



## IT Support Services

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## How to Securely Dispose of Old Computers

Getting new computers for your business is exciting, but what happens to the old ones? Depending on the age, some people sell them, others throw them out. That's the easy part. The problem is the sensitive data on them. There are passwords, account numbers, license keys, customer details, medical information, tax returns, browser history.... the works! Each computer, whether laptop, tablet or desktop, contains a treasure trove of sensitive information that cybercriminals would love to get their hands on.

Unfortunately, hitting delete on your files doesn't actually make them disappear, nor does waving a strong magnet over the drive. These mistakes have cost businesses millions of dollars over the years.

Most businesses are unaware that specialized data cleanup is necessary, others think calling someone to collect the computers will cover all the bases. A 2016 experiment proved just how dangerous the situation can be when they bought 200 used hard drives and found 67% held unwiped, unencrypted sensitive data, including sales projection spreadsheets, CRM records, and product inventories. Frighteningly, they didn't need any special hacking skills to get this data, it was all right there and helpfully labelled. It's also not surprising that with simple data recovery tools, people have also been

able to access British NHS medical records and missile data, all waiting patiently on a discarded hard drive.

### Why hitting delete doesn't help

Data on a hard drive works like a book with an index page. Every time data is written, it pops a quick entry into the index so when you need it again, it knows where to look. The index is used for files you create as well as system files you can't even see. Sensible, right? Except if you delete a file it's more like changing the index to say nothing is on page 10 and you can write something else there when you're ready. But if you manually flip to page 10, you'll find the information is still there - the file still exists until it's been written over - it's the index reference that got deleted.

### Wiping data before disposal

There are software tools you can get to do it yourself, as well as dedicated security firms, but your best option is to choose an IT business you know and trust. With that in mind, a methodical approach is required to ensure not a single drive is left untreated. You don't want to leave data behind, or even clues that a motivated person could extrapolate any private information from. The approach might include using

checklists to maintain security, or dedicated processes to guide each step in decommissioning. Careful records should also be kept, including who signs off on completion of the retirement, and where the computers are sent afterwards. A proper inventory and auditing process may slow the rollout of the new computers slightly, but it's always better than having your old data come back to haunt you.

We can migrate any needed data, backup the information to your server or external drive, then wipe or destroy the hard drives for you. We can assess the age of your old computers and either dispose of them for you or point you in the right direction of computer recyclers. Plus, the quicker you dispose of your old computers, the easier the process will be. Recyclers will be able to send less of your equipment to landfill, and you'll be less likely to forget how valuable the drive contents are.

Upgrading your business computers should be a happy time for you and your employees, so with a little forward planning, you'll be able to keep everyone smiling and all your data secure.

**Need help with your old hardware?**  
Call us today at 229.446.9641

“Downtime is an unavoidable part of any tech-enabled business, but your preparation can dictate whether it goes for one minute or one week”

## 4 Ways to Avoid IT Downtime

Technology is a wonderful addition to every business, but what happens when the IT goes down? All those things you do now that were completely unthinkable 30 years ago have become part of your day-to-day processes. It lets you compete with big business and connect with customers from far away, boost productivity and efficiency like never before, and even added multiple zeros to your bottom line. IT is a necessity. Unfortunately, this means when downtime inevitably hits, you've got a BIG problem.

Maybe it's from a virus attack, a bug in the system, hardware failure or something else...whatever the cause, the impact is real and measurable. Gartner (an IT research company) reports that 43% of small businesses close their doors right after a major data loss, and only a tiny 6% survive long term. The financial cost of each hour can be in the thousands, and the damage to your brand could be ruinous. Fortunately, while downtime will occasionally strike every business, there are things you can do to minimize the duration and frequency.

Taking a few simple actions now may result in your business staying open while your competitor gives up.

### Use monitored antivirus and firewalls

While most businesses have these protections, not all have embraced the idea of monitored antivirus and firewalls. Instead, the default setup has more in common with a home setup than a robust professional system. Given that SMB are a primary target for malware and cyber-attack, you should seriously consider moving to the monitored



versions. Our experts set up custom protection to block all attacks, both known and emerging. All updates are taken care of, plus company-wide protections applied so users can't accidentally infect the network. When something doesn't look quite right, our monitors take immediate action to protect your business.

### Have backups you can count on

A great backup can not only protect you from digital threats like viruses and ransomware, they protect against physical threats like robbery, fire or natural disasters. The last thing you want is for your business to be crippled by data loss. A robust backup system can be as simple as asking our Managed Services team to take care of it, or if you have an on-site technician, using the rule of 3: one backup on the server, one unplugged from the server, and one off-site. If anything ever goes wrong, you'll be able to pull up the most recent backup and continue as normal. Businesses without good backups tend to be down or limping along for days, if not weeks.

### Plan for disaster

Nobody likes to think about their business flooding or being hit with ransomware, but would your employees know what to do if something happened? Having a comprehensive Disaster Recovery Plan helps you get up and running quicker, minimizing downtime. Everyone knows what steps

to take, who to tell, who should be doing what, and which systems take priority.

### Monitor hardware for early signs

Computer hardware is like any piece of equipment - when it's getting old or cranky, it will let you know! This could be anything from making noises, being louder or slower than normal, or even system crashes. Each symptom is your early warning system that allows you to take action before a crash that sends everything into downtime. Our hardware monitoring service runs in the background and tracks various metrics to predict time until failure. If the signs point to imminent failure, we'll let you know and can often repair/replace the affected hardware with little or no downtime.

Downtime is an unavoidable part of any tech-enabled business, but your preparation can dictate whether it goes for one minute or one week and how often it happens. According to one study, most firms experience 43 hours average downtime per year, a number much too high for comfort. While scheduled downtime can sometimes be unavoidable, your business will appreciate being able to skip the panic of surprise downtime events. Reducing your risk is the best action you can take, making downtime a truly rare occasion. Even better, our Managed Services can take care of this for you, stopping many downtime-events before they occur.

