



September 2002

You've made the investment to fit your business out with the necessary software and hardware, but how can you be sure you're now using your technology to its full potential?

### ***Katrina Clifford reports.***

It goes without saying that for the majority of small-to-medium-sized businesses (SMEs) whose expertise lies outside of IT, keeping abreast of the latest technological developments is no small feat. After all, keeping up to speed with the optimal functionality of your existing technology, let alone with what is new to the market, is challenging enough.

Yet, by all accounts, IT spending continues to play an integral role in business's attempts to drive operational efficiency. But of what real use in this increased investment if you are not even fully utilising your current technology?

Granted, the incidences of wasted IT spend are well documented – some the result of unrealistic business expectations, others of costly purchasing mistakes.

Either way, the maxim remains the same – no amount of investment in new technologies or upgrades to existing systems will translate into increased productivity and efficiency if you do not have a sound understanding of your business's needs and work practices from the outset.

Surprisingly though, research shows that fewer than 5 per cent of businesses collect information about their output – a precarious figure when you take into account the rapidly changing nature of technology itself, not to mention the pace at which information flows are proliferating.

Statistics released by Datamation show that document production now accounts for up to 40 per cent of total labour costs for many businesses, while email alone has increased print volumes by some 40 per cent.

Yet Andy Scott, national knowledge manager for Fuji Xerox Australia claims most SMEs do not carry out effective information management. The reason? "For many, consideration of information management stops at the printer. Although, that is slowly changing and SMEs are beginning to see the potential in formalized systems of knowledge management," Scott says.

True to the tenets of knowledge management (KMI) then, when it comes to determining whether your business uses its technology to its optimal capacity, the buck doesn't just stop with the hardware and software you have in place. It remains inextricably linked to the cultural mindset ingrained in your business in addition to the work processes that are embedded within your technology.

As Angela Gregory, managing director of Staffware Asia Pacific says: "Workflows add control mechanisms to existing business systems to ensure that tasks are handled at the right time, by the right person and in the right order. They also facilitate the gathering of information and improve data flows which benefits users throughout the business."

But how can you measure the extent to which your work-flows and technology are driving towards the improvement of the business's bottom line and productivity levels?

## Forewarned is forearmed

According to Alan White, principal of IT infrastructure solutions at IBM Australia, a lot of the legwork needs to be done before your business even gets up and running. "While more visible analysis of costs and better budgeting strategy when it comes to technology spend".

The savings derived from enhancing workflow processes are substantial – ranging from 10 per cent to 30 per cent of operational costs – yet, according to Fuji Xerox's Scott, disseminating the principles of effective workflows and KM among SMEs is a slow burn process – typically because it means upending entrenched work practices.

"Most businesses usually have a trail of documents across their desk that end up somewhere in filing cabinets. This process of information storage is both costly, as well as not particularly conducive to the timely retrieval and sharing of information," Scott says.

To combat this, Fuji Xerox is in the conceptual stages of formulating a package specifically for SMEs to assist in the improved management of their knowledge and information flows. Bringing together one of Fuji Xerox's 23-page per minute Document Centre devices with a 10-seat licence of the company's web-based information management tool, DocuShare and paper-to-digital software package, PaperPort, the new KM-in-a-box solution is expected to weigh in for the price of a copier, according to Ian Morpeth, Fuji Xerox's national software marketing manager.

Morpeth says the package will make available to SMEs Fuji Xerox's professional consultancy services for product training and assistance with KM.

## Measuring up to standards

Perhaps surprisingly, says Jack Andrys, CEO of Internet access management solutions provider, **WebSpy**, monitoring of your business's Internet and email traffic can go a long way towards providing real cost savings and improved employee productivity. "After all, it is only with correct use and understanding of these channels that businesses can get the most out of their technology," Andrys says. "Most SMEs have very little idea of their exact Internet use and the cost..."

According to Andrys, inappropriate use of the Internet and email costs Australian businesses around \$1 billion in lost productivity each year – the real cost of which manifests itself in lost business opportunities, huge communications charges and even litigation issues. It is estimated that some 40 per cent of all Internet traffic between 9am and 5pm is believed to be non-business related, while 70 per cent of Internet porn traffic occurs during regular business hours.

"Internet Acceptable Use (IAU) is an issue that can be addressed by the employment of web management tools, yet not many businesses are making use of these tools because they don't fully appreciate the enormity or the implications of inappropriate use of the Internet and email," Andrys says.

WebSpy's web management solutions portfolio features its flagship products – **WebSpy Live**, a real-time data analysis tool that assists in the prevention of employee misuse of the Internet by triggering alarms and alerts – and **Email Analyzer 1.0**, which logs email traffic to provide businesses with an insight into what their bandwidth is being used for including email SPAM, the propagation of viruses and bandwidth intensive messages. Both can be downloaded for a 30-day free evaluation from WebSpy's local distributor, **Janteknology** ([www.janteknology.com.au](http://www.janteknology.com.au)).

While Andrys admits it is good business practice to monitor web access, he warns SMEs that such technological solutions are useless if not accompanied by appropriate Internet

use policies. "The assumption that the latest and greatest technology translates to workplace efficiency is ill-founded. Businesses need to develop stringent IAU policies and communicate these to staff so that everyone knows what is expected of them," Andrys says.

"After all, how can you place a value on Internet use if you cannot monitor that use? SMEs should recognise that monitoring is not just a big brother phenomenon but can also assist in knowledge management within your business by identifying which sites are being utilised for research and then sharing those resources among your employees."

## **Useful Sites**

If you don't know whether you are utilising your existing technology to its optimal capacity and are at a loss to understand how to best go about assessing your situation, here are a few sites worth taking a look at:

[www.webspy.com](http://www.webspy.com)

[www.ibm.com.au](http://www.ibm.com.au)

[www.hp.com.au](http://www.hp.com.au)

[www.fujixerox.com.au](http://www.fujixerox.com.au)

[www.microsoft.com/australia/training/resources/ctec.asp](http://www.microsoft.com/australia/training/resources/ctec.asp)

[www.ddls.didata.com.au/ddls/index.asp](http://www.ddls.didata.com.au/ddls/index.asp)

[www.drakeintl.com/training](http://www.drakeintl.com/training)

[www.skillmaster.com.au](http://www.skillmaster.com.au)

[www.iteducation.com.au](http://www.iteducation.com.au)

## **At full capacity**

Nevertheless, there are still a significant number of businesses that fail to utilise their software and hardware to their full capacity – opting instead for only basic functionality.

While technology companies the likes of Hewlett-Packard are in the process of developing ways through their reseller channel in which to better educate SMEs on the capability of their products, vendor certified training offers a viable opportunity for businesses to increase their IT expertise. After all, vendors are the only ones who really understand the full potential of the product offerings.

At last count, Microsoft for example, had somewhere in the vicinity of 240 product courses on offer.

But while acquiring the knowledge of how to best utilise the software and hardware you possess may be one thing, obtaining a snapshot of how your business manages its technology is an altogether different matter.

## ***My Business***