

10 Trends That Will Affect Your Office Now and in the Future

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Trend #2 Disaster Planning and Recovery

There's nothing like a few natural disasters to awaken businesses and all sorts of organizations from their slumber regarding disaster planning and recovery. Events of the past year and stretching back to 9/11 prove once and for all that it can indeed happen here.

Small businesses are especially vulnerable to disaster with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reporting that about 40 percent of small businesses don't reopen after a major disaster. This can have a farreaching effect in a community considering that the U.S. Small Business Administration reports independent businesses provide most of the jobs in a local economy.

As horrible and devastating as recent events have been, the positive effect is that disaster planning and recovery has moved from a back-burner agenda item to a top-of-the-list item. After all, the only way organizations can expect to get back to business as usual following a disaster is by creating contingency plans for events that hopefully will never happen.

But just in case, remember the four key facts in disaster planning:

- * Disasters will occur.
- * Make a plan before the disaster hits.
- * React with urgency, but don't panic.
- * Ride it out.

-Scott Cullen, managing editor, OfficeSOLUTIONS

Trend #3 - The Wireless Workforce

Welcome to the wireless world. In case you haven't noticed, it's here and now, and if you're not part of it already, you're soon going to be.

Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity), wireless networks, and wireless devices such as cell phones, PDAs, BlackBerries, GPS (Global Position Systems) are making it easier for workers to connect inside and outside of the office, minus the wires and cables.

Last year, the market research company META Group estimated that some 90 percent of organizations had workers with some form of mobile or remote work requirement, with that number rising to more than 95 percent in 3006. And when you work remotely, you need to be connected.

Wireless, particularly Wi-Fi, offers multiple benefits, not the least of which is speed. It's faster than DSL or cable connections and many times faster than dial-up. Convenience is another benefit. Imagine being able to carry your laptop all around your office or wherever you are without losing your Internet connection. How convenient is that?

Need more evidence about the wireless revolution? Best Buy is offering ClearWire Corp.'s high-speed, wireless Internet access service to new computer buyers in select markets, and Office Depot recently announced a new Wireless Office Service aimed at small and midsize businesses. That service allows businesses to centralize employee phone numbers (inoffice, cell phones, home office numbers) with one main number, providing customers with faster, easier access to anyone in the company. Plus, consider all the Wi-Fi hot spots sprouting up, from your local Starbucks to airport lounges, to bookstores-even some McDonalds restaurants-and it's clear that this is one trend that is changing how and where we conduct business as usual.

Trend #6 - The Greening of the American Office

More companies are going "green" and making their offices environmentally friendly. New "green" buildings combine modern design methods with environmentally conscious features that result in energy efficiencies.

Companies interested in going green can contact the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), which is a coalition of leaders from across the building industry working to promote environmentally safe, profitable, and clean buildings. The USGBC created Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). LEED's main focus is on sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality. According to the USGBC, the annual market for green building products and services was \$7 billion as of November 2005, representing a 37 percent growth rate from 2004.

Supplies manufacturers are doing their part by making environmentally friendly products. Today, offices can purchase products made from recycled materials, which also helps reduce energy consumption and protect the environment. These recycled items include copy paper, file folders, report covers, envelopes, shipping supplies, and writing pads, to name a few.

Meanwhile, the nonprofit sector is doing its part. Churches, schools, and other nonprofit organizations are recycling, thanks to programs such as Abitibi-Consolidated's Paper Retriever. The Houston, Texas-based company's recycling division offers this community-based recycling program in more than 2,0 metropolitan areas across North America.

Participating nonprofit offices that accept newspapers, magazines, catalogs, mail, envelopes, and fax, copy, and colored paper receive money from Abitibi based on how much they collect. Abitibi provides the trash bins free of charge, and community members are encouraged to deposit items in the bins.

The number of offices recycling printer cartridges and cell phones is also on the rise. Green Office Recycling, based in Denver, Colo., has been buying office items from schools, businesses, and clubs since 1995. In addition, there are plenty of businesses that refill printer cartridges, so individuals and businesses don't have to buy new ones.

The green office trend shows no sign of abating, especially since going green allows offices to save some greenbacks in addition to protecting the environment and their employees. And for those companies supplying products and services to those organizations, the green office trend is an opportunity to make some green.

Trend #7 - Data and Information Security

HIPAA (Health Information Portability and Accountability Act), Sarbanes Oxley, and Gramm-Leach-Bliley are creating a new-found awareness of privacy and security within the business and private sector at least related to patient, client, and-by extension-employee financial information. Indeed, you can't visit a doctor's office these days without being handed a patient's bill of rights regarding what that doctor is doing to ensure your privacy. But all that legislation is just the tip of the iceberg, with concerns about identity theft, not to mention sensitive business information, businesses of all shapes, sizes, and disciplines are taking a closer look at how they protect company, employee, and client information.

A recent study, *The Global State of Information Security 2005*, jointly conducted by CIO magazine and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), found that just 87 percent of worldwide respondents had an information security strategy, while 24 percent are planning to create one in 2006. According to CIO, each year of the survey shows an incremental improvement in efforts to react to and prevent security incidents. However, the survey also shows what CIO editors call "a lack of focus on actions and strategies that would prevent these incidents in the first place. "

The CIO/PWC survey also reveals that 33 percent of all info security attacks originated from employees, and 28 percent came from exemployees and partners. As a result, some 88 percent

of respondents are monitoring employees more closely or are planning to by the end of the year. Big Brother is indeed watching and, as scary as this sounds, maybe rightfully so.

