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# 12 Quick Productivity Wins

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# 12 Quick Productivity WINS

Already lapsed on your New Year's resolutions? It's not too late. These quick IT fixes will make you and your department look good

**S**TOP US IF THIS STORY SOUNDS FAMILIAR. YOU'VE BEEN ASKED TO a) keep your infrastructure humming and b) come up with innovative ways to use technology to boost the bottom line. Meanwhile, your resources are stretched tighter than a \$2 string on a banjo and you spend so much time putting out fires you should be wearing a helmet and carrying a hose.

We feel your pain. So we talked to tech pros and came up with 12 ways to boost your productivity without investing tens of thousands of dollars or six months of your life.

Some tips you can implement right now. Others may take a few days or weeks to fully deploy but will pay off handsomely in the long run.

So what are you waiting for?

BY DAN TYNAN | ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL SLOAN

## 1 Stop Losing, Start Finding

You'd think IT pros would be naturals at managing files. But you'd be wrong, says Laura Leist, an organizational consultant and owner of Eliminate Chaos. Leist says she recently spent five days with the IT staff at a major hospital in Seattle, teaching them how to name files and put them in folders other than My Documents.

"I've spent many, many hours in conference rooms talking to companies that have no structure to their servers, no naming conventions for documents, and duplicate copies of documents because people in their organization don't know what someone else has created so they do it all over again," Leist explains.

At the workgroup level, the basic prescription is absurdly simple: Set up



find stuff? As Leist says, most people know they need to get their act together, but never seem to have the time. As a result, they waste a whole lot more of it.

## 2 Meet Less, Work More

For many organizations, "meeting" is a four-letter word. Although face-to-face sit-downs can't be avoided entirely, you can minimize the productivity drain, says Keith Carlson, CEO of Innotas, an on-demand app vendor.

"Meetings will always expand to fill the time allotted," he says. His fix? A lot less time. Have a clear idea of what you want meetings to accomplish, limit them to 30 minutes, and hold at least some of them on your feet. "It's amazing how productive you can be when you hold meetings standing up."

Patrick Sullivan, enterprise architect for the Chubb Group, says his group is

a common area on the network servers for storing documents. Get department heads to decide what should be stored there, who should be able to access what, and what the file-naming conventions should be.

Then install a search app such as Google Desktop or Microsoft's Windows Desktop Search to find files across local and mapped network drives — or, as an enterprise-class quick fix, deploy a search solution such as Search Appliance or ISYS:Web9 that can crawl the entire network ([infoworld.com/4724](http://infoworld.com/4724)).

Think about it: How much of your work life do you squander trying to

## Natural-Born Productivity Killers

EVERYBODY WANTS TO GET MORE BANG FOR THE BUCK FROM their workforce. But some common strategies for boosting production may actually lower it in the long run. Managers who adopt these strategies think they're helping, but they're really not. See if you recognize yourself (or your boss) among these productivity killers.

**The Slave Driver:** You've put vacations on hold, implemented pizza "parties" so people will work through dinner, and hinted that anyone who wants a promotion had better start camping in their cubicles on weekends. Productivity zooms — for a while. Then employees start leaving in droves, with your best people leaving first. A better idea, says Chaco Consulting's Rick Brenner, is to eliminate wasteful or unnecessary tasks. You'll be more productive, and voluntary turnover will drop.

**The Juggler:** Some organizations believe it's better to start

a lot of projects at the same time to achieve "parallelism," Brenner says. But high project count leads to productivity losses as people constantly switch gears. "We do better when we focus our resources," he says.

**The Techno-Fixer:** New IT automation tools may look all shiny, but you'd better make sure they're compatible with the processes and people you already have, warns Tom Bishop, CTO for enterprise software vendor BMC. "Rolling out a new IT automation tool without understanding how people will react to it is often a recipe for disaster," he says.

