

Ten Things (Just Ten!) That Every Nonprofit Needs to Know About Information Technology

The following information was provided during a workshop presented at the 2003 Technology Conference for Nonprofit Organizations by the Council of Community Services of New York State, Inc. June 11, 2003 Poughkeepsie, NY. Tom Purdy, the North Carolina Bar Association's Information Technology Director added and updated the web-based resources.

Workshop goal: To introduce you to some basics of strategic IT planning, to point you to some first-rate free resources, and to provide some very practical tips for getting started.

Recommended for: Nonprofit decision-makers who have little or no background in Information Technology.

Workshop facilitator: Deborah Elizabeth Finn, Cyber-Yenta

1) Very little technical knowledge is required in order for nonprofit CEOs to participate actively in strategic IT planning.

As long as you thoroughly understand your organization's overall mission, strategy, and tactics and (are willing to learn a little bit about the technology), you can keep your Information Technology infrastructure on target.

Example: Your mission is to save the whales (not to maintain a local area network)! In order to save the whales, you need a strategy: to stay informed and inform others about the issues, lobby for policy changes, issue action alerts, raise money, and maintain relationships with various legislators, constituents, communities, donors, potential friends and allies. Keep pressing for tactics that will help you achieve your desired outcomes (saving whales); this will enable you to hold your own in most discussions with technical experts.

2) Your board of directors should be calling for and participating in your strategic Information Technology planning.

If they are not, it is time to recruit some board members who are techies. For example, your region probably has an internet service provider, a high-tech corporation, or a large retail firm with an extensive IT department. Perhaps you can recruit representatives from these organizations to serve on your board as part of their community benefits program.

3) A tremendous number of high-quality resources for strategic IT planning are available to nonprofits at no charge. (See resource list)

4) You can keep an eye on innovations in IT, and think about possible uses for them in the nonprofit sector, even if you do not have a technical background.

If you regularly read the technology columns of a good daily newspaper, and a few general interest magazines such as "PC Monthly," "MAC User," or "Network World," you will soon catch on to the basic concepts and terminology. (Do not worry if it seems over your head at first - you'll catch on! Everybody has to start somewhere.)

Example: You work for a nonprofit organization with five employees and four non-networked computers. It's time to link them up so that you and your colleagues can share information and regularly back up your work. As you read articles on wireless networking, and look at the building where you work - which is a pre-electricity Victorian house only somewhat successfully retrofitted for its current functions - you see that you may actually save money by going wireless. You ask your IT vendors for estimates on drilling and running cables through the building, and find that the cost of labor, support, upgrades, future expansion, and maintenance for a more conventional network will exceed that of a simple wireless network.

5) Information technology, no matter how strategically you apply it, will probably never save your nonprofit organization any money. It will enable you to work more effectively. You will probably be able to do more work, of higher quality, with fewer person hours. However, do not be surprised if this raises the bar of expectations on the part of the board, the community, the clients, the constituents, and the donors!

6) You need an in-house IT committee.

Convene an Information Technology team or working group, within your nonprofit, and make sure that you meet regularly to give input to the senior management on strategic IT issues. The team should include a cross-section of staff - administration and finance, programmatic, secretarial. Be sure to include staff members who are overtly or covertly techno phobic; their concerns should be addressed.

7) Secretaries and administrative assistants should be the lynchpins of your IT infrastructure. Budgeting for IT training for these employees can be one of your best investments.

Which staff members are more likely to be there when problems arise, to know about the technical abilities (and phobias) of their colleagues, and to know where the (paper or electronic) files are? Professional development that includes IT training is likely to increase job satisfaction and employee retention. Don't forget to revise job descriptions and job titles as your secretaries and administrative assistants move into IT management responsibilities!

8) In the long run, IT training and support will make up about 70% of your IT budget. The more obvious line items - such as hardware, software, and network services - will comprise about 30%.

This is a highly counter-intuitive fact of nonprofit life. However, there is a great deal of research on the "Total Cost of Ownership" that bears this out.

