

MSB Consulting, LLC

Streamlining IT for Business

<http://www.msbconsulting.net>

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Special Points of Interest:

- *Welcome to the MSB Consulting Newsletter!*
- *Protecting Your Company Against Disaster*
- *Chief Operating Officer Bill Blanchard featured in the Worcester Business Journal*
- *Work from Home: Microsoft Terminal Services and Your Small Business*

WELCOME TO THE MSB CONSULTING NEWSLETTER!

MSB Consulting is proud to publish the first of its monthly newsletters. Inside you will find up to date information on the latest happenings in the IT community and how it affects your small business. The articles enclosed will provide real solutions that can help make your IT equipment work for you.

In this edition, we will be covering basic disaster planning precautions that you can take to protect your company in the event of a natural disaster. These basic steps can save you thousands of dollars should one of these unfortunate events occur.

We are also excited to republish an article that was written about our COO, Bill Blanchard, in the Worcester Business Journal. Prior to the launch of MSB, Bill served a year long tour of duty in Iraq with the US Army. The author of the article, Cory Hopkins, interviewed Bill about his experiences and how they helped him launch the Metrowest's latest IT Consulting firm.

Next we will be covering affordable remote access solutions that will allow you the option of working remotely. Whether it be a snow day or you just don't feel like changing out of your pajamas, we'll provide you with the options at your disposal to make working from home a reality.

Finally, in honor of our first newsletter, we are pleased to announce the relaunch of our website www.msbconsulting.net. Our in house web expert, Michael Stratford, has taken great care to design a fantastic website highlighting all that MSB has to offer. The website will maintain an archive of our past newsletters and a series of technology highlights that will allow you to streamline IT for your business.

As always, we appreciate your business and look forward to having the opportunity to continue to serve you. You can let us know how we're doing or how we can serve you better by sending us an email at feedback@msbconsulting.net

Tired of numbers?

Get in touch with Joe Sheehan Owner of Sheehan consulting, a small business accounting specialist!

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PROTECTING YOUR COMPANY AGAINST DISASTER

Picture for a moment that it's a cloudy Friday afternoon and the weather forecast calls for heavy rains with high winds to hit the area over the weekend. You're ready to lockup for the day and start to put together that large deposit for the bank after a great week of sales. You take one last look at the office and wonder, "What if water starts to leak in from the street?" You look at your watch, realize that the bank closes at 4PM, and rush out the door.

Often times, disaster planning is one of the last things on a small business owner's mind. With so many other things to worry about, a natural disaster or terrorist attack is the last thing you need consuming your thoughts. However, by having good practices and plans in place, you can have peace of mind knowing that you're protected.

First, we'll start with the basics. Many companies are tight on space and, in an effort to maximize their work areas, computers and cables get lodged into the strangest of places. I've visited many offices that have all of their primary networking equipment on the floor in a closet. A simple remedy is to acquire some small stools or stands for your computer equipment. Also, make sure that those surge protectors stay off the floor as well. That one foot off the floor in a flood can mean the difference between having a powered down server or a very expensive doorstop.

Secondly, where are your critical documents and data stored? You have that expensive tape drive backing up your data nightly, but are you rotating the tapes? Are you bringing one home with you? An inexpensive peace of mind solution is to make a complete backup of all your data (either onto a tape, CD, or DVD) and put it in a safe deposit box at the local bank. That way, if you forget to take a tape home one night or if your home is struck by the same disaster, you are protected. It is also a good idea to keep all of your original documents in a safe deposit box as well. Things such as your articles of incorporation, accounting ledgers, or insurance forms can be difficult to replace if they are destroyed in a fire or flood. You can maintain copies of these documents at your work site if you need regular access to them.

Third, what would a day of downtime cost your company in revenue? Even companies with on site IT staff suffer from 24-48 hours of downtime in the event of a server failure. This is due to the specialized nature of server hardware and the time it can take to receive replacement parts. So, if a day of downtime would cost your company \$10,000 in lost revenue, it might be worthwhile to consider spending a couple thousand on solutions to minimize that downtime. Such solutions may include a secondary internet connection, a VPN solution so that employees can work from home, or even real-time remote backup software. The most important piece of this is to draw up a budget for disaster recovery based on a percentage of what it would cost for your company to be down for 24-48 hours.

Finally, the last step of protecting your company against disaster is having a plan in place. While you don't have to plan for every single contingency, I've written emergency plans for "What if we're in a nuclear exchange?", it never hurts to be thorough. At the end of the day it all comes down to fundamentals. If your employees are unable to get to the office, do X. If your transaction server is down, do Y. Make sure there is a copy of these plans available to yourself and your employees that will be accessible in the event of a disaster. With solid practices and planning in place, the wound your company suffers from a disaster doesn't have to be a fatal one.

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FROM COMBAT TO CONSULTING

Cory S. Hopkins, Worcester Business Journal

July 23, 2007

It is often true that the best business deals begin with a handshake.

And the way Bill Blanchard sees it, if he can shake hands with a shopkeeper in Baghdad as a member of a U.S. Army Psychological Operations (PsyOp) team, he can shake hands with a small business owner just about anywhere.