**The Hero:** Instantly fixing problems may be gratifying and earn you kudos, but it can backfire in the long run. "It is not always okay — or productive — to drop everything and solve any customer issue that comes up when it comes up," says the Forsythe Group's Chuck Kirchner. "It results in a reactive culture and creates long-term productivity issues." — D.T.

looking at wikis to minimize meetings and cut down on e-mail. Chubb's internal dev team, for example, is experimenting with Wiki Media — the same tool used to create the Wikipedia — to share ideas and collaborate on documentation as it codes. "The wiki technology lets our developers learn fun new skills while parlaying that into system documentation and new kinds of discussion groups," he says.

And when his group does hold meetings, Sullivan encourages employees to use a teleconferencing connection — even when they're sitting in an office down the hall.

"We might have a status meeting with 15 items on the agenda and you're 14th on the list," Sullivan says. "There's no need to sit through the whole meeting until we get to your item. You can use that time to do research or manage multiple tasks."

If you don't have a dedicated teleconferencing setup, a hosted Web conferencing solution such as Citrix GoToMeeting, Microsoft Office Live Meeting, or WebEx can save you time and expense. For example, for around \$40 a month you can hold meetings with as many as 10 remote participants using WebEx.

## Use IM (With Caution)

Instant messaging can avoid the delays associated with e-mail and the downtime of face-to-face or phone interactions — one reason why enterprise IM apps such as IBM Lotus Instant Messaging, Jabber, and Microsoft's Live Communications Server are really catching on.

A mid-2006 survey of 112 enterprises by the Radicati Group found that 71

percent use a sanctioned instant messaging application, and that employees spend an average of 16 percent of their day using IM. Radicati predicts enterprise IM traffic will grow from 2.1 billion messages per day in 2006 to 10.7 billion messages by 2010.

"IM is seeing strong uptake in the business world largely due to its immediacy of use," says Matt Anderson, principal analyst for Radicati. "In addition, IM's presence functionality makes it easy for co-workers to 'find' each other online, thus providing a much needed tool for group collaboration."

If you implement IM in the workplace, you need to take several precautions, says Chaco's Brenner. For one thing, IM falls under the same compliance rules as e-mail and other corporate communications, so care must be taken to preserve records and avoid revealing privileged information to outsiders. "If you're using IM without an IM SOX consultant, you're headed for trouble," Brenner says.

Enterprise-class IM systems come with that audit trail. Another reason to use them: The phishing and social engineering attacks that plague public IM systems are highly unlikely to touch an enterprise user in a closed loop system.

Used unwisely or too often, though, IM can sap your productivity. You'll

need to establish guidelines about how and when IM can be used, and encourage employees to make themselves unavailable when they need to bear down and meet deadlines.

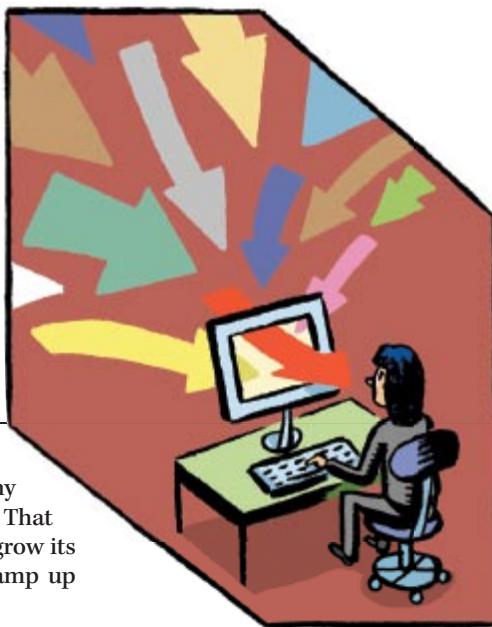
## Free Up Your Help Desk

Help desk techs spend a lot of time fixing the same obvious problems. The more no-brainer stuff you take off their plates, the more time they can spend on real dilemmas.

For example, every two weeks, Richard Casselberry, director of IT operations for networking vendor Enterasys, meets with his internal help desk department to review the questions they get and brainstorm solutions. One quick fix: Increase the number of incorrect passwords users are allowed before they're prevented from logging onto the network. By boosting failed attempts from 3 to 12, Enterasys was able to slash help desk calls for password resets without adversely affecting security.