9) Donated hardware, software, and services can cost a nonprofit more than purchased products or services in the long run.

The cost in person hours of using and maintaining non-standard or sub-standard configurations is astonishingly high, and donated equipment tends to be non-standard or sub-standard. Likewise, donated services will cost you a great deal of time in support, supervision, and ongoing maintenance. Beware of the web site design services donated by a close relative of the chair of your board! You may end up with something that you do not like, can't use, or can't easily change.

10) In a nonprofit organization, most strategic IT problems are actually organizational development problems.

Is it a CEO who is resistant to technical innovations? A board of directors that hesitates to make the commitment to raise the money needed for the IT infrastructure? Line staff who are already stressed and overworked, and can't stop to learn and implement new technologies? Inability to make outsourced IT consultants or in-house IT staff understand the organizational processes? Not all the Information Technology in the world will resolve these issues, if you don't address them at the organizational level.

+++++

About your facilitator: Deborah Elizabeth Finn is a self-described Cyber-Yenta, an independent technology consultant who lives only to help nonprofits and foundations fulfill their missions by bringing IT needs and resources together seamlessly. One of her major projects this year has been assisting the Boston Foundation in creating the new web-based version of the Boston Indicators Report (<http://www.bostonindicators.org>). More information about her background may be found at <http://www.deborah.elizabeth.finn.com/definnresume.htm>). She is always happy to offer nonprofits and foundations a telephone consultation at no charge, so please feel free to be in touch with follow-up questions after this workshop.

WORKSHOP RESOURCE LIST

This resource list is based on a compilation by Summit Collaborative (<http://www.summitcollaborative.com>) for its Strategic Technology Program (http://www.summitcollaborative.com/strategic_technology.html), with help from members of the Circuit Rider community (riders@npogroups.org). Comments are by Deborah Elizabeth Finn.

RESOURCE / PEOPLE CONNECTORS

- **Techsoup** (<http://www.techsoup.org>). This is the premiere web site for nonprofit technology. Although it may take some effort to understand how the information is arranged, you should always check here first for answers to your questions.
- **Idealist** (<http://www.idealists.org>). The best web site for advertising or finding a job in the nonprofit sector, it also has a searchable database of nonprofit events, resources, and organizations.
- **Meetup** (<http://www.meetup.com>). This service coordinates local, in-person meetings among internet users who share an interest, issue, or cause. They don't necessarily do a good job of vetting the meeting places, but they offer a way to arrange meetings at no cost to your nonprofit or the attendees.
- **Kim Komando** (<http://www.komando.com/newsletter.asp>). *The Kim Komando Show Electronic Newsletter* is a great source of news about the internet, your computer, new software, and new web sites. Plus, you'll find computer tips that will make using your machine and the internet easier and more fun! Kim's other free eNewsletters include the Cool Site of the Day and Tip of the Day.
- **Volunteer match** (<http://www.volunteermatch.org>)

MEDICAL SITES

- **Clinical Trials site** (<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov>)
- **AMA Physician Select** (<http://www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm>). What do you do when you move to a new area, change health plans or just want a second opinion? Visit the American Medical Association's web site. You can enter a city, state, or zip code to find a certified doctor in your area. You can also search by specialty.

SOFTWARE / HARDWARE

- **Techsoup** (<http://www.techsoup.org>). Great web site for discounts on hardware, software, and training. Be sure to check on Microsoft Charity Licensing, which provides 50-90% discounts on their software products for 501(C)3 organizations.
- **Oldversion.com** (<http://www.oldversion.com/>). Have 300 versions of 44 popular programs including AOL Instant Messenger, Internet Explorer, and Acrobat Reader. Locate previous working version for older PCs or after upgrades do not work. Also try eBay.
- **Drivers HQ** (<http://www.drivershq.com/>). Searches your PC and lets you know if there is an updated driver available. If there is a newer driver available, go to the manufacturer's web site and download it, which could potentially speed up your PC and/or fix a problem! There is also a pay version that automatically downloads the newer driver for you. **NOTE:** Do NOT update drivers if everything is working okay, since new drivers can cause problems, too.