Blanchard, 25, returned to his home in Milford on April 1 after a yearlong tour of duty in Iraq with the 305th Psychological Operations Company. In June, he and his two partners opened MSB Consulting in Worcester, a full-service IT consulting firm tailored for small and medium businesses.

So far, Blanchard said, business is good. MSB has already built a small client base through family connections and word-of-mouth, and is looking to open a new office in Westborough in six to 12 months.

Sharp end of the stick

As a sergeant in the Army's PsyOp unit, Blanchard was one of only 2,000 such soldiers in the entire army. He said the three-man team he commanded was responsible for most of Baghdad west of the Tigris River, an area populated by more than one million Iraqis.

Blanchard's job, he said, was to be the marketing arm for the Army, convincing citizens, Imams, and business owners that U.S. Army programs were good for them, that cooperation was not a sign of weakness and that the real enemy were the insurgents.

This was in between trying to broker surrender agreements and negotiate truces during combat operations, of course.

The transition from being at the sharp end of the stick, so to speak, of the Army's "hearts and minds" campaign in Iraq to small business consulting stateside was not as much of a stretch as one might think, Blanchard said.

"Consulting in any form, whether it's with Iraqis or in America, it's a people business," said Blanchard. "With PsyOp, what you learn to do is take a step back and put yourself in the person's shoes who you're talking to for a minute. If I'm talking to a small business owner, by taking a step back and being able to look at his concerns and address his needs to put his mind at ease, that's important."

Battle-tested

Blanchard's experiences in Iraq prepared him well for the difficult task of starting a business from scratch.

Because he was an enlisted soldier, and not an officer, Blanchard said he had to work hard to earn the respect and trust of his superiors, much like he works at earning that same trust from his clients.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, I was the lowest-ranking guy in the room," he said. "That's a challenge more than a hindrance. You have to earn respect on a peer level, not just an officer/non-commissioned officer level. It's the same as a client/consultant relationship."

Blanchard said he also learned how to work in an environment with very little room for failure or error.

"As it relates to my business, I learned how to work without a net, definitely," said Blanchard.

He said he sometimes has to resist the urge to be the sergeant that he is and take command of the business away from his two partners, with whom he's been friends for years. Instead, each of them has clearly designated roles and tasks, using the strengths of each to make the business stronger. Rather like the army, in fact.

Because of his pre-war experiences working in the IT department of a large corporation in Washington, D.C., while a student at American University, Blanchard said he is the de facto COO of MSB Consulting, making sure business operations are smooth and uninterrupted.

His experiences in D.C. as a student during 9/11 and immediately afterward also helped him in his current role as the company's resident disaster recovery, data backup and monitoring specialist. He said the company he worked for at the time enlisted his help heavily in feverishly trying to protect themselves in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

For his own part, Blanchard said he walked into a local Army Reserve recruiter's office on Sept. 12, and never looked back. "War is hell," he said. "But I don't regret it for a minute."

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WORK FROM HOME: MICROSOFT TERMINAL SERVICES AND YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

When you're a small business owner, the work day never really ends. Whether you're talking to a customer while at dinner or burning the midnight oil with Quickbooks, owning a business is a 24 hour a day job. However thanks to new technologies that were implemented with Windows XP and Windows Vista, you now have the option of working on your files from anywhere there's an internet connection.

Originally named Terminal Services, Microsoft implemented this remote access solution for use with Windows 2000 Server. Nowadays, the technology comes bundled with most of Microsoft's operating systems as Remote Desktop Connection. This software allows you to get a real-time image of the computer you're accessing, so that you can work just as though you were sitting in at your desk. For your reference, a desktop machine can only be accessed if it is running Windows XP Professional or Windows Vista Business/Ultimate.

While this sounds like a great and inexpensive innovation, there are limitations. For example, say you and your spouse own the same business and you both use the same machine in the office. You will be limited in that only one of you can be using the machine at a time. If you're using Quickbooks on the machine and your spouse wants to log in from home to edit an Excel spreadsheet, you'll have to log off in order to allow them access.

If only one person uses the machine at a time, obviously this is not a problem. The one person connection is the most inexpensive choice, but there are more robust options if you're looking to have a whole office of individuals work remotely. The server would require a copy of Microsoft Server 2003 or better. You are also required to have the relevant number of Terminal Services licenses. Depending on which bundle you purchase, each license averages about \$75. Bear in mind that when purchasing licenses, you only have to purchase up to the maximum number of concurrent connections you expect to have running at one time. For example, if you have a 20 person office, but only 8 of your employees are ever going to be connected at one time, then you only need to purchase 8 licenses.

The uses for remote desktop connections are endless. We've implemented a variety of different solutions for different companies. Some clients use remote desktop in the office to allow many connections to the server to access one specific program, such as a database. Others want to keep all of their data in one place, so that when an employee works from home, all they have to do is login to their office machine or server. This also allows companies to keep functioning in the event of a snow day. If the roads are treacherous, all an employee has to do is double click an icon on their desktop and it's just like being in the office.

At MSB Consulting, we strive to maximize your productivity. Many of you probably already have this technology in place, but have never known about it. With a few clicks, we're able to unlock the full potential of your technology and thus streamline IT for your business.