As big a concern as information security has become, it's surprising to note that about one-fifth of the survey respondents-information executives-have no idea how much money their companies are budgeting for info security. Oddly enough, larger companies are the worst at tracking their spending in this area. According to the survey, about 40 percent of the 1,700 companies with \$5 billion or more in revenue don't know their information security budget.

The good news from the study is that more companies are employing security executives (40 percent in 3005, compared to 31 percent in 3004). As a result, these companies are more focused on the integration between physical and information security than in the last two years.

Clearly, data and information security is a major trend that knows no boundaries when it comes to the size of an organization. It's only going to become more prevalent in the coming years.

Looking at the short term, let's wind up with a list of the top 10 strategic priorities for 3006 noted by CIO/PWC respondents:

- * disaster recovery/business continuity
- * employee awareness programs
- * data backup
- * overall information security strategy
- * network firewalls
- * centralized security information management system
- * periodic security audits
- * employee monitoring
- * security report monitoring
- * intellectual property protection.

Trend #8 - Open Platform: The Personalisation, Mobility, and True Integration of MFPs

As sure as death and taxes, in 2006, MFPs will have even more features, and we'll all have less time to use them. The key to success in the evermore complicated and competitive world of the office MFP is going to be making those features quickly accessible to everyone.

Going back to analog copier days, users walked up to the device, chose the number of sets, simplex or duplex, added maybe a staple or two, and hit Start. In 2006, users will be able to copy, print, scan, fax, Internet fax, route files to electronic content management systems and records

management software, and carry out complex workflow tasks involving OCR (optical character recognition), ICR (intelligent character recognition), metadata integration, and much more. The question is will users have the time and the ability to navigate through the maze of menus and submenus that are required to conduct this orchestra of document management capabilities?

The key to success lies with three words, open-platform architecture. Gone will be the days where each MFP was driven by proprietary firmware that made the touch screen interface rigid and virtually impossible to customize. Now, with open architecture built on the industry-standard Java protocol, the MFP can be customized with limitless possibilities.

Phase one, greater integration of third-party software applications into the touch screen, is here already, with software companies including eCopy, OmTool, NSi, and Ribstone already offering commercial-integrated applications working with open-platform MFPs.

Phase two will involve companies/enterprises customizing their new open-platform touch screen interface to their specific workflow needs. An easy application to visualize is a customized service kiosk device in, say, a financial institution or government department. These form-hungry environments will be able to do away with banks of folders filled with countless forms that generate waste and create confusion. Instead, customers will be able to go to the customized MFP, answer some simple questions, and have the forms they need instantly printed from the device's document archive.

Phase 3 will be the personalization of the MFP to every visitor. Think of it as MyCopier. In the same way that you can customize your ISP home page with the weather in your area, your sports teams' results, your stock prices, and so forth, you'll be able to do the same thing with your document-handling needs.

Imagine being able to walk up to the office MFP, swipe your ID card, and then be faced with a document workflow device set up especially for you. The copy settings you use are all on the home screen, not hidden away deep in the complex menu system. Your personal fax and e-mail address book is instantly available and integrated with your PC's Outlook application; your scan-to-file system is at your fingertips; and your stored forms and standard letters are all sorted and easy to find.

Now take MyCopier to the next phase where you can swipe your ID card at any MFP in the building, or buildings in a large enterprise, and you have a truly mobile, personalized document portal designed to cater to the hectic information-handling needs of the 21st century.

Although this may sound like science fiction to some, there's no doubt that open platform will change the shape of the MFP forever.

Trend #10 - Out with Outsourcing

This may not be a trend pertinent to smaller offices, but it is a trend that is gaining favor in many larger organizations, according to a study released by Deloitte Consulting, LLP last spring.

The study, "Calling a Change in the Outsourcing Market," reveals that 70 percent of respondents reported negative outsourcing experiences, and 64 percent said they've brought some outsourced services back in-house.

Deloitte discovered that the initial rationale for outsourcing is now at odds with the subsequent experience. For example:

- * 70 percent of respondents said cost savings was a primary driver for outsourcing, yet 38 percent of those said they paid additional/hidden costs for services they believed were in the contract.

- * 57 percent outsourced to gain access to best practices and innovation, but 31 percent said that the vendors became complacent once the contracts were in place.

- * 22 percent outsourced to gain access to a higher-caliber labor force, yet 20 percent reported greater than expected vendor/employee turnover.

"Outsourcing vendors and companies may have conflicting objectives, putting at risk clients' desire for innovation, cost savings, and quality," says Ken Landis, senior strategy principal with Deloitte. "The structural advantages envisioned do not always translate into cheaper, better, or faster service. As a result, large companies are scrutinizing new outsourcing deals more closely, renegotiating existing agreements, and bringing functions back in-house with increasing frequency."

The study also cautions about bundling multiple services under a single vendor. Respondents complained that this practice made it difficult for them to discern unit costs and indicated suspicion about the savings because bundling makes it easier for vendors to "create illusionary cost savings."

Still Deloitte considers outsourcing a useful tool for areas such as product outsourcing, where tangible results can be measured, and in areas such as mail services when identified as a non-core function. But that said, issues regarding privacy and security are also taking their toll, and anecdotal evidence provided by certain mailing equipment providers reveals that the trend does indeed seem to be shifting towards moving some of these functions in-house because of privacy concerns.

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