TECH ASSESSMENT / TRAINING

- **Techatlas** (<http://techatlas.org>)
- **TechSets** (<http://www.techsets.org/>)

NPO INFORMATION AGGREGATORS / INTERMEDIARIES

- **Foundation Center** (<http://www.fdncenter.org/>). A wealth of information, particularly about where the funding comes from, and where it's going. They publish the **Philanthropy News Digest**, a weekly free eNewsletter (<http://foundationcenter.org/pnd/>).
- **Guide Star** (<http://www.guidestar.org>). The definitive online searchable database of basic information about nonprofits and foundations. The information is derived from Form 990s filed with the Internal Revenue Service. Many of the entities listed are very small or dormant, so when you start doing a search it's easy to overestimate the number of nonprofits that are active in a given sub-sector.

- **Nonprofits News** (<http://news.gilbert.org>). Michael Gilbert, the editor of the "Nonprofit Online News," is quite the contrarian, as well as an excellent guide to what issues that every nonprofit professional should keep in mind.
- **ONE/Northwest's Activist Toolkit** (<http://www.onenw.org/toolkit>). It is always worthwhile to keep an eye on what ONE/Northwest has to offer. Although their mission is to serve environmental groups in the Pacific Northwest, they make many of their excellent resources available to everyone in the nonprofit sector at no charge.

WEB SITE / EMAIL TOOLS

- **Bobbytest** (<http://www.mardiros.net/bobby-accessibility-tool.html>). Do you know whether persons with disabilities can easily use your web site? If not, it is time to put it to the test. Bobby will help you pinpoint the trouble spots.
- **Yahoo Groups/Email** (<http://www.yahoo.com>). This free service enables you to create email distribution lists quickly and easily. A great way to get out your urgent action bulletins, or to foster online community among your organization's friends and stakeholders.
- **Atomz Search** (<http://www.atomz.com/>)
- **NPO Groups** (<http://www.npogroups.org>)
- **Network For Good** (<http://www.networkforgood.org>)
- **Groundspring** (<http://www.groundspring.org>)
- **GKG** (Domain Name Host) (<http://www.gkg.net>)
- **CrystalTech** (Web host) (<http://www.crystaltech.com/>)
- **Link Popularity** (<http://www.marketleap.com/services/freetools/default.htm>)
- **Online Petitions** (<http://www.petitiononline.com/>)
- **Action Studio** (<http://www.actionstudio.org/>)
- **Web content translation**
 - **Babelfish** (http://www.altavista.com/help/free/free_searchbox_transl)
 - **Google Translator Tool** (www.google.com/language_tools)
- **Website "dead-links" utilities (free):**
 - **Xenu's Link Sleuth** (<http://home.snafu.de/tilman/xenulink.html>)
 - **W3C Link Checker** (<http://validator.w3.org/checklink>)
 - **Open Directory Project**
(http://dmoz.org/Computers/Software/Internet/Site_Management/Link_Management/)
- **Google's "Who links to you?"** Find all the pages that point to a specific URL (<http://www.google.com/help/features.html#link>)
- **Automated notification services for web site changes:**
 - **TimelyWeb, by EldoS** (<http://www.timelyweb.com>) and **Email notifications:** free version monitors 10 pgs and commercial version (\$29.95) for unlimited # of pgs.
 - **ChangeDetection** (<http://changedetection.com/monitor.html>). Free email notifications of website changes.
 - **GoogleAlert** (<http://www.googlealert.com/>). Free email notifications.

