1618 to schedule your screening and *share the love!*

“Love at First Site” for your business — Introducing Microsoft Small Business Server 2011

— Bob Jenner

The latest version of Microsoft Small Business Server is SBS 2011, and it's a real winner. Designed for businesses of up to 75 users, SBS has a lot to offer in its latest release.

SBS 2011 is based on Windows Server 2008 R2, the latest version of Microsoft's Windows Server. It allows you to take full advantage of advances in hardware design for a faster and more stable system. With the SBS extensions for Windows 2008 Server R2, you will have one easy-to-use console for all your day-to-day administrative tasks. No more “hunting around” for the right tools.

Included with SBS 2011, Microsoft Exchange 2010 is a great enhancement over Exchange 2003 or 2007. Accessing Microsoft Exchange/Outlook email from a web browser is now done using “Outlook Web App”. It looks, feels, and more importantly acts much more like the Outlook desktop application. You have full access to all your email, personal folders, public folders, calendar and tasks. It's almost like having Outlook in your pocket, to take securely anywhere you go!

SharePoint Foundation Services 2010 is also integrated into SBS2011. This latest version of SharePoint provides a platform for sharing all kinds of content with your users, customers and vendors. SharePoint Foundation Services makes collaborating on projects easier, no matter where you are. With its easy to use interface, and familiar Microsoft Office like experience, SharePoint extends your network resources, allowing you to share and collaborate on documents using a just a web browser.

SBS 2011 Remote Web Access: This is the big one for many of our clients. SBS 2011 comes with built-in secure remote access, allowing you to access your computer from home or while traveling with just a web browser. There are no additional software requirements or monthly fees. If you are on the road, and you left an important file on your network at the office, no problem! Just log into SBS Remote Web Access and retrieve it. Remote Web Access provides secure access to your desktop, your email, and your files from virtually anywhere.

In addition to the standard edition of Microsoft Small Business Server 2011, there are two additional versions. Microsoft SBS 2011 Essentials and Microsoft SBS 2011 Premium Add-On. SCS 2011 Premium Add-On adds a second server license, as well as licensing for Microsoft SQL server 2008 R2. If your business has 75 or fewer employees, and your business applications require Microsoft SQL, the Premium Add-On may be a compelling option for you. The second Windows 2008 R2 server license included with SBS 2011 Premium can be used for a second physical server or a virtual server. Many of our clients use a single larger server, and create a second virtual Windows server on the same

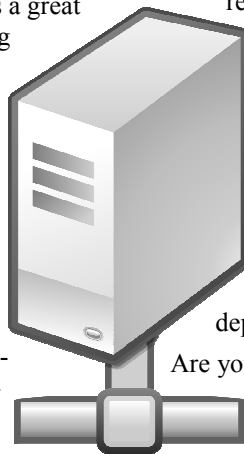
hardware. This saves in hardware cost, power consumption, and cooling costs!

Microsoft SBS 2011 Essentials is a brand new edition, which is due to be released in the coming months. This limited edition system includes the same Windows 2008 R2 server as the standard edition (for keeping your information on your premises). But it also adds “cloud-based” options for Exchange Email, SharePoint, CRM, and other offerings from a variety of cloud services providers. The Essentials Server supports up to 25 users. We will be keeping our eye on this one to see what direction Microsoft is taking the Small Business Market for information systems delivery.

What are cloud-based services, you ask?

These are services delivered to you via the Internet, usually with no on-site hardware component. With cloud based services, you pay for access to the services and the benefit those services provide, not the physical infrastructure that drives them. Most of our clients are already using email filtering, which is an example of cloud services. We will have a more in-depth discussion of this in the near future so Stay Tuned!

Are your current computers five or more years old? Would you like to take advantage of these new and exciting technologies for your business? Why not give us a call for a free technology review at 713-344-1618. There is no cost or obligation. We will come to your site, go over all of your current technology, and provide a written review with recommendations. No hassle, Guaranteed!





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Inquiring Minds...

— Scott Bernstein

What Business Owners Really Want from a Service Provider

We all want clients/customers. We make our pitch, tell them how great we are, and then what? Do we hit the mark? Do we get the sale? It depends. Whose needs are we addressing? The customer's needs, or our own?

I recently was at a marketing conference for IT companies. The organizer brought in a panel of eight non-IT business owners, and asked members of the audience to volunteer to give their “elevator speech”. There were quite a few takers, who all tried to get the business owners interested in their services.

After all the presentations were done, each business owner was asked to rate the presentations and make comments. Their thoughts can apply to anyone looking to sell something, not just IT.

- 1. The concept of “Partnering” or “long-term relationships” is of no interest to them.** They felt it would be too much work to establish that.
- 2. Enthusiasm matters.** Those that did not have it were thought to not be passionate about what they had to say or sell.
- 3. After a while, all messages start to sound the same.** We need to differentiate ourselves in order to stand out.
- 4. Cost is NOT the first or even second issue.** Get the solution resolved. If cost came up early, it was a turn-off.
- 5. What matters most** is speed of response and resolution of the issues.
- 6. Don't use technical terms** (this seems so obvious but it wasn't). IT (see, there is one now) has so many acronyms it can make your head turn. Don't use them.
- 7. Use common, everyday analogies** to make your point. The best presentation compared getting your computer fixed to getting a car serviced. It was easy for everyone to understand. Who hasn't taken a car in for maintenance and repairs?

This demonstration opened up the eyes of many of the IT people in the room. But it applies to everyone.

So, how good is your elevator speech? Are you addressing your needs, or the needs of business owners? Are you able to communicate how you are different from your competition? Are you able to convince them that the status quo (our biggest competitor) is no longer adequate?

Keep these pointers in mind the next time you are called on to do a presentation for a potential client. Find a friend or relative who can help as a practice audience. And practice!

Happy Valentine's Day!

We ♥ Our Customers!

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