Remote access products such as GoToMyPC and NetworkStreaming can help speed call resolution by giving techs secure remote access to customer systems. Kodak Dental, whose practice management and imaging software is used by more than 37,000 dental practices worldwide, uses an appliance from NetworkStreaming that enables clients to connect with techs instantly through the firewall. Users download a small remote applet — and log onto a secure Web page when they need help. Dennis Nelson, support systems analyst for the company, says the NetworkStreaming appli-





ance shrinks call times by 24 percent, saving the company \$5,000 a day in support costs. That has allowed Kodak Dental to grow its business without having to ramp up help desk personnel.

## 5 Get the News You Need

Want to cut down on e-mail and deploy a quick knowledge management solution at the same time? Then deploy an enterprise RSS app to deliver timely or essential information to employees. Apps such as Attensa Feed Server, KnowHow3, and NewsGator Enterprise Server (and its new hosted RSS service) allow you to set up and monitor news feeds.

RSS is more efficient than e-mail because recipients don't have to wade through a mass of junk e-mail to find it and corporate spam filters won't flag incoming RSS messages by mistake, says Rick Brenner, principal of Chaco Canyon Consulting. When you provision RSS feeds internally, they can help you get new hires up to speed fast — or quickly distribute security bulletins, facilities announcements, or interdepartmental memos.

Instead of asking employees to hunt for information on the Web, managers can use RSS to ensure the flow of knowledge throughout the organization. And because the feed can follow the employees as they move through the organization, there's less maintenance from an IT perspective, Brenner says.

"RSS also eliminates the need to keep copies of the same person's address on several subscription lists," Brenner adds. "So if someone changes their address for any reason, they won't have to notify anyone. And if someone moves

to a new role that requires a different set of subscriptions, they can take care of the changes without bothering the RSS publishers."

The caveats? Managing bandwidth from both a server and a user perspective. As with e-mail and instant messaging (see above), overusing RSS can result in a productivity drain, not a gain.

## 6 Get a Handle on Your Projects

Gerry Skipworth was busy all the time, but his firm's consulting business was losing money. So in 2002 he signed up with Innotas' Project Portfolio Management simply to find out where all his time was going. Then the vice president of IT services for systems integrator Compugen encouraged his staff to enter their data into Innotas Web app as well. The results weren't pretty.

"We were spending too much time meeting with vendors and not enough time racking up billable hours," Skipworth says. "We didn't need a consultant, a project manager, and a software architect attending every client presentation. But before we could set limits, we needed to see where our time was going."

PPM is all about visibility. "IT managers need to know they have the right people working on the right projects, and that their time is optimized," says Innotas' Carlson. "We give them visibility into all this information in one place."

Skipworth says it took about two weeks to get running on the Web-based PPM, mostly gathering and entering data, and cost from \$15 to \$40 a month per seat. Now some 250 Compugen employees use the app to prioritize how much time they devote to projects, so the company can focus on those that have the greatest impact on the bottom line.

## 7 Stop Micromanaging

If you can't get your work done each day, there's a good chance it's because you're busy doing someone else's job, says Chaco Consulting's Rick Brenner. Inexperienced managers in particular are often guilty of taking their old jobs along with them to their new assignments, which leads to micromanaging and a host of other problems.

There's no quick fix for micromanaging, but there is a fast way to figure out if this is your problem. Start by making a list of things you're doing that you shouldn't be doing, then list the parts of your job you don't get to each day. As you winnow the first list the second one will also shrink, when you realize all of the other things you should be doing but aren't.

"You've got to ask yourself, 'What is my job?'" Brenner says. "With most of my clients, part of their job is to develop the people who are working for them. When I ask them 'What did you do today to develop someone else's skills?' the answer is usually 'Nothing.' They're not doing their jobs."

Stepping in and doing the job for your reports only makes the problem worse, Brenner adds. The key is teaching your staff the skills they need to stand on their own. That may require outside

“For a minimal cost, the productivity gains you can get from a dual monitor are quite phenomenal.”