PRODUCTIVITY TOOLS

- **Web-Based Calendars** (<http://www.calendars.net>)
- **Connected** (<http://www.connected.org/>)
- **Free Fax Server** (<http://www.tpc.int/>)
- **Evite** (<http://www.evite.com>)
- **Free Conferences** (<http://www.freeconferences.com>)

INSTANT MESSENGER

- **Easy Message** (<http://www.easymessage.net/>)
- **Trillian** (<http://www.ceruleanstudios.com/trillian/index.html>)
- **Fire** (<http://fire.sourceforge.net/>)
- **Avantgo** (<http://my.avantgo.com>)
- **Webwasher** (<http://www.webwasher.com>)
- **Spam Filtering/Outlook** (<http://www.upserve.com>)

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

- **Backflip** (online bookmark organizer/sharing tool) (<http://www.backflip.com>)
- **Blogger** (knowledge sharing tool) (<http://www.blogger.com>)
- **SurveyMonkey** (inexpensive and user-friendly web-based survey tool) (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>)

RESEARCH TOOLS

- **Google** (<http://www.google.com>). The industry standard in web search engines.
- **Kartoo** (<http://www.kartoo.com>). A wonderful resource for visual thinkers who are doing research on the web.
- **iTools** (<http://www.itools.com/>). Search the Internet using six main categories: search, language, research, financial, map, and internet tools.
- **Mapquest** (<http://www.mapquest.com>). If you know the addresses of your starting point and destination, you can get detailed maps and driving directions from this site.
- **Mysimon** (<http://www.mysimon.com>)
- **C-NET** (<http://www.cnet.com>)
- **Intershipper Quick Quote** (<http://www.intershipper.com/Shipping/Intershipper/Website/MainPage.jsp>). Enter the weight, your ZIP code and the destination ZIP code. You will receive a list of vendors and prices. You can also compare the differences in prices between standard and priority overnight, two-day, three-day, and ground.
- **United States Post Office/Zip Code Locator** (<http://www.usps.com/zip4/>)
 - **Change your postal address:** <http://www.usps.com/moversguide/>
 - **Calculate postage:** <http://www.usps.com/tools/calculatepostage/>
 - **Find a Post Office:** <http://www.melissadata.com/lookups/NearPostOffice.asp>
- **Area Code Listing by Number** (<http://www.cs.ucsd.edu/users/bsy/area.html>)
- **Refdesk:** “the single best source for facts on the net”: (<http://www.refdesk.com/>)
- **Merriam-Webster**, “the language center” (<http://www.m-w.com/home.htm>)
- **Dictionary.com** (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>)
- **Webopedia**, “the only online dictionary and search engine you need for computer and internet technology.” <http://www.webopedia.com/>)
- **Wikipedia**, “the free encyclopedia that anyone can edit” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page)
- **Price Grabber** (<http://www.pricegrabber.com>)

COMPUTER SECURITY TOOLS Computing risks have grown sharply over the last few years. Even knowledgeable people have trouble keeping up with security issues. There are a number of free online services that will tell you if you have a problem.

- **Your Browser** (<http://browsercheck.qualys.com/>). This free site performs a series of audits designed to test and fix your browser's security vulnerabilities.
- **Viruses** (<http://security.norton.com/default.asp?langid=us&venid=sym>). Use Symantec's free checker to hunt viruses.
- **Home computer users: get a free virus check.** If your PC is connected to the internet, you need software to block and scan for viruses. If you don't have either, or if you want to see if yours is working properly, Trend Micro (PC-cillin) and Symantec (Norton Antivirus) offer free checks (**Trend Micro's HouseCall:** http://housecall.trendmicro.com/housecall/start_corp.asp & **Symantec Security Check:** <http://security.symantec.com/sscv6/default.asp?productid=symhome&langid=ie&venid=sym>).
- **Ports** (<http://www.speedguide.net/scan.php> and <http://www.dsreports.com/secureme>). Windows includes ports intended for communication. If you have a firewall, ports should be hidden from hackers.
- **Windows** (<http://www.microsoft.com/technet/security/tools/Tools/MBSAhome.asp>). Microsoft has a free tool that will scan your system for security problems.
- **ZoneAlarm** (<http://www.zonelabs.com>). You can set up a firewall for your stand-alone or networked PC. Very useful if you are surfing the web from a laptop or desktop that has confidential data.
- **AdSubtract** (<http://www.adsubtract.com>). This product will enable you to surf the web without the nuisance of banner ads, pop-up ads, or other extras (background music, JavaScript, background images, animations) that waste time and bandwidth. You can also configure it to refuse cookies from all or some web sites.
- **Spyware** (also known as adware) is typically a program placed on your hard drive that tracks your Web surfing habits. It reports to a computer on the internet, so you are customized advertising. The internet has many worthwhile shareware programs, however the following should be avoided:
 - Bonzi Buddy (<http://www.bonzi.com/support/bdyremove.htm#remove>)
 - Click2FindNow (<http://toolbar.click2findnow.com/uninstall.exe>)
 - Go Hip (http://www.gohip.com/remove_browser_enhancement.html)
 - HotBar (<http://hotbar.com/downloads/HbUninst.exe>)
 - I-Lookup (<http://www.i-lookup.com/uninstall.exe>)
- **Tips for blocking Spyware:**
 - Read the terms when you download software. Legitimate programs (most are) will tell you if they include spyware.
 - Install a software firewall, such as **ZoneAlarm** (<http://www.zonelabs.com>) and **Outpost** (<http://www.agnitum.com>). Most will not let a program report back to the internet without your permission.
 - Use spyware scanning programs to detect and delete harmful spyware programs: **Ad-aware** (<http://www.lavasoftusa.com>) and **Spybot Search & Destroy** (<http://security.kolla.de>). Check regularly for updates.
 - Before you download a program, check it in the database at **SpyChecker** (<http://www.spychecker.com>) to see if spyware is included in the package.