**Talk to us about minimizing your downtime. Call us at 229.446.9641**



## It's Official: Your Business NEEDS to Use HTTPS

"Google will mark your page as insecure unless you're using https."

You may have noticed many business websites now have a green padlock in the address bar next to the letters 'https'. Until recently, you'd only see that on shopping or banking sites, but it's now become the expected norm for all business websites - even if you don't ask people to log in or enter credit cards. Simply put, the 's' in https stands for secure and means any data sent/received by the visitor is encrypted.

Clearly, it's an essential feature for e-commerce sites, but why have all the info-only websites started using https too?

### The New Google Rule

As of July 2018, Google will mark your page as insecure unless you're using https. It's a movement they started a few years ago to make the internet a more secure place by default. Since Google pretty much rule the internet search and increasing security is always a good idea, businesses have been gradually switching over. Without https protection, someone with access to your internet connection, whether from digital eavesdropping or hacking, could intercept the information. They could also place malware onto otherwise legitimate sites and infect innocent visitors. That's why eighty-one of the top 100 sites online have already switched to https and a strong majority of the web is following suit.

### The Browser Bar Says It All

In the same way a green padlock in the browser bar indicates a trustworthy site, you can expect non-https sites to be marked with a "not secure" warning. Previously, users had to click an information symbol to actively investigate non-secure sites. The shift to plain sight markers will be most noticeable on Chrome, however it's expected that other browser developers will follow suit. Visitors may then be alarmed by landing on your site and seeing that the connection isn't secure.

The fact that you may not be asking them to log in, enter personal details or payment is irrelevant. You may not be asking them to enter anything at all, but perceptions matter. Eventually that warning will be changed to an alarming red as Google declares war on unsecure sites. As the common understanding is that a warning = bad, you may get more visitors bouncing away within seconds or even contacting you to report that your site has a problem.

### Boosts for Secure Sites

Google is taking its commitment to safe web browsing further by favoring https. That means the search algorithm is taking your site security into account, preferring to display results that it knows will protect users from hackers. Since https status gets the nod, you may find yourself climbing in the ranking

while other businesses scramble to catch up. It really is a win-win situation.

### What to Do Next

In an ideal world, your site would have a secret switch on the back-end you could flick over and suddenly be https, but it's a little more complicated than that. In fact, you may have already noticed some sites experiencing trouble with the migration. When the setup goes wrong, users don't see your website with a little warning in the corner, they're blocked by a full page error and offered a return to 'safety' (away from your site).

The easiest way to make the move to https is to contact your IT technician or web developer, as they'll be able to make sure you're keeping Google happy and rolling in the green.

**We can migrate your site to https - call us today at 229.446.9641**



# The Best Way to Buy New Computers

You've decided to buy a new computer for your business, perhaps even a whole set of computers. You can almost taste the excitement as you think about those sleek new machines and how much faster your employees will be able to do their work. There's just one thing left to do: actually choose which ones. That's where it gets tricky. Most people pop out to their local retail store and look at the display models, then get overwhelmed when the salesperson starts throwing words like CPU and RAM around. Unfortunately, that scenario almost always ends up with your business having the wrong computer. Here's why, and what you should do instead.

**Most retail salespeople are minimally trained:** Unsurprisingly, salespeople are trained to sell! They may have an interest in computers and they're certainly great at reading the words on the box to you, but that's the limit of their expertise. Their goal is to make the sale, earn the commission and go home happy. You are getting the computer your business needs and that 100% suits your purpose isn't particularly high on their priority list. They're not equipped to deeply understand the way your business works, nor do they have the time to find out. You're also more likely to be upsold extras you don't need but will rapidly drain your budget.

**Compatibility can be a problem:** While you probably know having both Mac and PC can lead to compatibility issues, did you know even switching brands within your PC network can cause issues? There are so many moving parts to your business network, from printers to routers, laptops to mobile payment processors, that anytime you throw a new computer into the mix you could end up with compatibility problems. Salespeople don't know what your current setup is at your home or business but may still make recommendations based on assumptions and hopeful guesswork. Even the number and types of ports available on retail computers may cause a problem once you're setting up.

The last thing you want to do is end up with a collection of wobbly adapter

plugs as you attempt to course-correct and make do until it's time for a do-over. Any time your employees need to go off-book and create workarounds, efficiency is guaranteed to take a dramatic hit. It's best to skip the drama and get the right computer first time around.

**Support could get tricky:** Your IT provider will often stick to a handful of vendors to ensure all parts are kept uniform. That way we know which parts will work together, and should something fail, we can usually get replacements quickly. We'll often have special relationships with parts vendors, and can get special pricing, extended support and upgrades that a salesperson can't match. Your IT budget goes further with your consultant, and not just on the day of purchase.

By contrast, when you buy computers through your IT provider, you know you're getting the exact computer your business needs. We know your business inside and out, including your long and short-term goals. From the first time you work with us, we'll be sure to do our research before making a recommendation. Remember, you want your computers to last 3-4 years of heavy usage, so it's also a good idea to buy business-grade computers. While the computers at the retail store are equally shiny, they're rarely as durable as the ones your consultant can supply.

Your IT provider will also be able to set the new computers up, ready to go with the exact software you need. We'll strip out all the bloatware (unnecessary programs and trials that come pre-installed) and configure your new computers to work perfectly from day 1. Your employees will be able to enjoy their new systems, take full advantage of the productivity boosts you paid for. That means internet working, internal network connected, programs playing nice with each other, and yes, even printing without problems!

**We can help with your next purchase - ask us how!**





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