— Derek Timm, WorkRite

training, allocating more resources, or finding ways to reward productive workers without necessarily promoting them into management.

“A lot of IT managers tend not to delegate, either because they’re control freaks or they think no one else can do it as well as they can,” says Brendan Courtney, vice president for Spherion, a \$2 billion staffing and recruiting firm. “They also tend to not hire people they perceive might be better than them. What they don’t realize is that if they hire people who are better and delegate authority, it will further their own careers.”

## Double Your Displays

Sometimes, adding inexpensive hardware can give your bottom line a boost. In May, insurance firm The Durkin Agency moved 20 of its claims adjusters, data entry clerks, and IT employees to a dual-monitor setup using 19-inch flat panel displays. The result? A 10 percent increase in the number of insurance claims the firm processed each day, along with increased employee satisfaction, says vice president Eileen Durkin.

Multiple monitor configurations are gaining in popularity, says Derek Timm, national technical services manager for WorkRite, which sells the articulating arms Durkin uses in its dual-display workstations.

“For a minimal cost, the productivity gains you can get from a dual monitor are quite phenomenal,” Timm says. “You don’t have to minimize windows as

much, or page back and forth between applications.” Putting the displays on adjustable mounts creates more desk space and allows users to adjust their workstations for comfort.

## Give Your WAN a Boost

If your company has branch offices, odds are you’ve got wide-area network problems. As traffic slows down due to latency and other issues, so does your ability to collaborate with far-flung colleagues. The solution may be a WAN-acceleration appliance.

Appliances such as Blue Coat Systems’ SG800, Riverbed Technologies’ Steelhead 3010, and Silver Peak’s NX-3500 can cache frequently transferred files and optimize TCP, MAPI, HTTP, and other Net protocols to make offices halfway around the world feel as if they’re right next door. Prices start around \$7,500 per appliance but head north in a hurry.

The key is choosing the right appliance for your enterprise, as different accelerators have different strengths.



The Steelhead, for example, can optimize Microsoft SQL Server and Exchange traffic; Blue Coat’s solution is the only one of the three that can handle encrypted traffic using SSL; and Silver Peak’s appliance can beef up UDP (User Datagram Protocol) traffic, which can provide a boost for real-time voice and video transmissions. For more information on WAN acceleration, see Keith Schultz’s “Wide-Area Slowdown” ([infoworld.com/2950](http://infoworld.com/2950)).

## Play the Game — Literally

At most companies, playing computer games is grounds for reprimand if not dismissal. At the Regence Group, it’s encouraged. Of course, employees of the Oregon-based Blue Cross/Blue Shield provider aren’t playing ordinary games; they’re engaged in a real-time incentive program that rewards them for meeting specified goals.

For example, customer service agents who resolve a certain number of problems on the first call may receive 10 tokens, which they can use to play an online slot machine or a bass fishing game, says Regence HR director Ryan Kenney. After they rack up points inside the game, employees can exchange them for a debit card worth actual cash.

While it sounds like fun and games, there’s real science behind it, says Brooks Mitchell, a professor of management at the University of Wyoming and CEO of Snowfly, which designed the incentive system used by Regence. “It’s called behavior shaping,” he says. “If you can reinforce little behaviors daily or even hourly, the big behaviors will occur by themselves later on.”

When employees are recognized and rewarded, Mitchell says, attendance,

job satisfaction, and employee retention rise. A meta-study conducted by researchers at the University of Southern California and the University of Central Florida found that workplace incentive programs increased productivity by 22 percent on average, and monetary rewards were twice as effective as the non-monetary ones.

Mitchell admits Snowfly is best suited for entry-level tasks where performance can be easily measured, such as call centers and help desks. But Regence has broader ambitions. At press time, 1,400 of the company's 6,000 employees were using Snowfly in a pilot program, but Kenney says they hope eventually to roll it out throughout most of the company, including the IT department — to, say, reward programmers for meeting deadlines or submitting code with a minimal number of bugs.

The key to the program's success is sitting down with each employee and coming up with ways to measure their performance objectively, Kenney says.