STRATEGIC IT PLANNING

- **Information Systems Forum** (http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Information_Systems_Forum). An email distribution list for nonprofit professionals who want to use technology to help fulfill their organizations' missions. The members range from the techno-phobic to the techno-savvy, and share news, information, advice, and referrals on an informal, collegial basis.
- **N-Ten** (<http://www.nten.org/>). A professional community that connects people involved in nonprofit technology and strives to help them effectively use technology in their work.

- **Techsoup** (<http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/techplan/index.cfm>)
- **PlanWare** (<http://www.planware.org/strategicplan.htm>)
- **Free Management Library**
(http://www.managementhelp.org/plan_dec/str_plan/str_plan.htm)
- **Alliance for Non-Profit Management**
(http://www.allianceonline.org/FAQ/strategic_planning)
- **Academic Institution Tools** (<http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/spt.html>;
<http://www.wmich.edu/nonprofit/Guide/guide7.htm>)

**“Meet the new additions to our expert panel”
By Kara Gattine, Associate Editor**

"There's nothing in the world like free expert advice." That's our motto on SearchNetworking.com. If you haven't had an opportunity to visit our Ask the Expert section recently, you're in for a nice surprise. Over the course of the past six weeks we've added many new faces to our expert panel, and we're happy to say they are exceptional! Here's the rundown on our new experts:

- 1) **Routers:** Sudhanshu Gupta, Technical Consultant, Wipro InfoTech
http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/ateExpertBio/0,289623,sid7_cid528289,00.html
- 2) **VPNs:** Jack Keane, Ph.D., Chief Scientist, OpenReach
http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/ateExpertBio/0,289623,sid7_cid531747,00.html
- 3) **Network administration:** Chris Partsenidis, Founder and Senior Editor, Firewall.cx
http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/ateExpertBio/0,289623,sid7_cid535205,00.html
- 4) **IT management:** Philip Rackus, Director of Product Management, N-able Technologies
http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/ateExpertBio/0,289623,sid7_cid532040,00.html
- 5) **Enterprise wireless:** Graham Robinson, Wireless Network Architect, Simply Wireless
http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/ateExpertBio/0,289623,sid7_cid535207,00.html

These experts, as well as the entire SearchNetworking expert panel, assist you by lending a hand and their valuable time to answer your networking-related challenges and inquiries.

Do you have a networking question that you need answered to make your network operate smoothly? What issue has arisen that has you stumped? So many categories, so many experts -- so get your mouse clicking. Browse through our collection of Q&A's, and then ask away.
<http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/ateExperts/0,289622,sid7,00.html>