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How to Stop Technology Scatter

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Remote workers, a 24-hour workday, satellite locations, different platform preferences, and distributed data and networks present an unavoidable problem for today's associations: technology scatter. With IT becoming an ever-increasing part of overall business strategy, it's important to get a handle on this issue before it becomes detrimental.

Before you can address the scatter, however, you need to understand how the scatter is affecting your organization. Geographic technology scatter occurs from remote workers and satellite offices, platform scatter is generated by Blackberry versus Droid versus iPhone preferences, and data scatter results from everyone working on documents from a variety of locations. All this affects negatively your organization in four main areas:

- ❖ **Administration.** With technology scatter comes an increase in the amount of time (and money) you must spend to properly manage and support these locations, platforms, devices, and data. In an extremely scattered environment with a commitment to user support, IT administration costs can skyrocket.
- ❖ **Productivity.** With multiple people working on multiple versions of files, and employees struggling to find what they need when they need it, productivity slows. The greater the scatter, the greater the technological friction that people must overcome to work together.
- ❖ **Security.** Sensitive data must be backed up and protected despite the fact that the data are not centralized. The risks of the data being stolen or corrupted are present at every location, within every platform. This increases your security risks and can monumentally increase IT management costs.
- ❖ **Liability.** With more technology scatter, you open yourself up to litigation risk. If you are court-ordered to produce electronic documents, you must produce them, at your cost—and fast. That's why your organization's ability to enforce document management and other technology centralization policies across multiple locations and platforms is essential.
- ❖ **Member relations.** Your audience is used to accessing integrated information from other businesses (online banking, travel services, for instance). When your association's technology is scattered in such a way that makes it impossible to integrate fundraising, membership, marketing, and communications, you create silos of information that must be manually integrated. Not only is this labor-intensive, but the passive management of data and the lack of a cohesive delivery system make it likely that constituents will become frustrated and that data essential to building these relationships will be missed.

Now that you know the risks, you can begin to remediate. Below is a four-step process we recommend to (and often implement for) association executives facing the technology scatter challenge:

1. **Evaluate.** Is your technology the right technology? Perhaps the root of your tech scatter is simply the fact that you're not utilizing it efficiently. Do your employees have too many devices to be effective? Is your IT network up to date and capable of the demands you're putting on it? An honest evaluation of your needs and the technology that you're using can go a long way.
2. **Compare.** Is your technology up to industry standards? While it's not always best to follow the herd, it's a good idea to keep up with what comparable organizations are doing. Perhaps you're trying to implement a system that has way too many moving parts for your needs. Maybe your technology is more suitable to another industry. Being aware of what's helping others to run efficiently and configuring it to your specific needs can boost your efficiency and make life easier.
3. **Regulate.** Once that's done, it's time to set basic standards and parameters to organize the dispersion. Figure out into which category the majority of your scatter falls (geographic, platform, or data), then discuss your options. Will your organization build custom software applications and intranets as collaboration platforms? Or will you be using software as a service over the web? Will remote and

telecommuting employees be sharing your network? What about smartphones? Servers? Maybe a document management system is necessary. Creating a plan and clarifying and communicating that plan to employees helps to remediate your technology scatter problems.

4. **Leverage.** Videoconferencing and other collaboration technologies (such as Google Docs, Skype, and Salesforce.com) can help to not only manage a remote workforce, but also to help rein in some technology scatter. Leverage the technology that has been created for this purpose to help you in this effort.

Business may never sleep, but by taking basic steps to reduce your technology scatter and create an integrated, organization-wide technology-management strategy, you might be able to rest easy.

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