"What excites the HR geek in me is how Snowfly helps employees understand what matters most," Kenney says. "We want to build employee engagement, align them with the strategic objectives of the company, and hold onto our people longer. Employee retention alone will ultimately save us millions of dollars."

## 11 Look for Easy Ways to Integrate

Most enterprise application integration projects are huge hairy beasts, capable of gobbling up every IT



resource and budget dollar in sight. But it doesn't have to be that way. Simplified integration tools such as the open source Jitterbit software or Cast Iron Systems' iA3000 appliance allow you to integrate different apps without the pain of programming, freeing up your IT staff for more important endeavors.

"Integration is one of those necessary evils that drags you down," says Simon Peel, senior vice president of integration strategies for Cast Iron Systems. "If you go up to someone and say 'I did 20 integrations today' they're likely to say they don't care. Our box lets you get the job done much faster and move on to things that are really critical for your organization."

IT solutions provider Optimus Solutions used Cast Iron appliances to integrate data between Salesforce.com and Microsoft Navision (now called Microsoft Dynamics NAV). After the company's development team had identified the data it wanted to integrate and how it should look, getting Cast Iron implemented took about a week, says Steve McDonald, vice president for IT at Optimus. The iA3000 appliances start at \$2500 per month.

"It's had an enormous impact on our productivity," McDonald says. "We got exactly what we needed with appropriate scalability without having to hire an EAI specialist. We're just beginning to discover all the synergies

between our sales and AR teams, but the improvement in the general level of consistency and communication on both sides has been noteworthy."

## 12 Think Strategy, Not Tactics

Ultimately, by measuring how you and your staff spend, minimize waste, and delegate authority, you want to be in a position where you can see the big picture of how IT relates to your organization's bottom line. But that's not where most IT organizations are today, says Chuck Kirchner, manager of the Forsythe Solutions Group's IT service practice.

"Most IT organizations are reactionary to some degree, and some are very reactionary," Kirchner says. A good measure as to whether an IT department is reactionary or visionary is how often its top IT execs must leave meetings to deal with production problems or other emergencies. "The more often an organization's leaders have to put out fires, the less mature it is."

Ultimately, Kirchner says, there is no magic-bullet solution. Long-term productivity gains can only be realized through an IT service management initiative that establishes clear expectations for the services IT is expected to provide, trains techs in how to provide them, and educates users within the organization on the best ways to engage technology. You can start today by laying out a road map of where the organization is and where you'd like it to be in six months, a year, two years, and so on.

Spend all your time putting out fires — focusing on tactical tasks instead of strategic ones — and you risk burning down the entire enterprise. ❧

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**1. Over the course of one year, do you buy, specify, recommend, or approve the purchase of the following products or services worth:**

Please include amounts for all locations of your organization. Consultants: please include what you recommend for your clients as well as what you buy for your own business.

- |                                  |                                |                            |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 01. \$100 million or more        | 06. \$5,000,000 to \$9,999,999 | 11. \$100,000 to \$399,999 |
| 02. \$50,000,000 to \$99,999,999 | 07. \$2,500,000 to \$4,999,999 | 12. \$50,000 to \$99,999   |
| 03. \$30,000,000 to \$49,999,999 | 08. \$1,000,000 to \$2,499,999 | 13. Less than \$49,999     |
| 04. \$20,000,000 to \$29,999,999 | 09. \$600,000 to \$999,999     | 14. None                   |
| 05. \$10,000,000 to \$19,999,999 | 10. \$400,000 to \$599,999     |                            |

Product category	Write code in box
Large systems	<input type="text"/>
Client computers	<input type="text"/>
Networking / Telecom (including servers)	<input type="text"/>
Wireless	<input type="text"/>
Internet / Intranet / Extranet	<input type="text"/>
Security	<input type="text"/>
Storage	<input type="text"/>
Peripheral equipment	<input type="text"/>
Software	<input type="text"/>
Service/Support / Outsourcing	<input type="text"/>

