

The productivity link

How technology can improve employee morale and productivity **Interviewed by Clare DeCapua**

Technology initiatives are tied more to employee productivity and morale than you may realize.

Without the tools to communicate effectively, streamline tasks and avoid the dreaded bottleneck, an already time-strapped work force can completely lose its momentum.

"In this economy, the very first impulse is to stop spending and not do any new projects," says Mary Rodino, Chief Marketing Officer with CIMCO Communications. "The most important issue right now is for companies to take the time and money to invest in technologies that actually make a difference in productivity."

Smart Business spoke with Rodino on how to use technology to keep your employees connected and your businesses successful.

What obstacles are employers — and employees — encountering this year?

When employers are not hitting top-line revenue numbers, they have to consider budget cuts, layoffs or furloughs. The impact on employees is that there's a greater fear of losing their jobs and an increased workload for the 'survivors.'

Those people who aren't laid off are expected to pick up the pieces and there instantly becomes an incredible pressure to retain existing customers, while obtaining new customers. It's a classic example of more for less: employers expect more productivity and greater loyalty from their employees for the same amount of money, or even less.

How can a business use technology to make organizational improvements?

Many technology solutions today really streamline and improve processes for an organization, but that doesn't mean every solution is right for your company. My recommendation is to start looking at workflow, bottleneck areas and manual tasks that can be automated. Take a deep dive into the process chain, from first customer interaction to billing, and see what areas could really benefit from that technology solution.

One technology that could give you more flexibility, as well as cost savings, is multiprotocol label switching (MPLS).



Mary Rodino
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If your company has several remote locations that send data back and forth, MPLS allows you to connect the locations directly instead of going through the headquarters' server, where there may always be a bottleneck from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. All of your locations can communicate and send applications to each other seamlessly. The benefit is that improving data flow eases communication between your internal users and allows them to work more efficiently and stress-free.

How else can a company use technology to improve efficiency?

Another highly efficient and prevalent technology is hosted Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). With this application, every employee, even executives and sales reps who are traveling, can really be connected all the time. VoIP technology enables enhanced mobility features that allow employees to get all of their phone calls and messaging without missing a beat.

When companies choose a hosted VoIP solution, they do not have to worry about maintenance contracts, upgrading their phone PBX, or deploying their own internal IT resources.

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In addition, many service providers offer very attractive leasing programs for IP phones so that companies don't have to make any capital investments. The key takeaway with VoIP is that companies can really focus on their core operational competencies instead of managing technology.

What advice would you give business owners who say they can't afford technology improvements right now?

If you can't afford large technology initiatives, there are still other options. Be creative and consider initiatives that don't require a large investment. Conferencing is a good example of a technology that doesn't require a large investment and can still reduce your operational costs.

Whether it's voice conferencing or Web conferencing, this technology is an ideal way to decrease the costs of meeting in person. Conferencing can't always replace a face-to-face meeting, but instead of meeting face-to-face every month, perhaps you only have in-person meetings once a quarter.

The savings to the company can directly affect the bottom line, and employees are more productive as they reduce time away from the office and their families.

Many companies provide conferencing as a pay-as-you-go service so you are never paying for something you're not using. In addition, you are connecting employees who can virtually be anywhere and reducing your travel expenses.

The best advice I can give is to work with a technology partner. Make sure that you are working with a partner that will really look at your company's business objectives. Your technology partner needs to understand what drives your business and what your goals are so it can identify the best solution.

A good technology partner will ask the right questions, listen to your needs and not just promote a product or service. It will provide solutions that improve productivity which, in turn, will empower your employees and enhance your profitability. <<