Productivity improvement: Finding hard numbers in soft benefits

The technology industry is abuzz with discussions on how to improve productivity – and the number of suggestions is proportional to the number of technology suppliers. But as a small business leader you may be looking for a trusted advisor, an unbiased technology supplier who can sift through the hype. There is an ongoing move towards employee empowerment. This empowerment refers to the new priorities among small businesses to invest in tools and technologies that allow their employees to make better business decisions, improve market reaction time and better serve their customers.

Drilling down beyond the hype – how can you use technology to augment your organization' ability to complete tasks and decrease process friction?

Productivity

A global survey of small businesses conducted by leading research and analyst firm Techaisle found that small business leaders believe in the connection between technology and productivity: 45% see "creating processes that constitute a better way of doing business" as a key benefit of technology, 43% credit technology with "facilitating better automation of core business processes," 40% report that technology creates "better coordination across functional areas," and 50% state that technology "improves employee productivity".

What are your options?

Where should small business leaders focus their investments to obtain the greatest productivity benefits from technology solutions? Techaisle research points to five areas where small businesses can draw a straight line from technology capabilities to improved productivity:

Mobility : Productivity improvements and support for new ways of organizing work and workers including work from anywhere, anytime, on any device and managing work-life balance are cited as mobility's greatest business benefits by 49% of small businesses. Improvements in service delivery, including better customer service and business continuity in the event of problems at a central office location, is offered as the most compelling mobility business benefit by 41% of small businesses.

Collaboration: Improved employee productivity is the second highest-rated benefit of collaboration solutions such as web/video conferencing, file sharing, in-application sharing features. Faster decision making, which itself is a measure of productivity improvement, is the top-rated benefit of collaboration solutions. Techaisle's research also found that innovative small businesses are 1.8x more likely to experience improved employee productivity with collaboration solutions than small businesses that are not innovative.

Cloud: is the primary platform used for enabling mobility and collaboration as cloud allows access to corporate data via mobile devices. Today, an "office" is defined by devices and the "workplace" is defined by the ability to work from wherever those devices (and their users) are located. Techaisle's survey found that enabling a mobile workforce (39%), increasing collaboration (28%), and improving productivity for line of business users (27%) were three of the top benefits gained by small businesses using cloud solutions.

Newer PCs: 59% of small businesses report that newer PCs make their employees more productive due to faster application performance, less downtime, better connectivity, high quality business class communication and better security. Additionally, within small businesses, which are most constrained for IT staffing and support,

60% found that managing newer PCs was easier. Newer PCs deliver more than an incremental improvement in performance and features and even price conscious small businesses would benefit significantly from replacing older PCs with modern PCs

Video Conferencing: 54% of small businesses using videoconferencing have benefitted from improved productivity through more personal interaction, better teamwork, decision agility, trust and seamless exchange of ideas. Techaisle survey found that for innovative small businesses, video-conferencing solution is integral to business success

Setting metrics and milestones

While individual targets will vary by business and by context within a business, the notion that technologies and culture/capabilities combine to deliver optimal benefits provides a good starting point for small business leaders looking to apply management frameworks to productivity-related solution investments.

Look again at the productivity-related benefits listed in the text and consider whether you have the information needed to develop hard targets for your operations.

• Could you define metrics that would determine whether or how your decision-making is accelerated by collaboration technology?
• Is there an opportunity to identify the impact of richer communications or accelerated workflow, so that you can direct your team to investigate mobility or cloud solutions that would deliver better business outcomes?
• Do you have desktops and notebooks with faster processors, improved graphics, better battery life, connectivity, security and improved manageability? A PC is still the centerpiece of business productivity where work gets done.

By building metrics that connect technology solutions to tangible results, you can translate the promised, but hard-to-quantify benefits of productivity into practical solution objectives – and align your technology investments with your business aspirations. This is not an easy path to define, but it is an approach that allows small businesses to be more agile and successful than large enterprise competitors.

Everyone in your business should be able to understand that productivity is a crucial business imperative – and that it requires the development of capabilities and deployment of technology within your business, and a commitment to using business-relevant metrics to identify and manage best-bet solutions.

We get it – and we can help

Dell Small Business Technology Advisors work with millions of small businesses, entrepreneurs and innovators around the world every day. And as a trusted partner to small businesses, we also advise local tech service providers on productivity through technology for their small business customers.

Let's talk

This is one of ten insight pieces for Small Businesses that we have commissioned with Techaisle on strategies to reduce cost, improve productivity, increase profitability, accelerate growth and manage risk. To learn how to reduce costs and drive real savings for your business, call a Dell Small Business Technology Advisor today at 877-BUY-DELL.