**2. What is your primary job title? (PLEASE CHECK ONE ONLY)**

- IT / Technology Management**
01. CTO, CIO, CSO, Vice President
02. Director
03. Manager / Supervisor
04. Network Manager / Director
05. Engineer
06. Systems Analyst / Programmer / Architect
07. Other IT Management
- IT / Technology Professional**
08. Consultant / Integrator
09. Developer
10. IT Staff
11. Other IT Professional
- Corporate / Business Management**
12. CEO, COO, President, Owner, Vice President
13. CFO, Controller, Treasurer
14. Director
15. Manager / Supervisor
16. Line of Business
17. Other Business Management Title
98. Other Title (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Please indicate your job function(s) (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):**

- IT / Technology Functions**
01. Executive
02. Department Management - IT
03. Networks / Systems Management
04. Applications Development
05. Management of Enterprise Applications (CRM, ERP, SCM, etc.)
06. Research / Development Management
07. Consultant / Integrator
08. Other IT Functions
- Corporate / Business Functions**
09. Executive
10. Department Management - Business
11. Financial / Accounting Management
12. Research / Development Management
13. Sales / Marketing Management
14. Other Business Functions
98. Other Functions (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Are you involved in buying, specifying, recommending or approving the following IT products / services?**

(PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

- Software / Products / Technologies**
01. Service Oriented Architecture
02. Virtualization Oriented Architecture
03. Open Source Technologies
04. Risk Management
05. Customer Relationship Management
06. Enterprise Resource Planning
07. Business Process Management / Outsourcing
08. Business Intelligence / Data Mining / Data Warehousing
09. Financials / Payroll / Billing
10. Performance / Application Management
11. Other Software
12. Networking
13. Web Services
14. Content Management
15. Network and Systems Management
16. VoIP (Voice Over IP)
17. Telecommunications
18. Wireless
19. Remote Access
20. Web / Video Conferencing
21. Storage
22. Storage Virtualization
23. Disaster Recovery
24. Security
25. Anti-Virus / Content Filtering
26. Firewall
27. VPN
28. Identity Management
29. Authentication / Authorization
30. Intrusion Detection & Prevention
31. Encryption
32. Other IT Products / Technologies
- Hardware / Peripherals**
33. Server Virtualization
34. Servers
35. Multi-Core Processors
36. Notebooks / Laptops
37. Mobile Data Center Devices
38. PDAs / Handhelds / Pocket PC / Wireless
39. Flat Panel Displays
40. Printers
41. Other Hardware / Peripherals

**5. What is your organization's primary business activity?**

(PLEASE CHECK ONE ONLY):

- General Business Industries**
01. Defense Contractor / Aerospace
02. Retail / Wholesale / Distribution (non-computer)
03. Pharmaceutical / Medical / Dental / Healthcare
04. Financial Services / Banking
05. Insurance / Real Estate / Legal
06. Consulting (non-computer)
07. Transportation / Utilities
08. Media (print / electronic)
09. Entertainment / Hospitality
10. Communications Carriers (telecomm, data comm., TV / cable)
11. Construction / Architecture / Engineering
12. Manufacturing & Process Industries (non-computer)
13. Research / Development
- Technology Providers**
14. Service Provider (MSP, BSP, ISP, ASP, etc.)
15. Computer / Network Consultant
16. Systems / Network Integrator, VAR / VAD
17. Technology Manufacturer (hardware, software, peripherals, etc.)
18. Technology - Related Retailer / Wholesaler / Distributor
- Government / Education**
19. Government: federal (including military)
20. Government: state or local
21. Education
98. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. How many people are employed at this organization, including all of its branches, divisions and subsidiaries?**

(PLEASE CHECK ONE ONLY):

1. 20,000 or more
2. 10,000 - 19,999
3. 5,000 - 9,999
4. 1,000 - 4,999
5. 500 - 999
6. 100 - 499
7. 50 - 99
8. 49 or less

**7. Which of the following operating systems are in use or planned for use?**

(PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

01. Windows XP
02. Other Windows
03. Mac
04. Linux / Unix / Solaris
05. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

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