

So you run a small business. Perhaps it is run out of your home or you have a small office space. You have worked very hard to build a client base. You have put together a business plan and a budget. Your client base and their information is everything to your business.

Then, one day, you turn on your computer and you get this message: "Operating System Not Found". That's okay, because with a computer you just reboot and everything is okay. Not this time, however. You open the yellow pages and call the closest computer support company who can come right now and fix your problem. No big deal, the tech will just go click-click-click, the computer will start, you will write a cheque for \$100, thank the tech, and get on with your day. Unfortunately, the tech tells you that your hard drive is dead.

You have a deadline to meet and all the information is on that computer. All of your blood, sweat, and tears shed while building your business is on the computer, and the tech tells you that the approximate price is \$1,000

Defending Your Computer System against Breakdown

to recover your data, install a new hard drive, and reinstall your system. It will take about two or three days. You have no backup if the recovery does not work. Pandora's box has been opened.

This is a fear for all small business owners, and it is a very legitimate fear. Unfortunately most small business owners do not budget for computer support and a surprising number do not have backups or a contingency plan should their computer break down. Why?

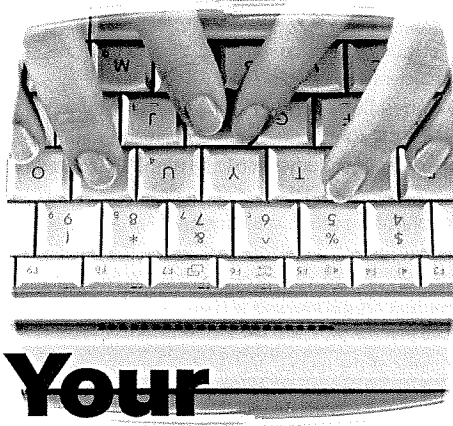
I think it is largely to do with the past, present, and future of computer support. I also believe that computer support has not kept up with the requirement of businesses that rely on their computers more and more every day. So, where does that leave us?

It is important to look at the past to help predict the future. In the late eighties to early nineties, personal computers were still new to businesses. The computer was a glorified word processor. The computer support companies were truly enhancing businesses. The computer was not relied upon and was not a communications tool.

Then, email and the Internet came along. All of a sudden we could send email between computers, and software was helping businesses run. Still, this was enhancement. Computers were helping companies run with new software packages and increased communications. At this

point, the shift occurred where computers went from being enhancements to a business to necessary tools, and businesses relied on computers. Companies saved on labour but did have to pay for computer infrastructure and support.

Then came the Y2K bug. Businesses big and small were spending large sums of money to ensure that they were ready for the Y2K bug. Now, companies were not hiring IT professionals to enhance their businesses, but to defend them. Companies had to pay for computer support they



did not want.

On Jan 1, 2000, quite fortunately not a whole lot happened, and companies grew weary of the computer support companies. Faith was lost. But then new problems kept creeping up: viruses, hardware failures, Internet security and, more recently, spyware. So for the past number of years we have been defending businesses both big and small. This was not simple preventative maintenance. We get oil changes for preventative maintenance of our cars; we do not purchase shields to protect them from malicious attack. But for a computer, this is common practice.

What is the future for computer protection? Nobody wants to pay to have their networks and computers defended. There is also a mentality that computer support companies get paid when a company is down. Why is that? Shouldn't computer support companies get paid to keep a client up, making it a breach of contract if a client is down? If the support companies revenues are directly linked with the uptime of the computer systems, would there not be an incentive to keep them operational? If this is the case, and computer systems remain operational, we could again focus on enhancement.

This, then, is the future. There are some exceptional new technologies to improve business operations. Now is the time to again make the computer a tool, and not a necessary evil. ■



Is My Network Protected?

By Garry Wagner

With today's technology getting better and better, we still find ourselves lacking protection. If you have a computer connected to that cloudburst called the Internet, you need to ensure that you are sufficiently protected.

Testing Your Firewall

- 1) In your browser, enter <https://www.grc.com/x/ne.dll?bh0bkyd2>.
- 2) Click the "Proceed" button at the bottom of the page.
- 3) Click the "All Service Ports" button (just under the "ShieldsUP!! Services" blue title bar).

In most cases, this grid pattern should be mainly green, which would mean you have reasonable Internet protection. Think of it as this: you are the only one who knows how to enter your home's door because no one sees anything other than a wall.

If the grid pattern has blue spots, that invisible door on your house is visible, but someone needs to use effort to access your personal premises/network.

If the grid pattern has red spots, that invisible door on your house is visible and anyone can access your personal premises/network without any effort.

If you see reds, blues, and very little green, go to your local search bar or phone directory and look for a computer troubleshooter! Better yet, get a recommendation for one from someone you trust as computer-knowledgeable.