

MC Connect

“Insider Tips to Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier, and More Profitably”

As For Me and My House...

I don't generally have much use for the wave of political correctness that seems to have swept our society. That being said, I have the utmost respect for individual beliefs and traditions. For me and my house, it is Merry Christmas. For those with different beliefs, I sincerely wish you all the best.



For so many reasons, I love this time of year. I love the reminder to get outside of myself, widen my vision, and see if there is some good I can do in the world. Of course, the food, desserts, and candy certainly make

the list as well. I enjoy spending time with friends and family. I love Christmas music. (In fact, I'm listening to it now.) And at the top of my list is probably Christmas trees, lights, and decorations.

Unfortunately, year after year, no matter what I do, the holidays end and life resumes. Many people resist change, but I am one of those people who thrives on it. If I had to repeat the exact same activities year after year, I think I would end up in a padded cell. So December is more than a holiday season to me; it is also a time of reflection, introspection, goal setting, planning, and because I simply cannot help it, dreaming. I guess I should clarify a bit: December is the culmination of these activities, since they are really an ongoing part of my life.

Reflecting back on 2014, it has been a game-changer for me on many fronts. I won't bore you with my personal life, but I will say that it has been a worthy journey. On the business front, I have never had a better year. Although I am not excluding finances here, I am not focusing on revenue. I am referring to internal development, better strategies, new or improved systems and work-flows, and most important: a clarified vision of where I plan to take my business.



“As a business owner, you don't have time to waste on technical and operational issues. That's where we shine! Call us and put an end to your IT problems finally and forever!”

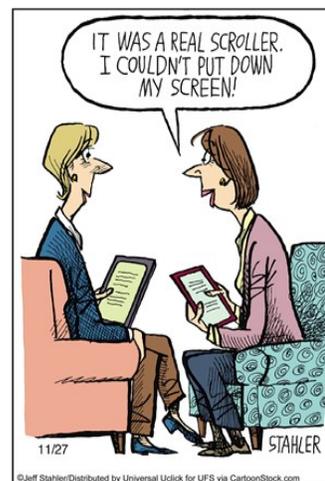
- Justin Shelley, Master Computing

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DENTON, TEXAS

Inside This Issue...

- Is Your Home Wireless Network A Threat To Your Business?...Page 1
- Social Media Actions In A Heated Moment...Page 3
- Sony Xperia Z3 Compact...Page 4
- Reducing Distractions At Workplace...Page 6
- History of Christmas Trees...Page 7



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Throughout 2014 we started surveying and listening to our clients. I was hoping to hear that everyone was a raving fan and that we could do no wrong. I learned that some of our clients do feel that way. But some were kind enough to show us where we needed to improve. I appreciate honest feedback, and thank those of you who offered it. My main takeaway was that we needed to move faster and communicate better. Sometimes the truth hurts, and in this case it was especially painful because this is where *almost all* IT companies struggle. But I advertise that we are better. As it turns out, that may not always be true. Again, the truth hurts.

As I write this, I wonder... is it wise for me to publicize the fact that we are no better than our competition? Probably not. But my hope is that you will see that I listen (which might, in fact, make me better). I want everyone to know that I am absolutely committed to building a business that I can be proud of. It's a personal thing, and it has to match my own personality. For some, our visions will align. For others, maybe not. That's OK. Diversity is one of my favorite aspects of life.

I digress. 2014 taught me that in order to thrive, I have to make some changes. Many of those changes are already in the works. Some are still very much in the planning stage: on the dry-erase board in my office, or the newly installed cork boards in the hallway. Here's the rundown:

- The number one complaint we heard was a matter of speed. When bad things happen in the world of technology, it needs to be resolved. Now! Since we were already overworked, we hired more people.
- The second most prominent complaint was about poor communication. In 2013 we invested heavily in some new software that was supposed to help us with communication. It is a great program, but very complex. I realized that in order to use it more effectively, we needed additional training. So we got more training. And we will continue that process as we move forward.
- As I considered where we were as a business, our then-current trajectory, and my *desired* trajectory, I came to another painful realization: my pricing structure was not sustainable. I love the *idea* of unlimited support agreements. But the *reality* is: they are not fair to you. And they do not allow me to do my best work. So 2015 will bring a new pricing structure. For some, prices may go up. For others, prices may go down. But for *everyone*, the value you receive for the money you spend with us will increase.
- How will value increase? I'm glad you asked! We have installed a bank of 40" screens in our tech room that show us every nagging problem with every network we support. This includes virus infections, out-of-date antivirus software, security patch problems, hardware failures, imminent hardware failures, software problems, and a laundry list of additional alerts. In many cases, we will be able to see problems before you do. The value? Employee productivity. A company's greatest asset and expense is almost always human resources. If your company has an average of 1 preventable support request per week, and it takes us 4 hours to respond on average, you'll end up wasting 208 hours (8.6 weeks) per year. Ouch! So what if we could fix the problem before you ever had to call? That's 208 hours of payroll back in your pocket. Merry Christmas!
- How else, you ask? In addition to improving our preventive maintenance, we are also turning our focus on security. Without the proper security measures, data loss and/or identity theft are almost guaranteed. Once it happens, you can't fix it. So we are upping our game. On our new service agreements we will be providing two forms of anti-malware protection included for no additional charge. That's just the start, but it's an important one. Malware is a major player in both data loss and identity theft. Other areas of improvement include better data backup systems, better firewalls, and more.
- Still not convinced? Give me a call. I'll meet you in person at your office, my office, or a nice restaurant (my treat), and we'll discuss in detail.

2014 was a good year. And I am ecstatic about where we are headed for 2015. I hope you have also taken time to reflect on how you can make 2015 the best year of your life. At least until 2016 rolls around! With that, I say again: Merry Christmas. Happy New Year. And happy/merry everything else.

Justin Shelley

Think Through Social Media Actions In A Heated Moment

1. **If you wouldn't say it to your grandmother, don't write it on Twitter.** The oldest test in the book is the grandma test. It still holds today. If she would be appalled, odds are that others will be too. It feels good to blast an opponent, but such outburst can easily be used against you.
2. **Remember that everything you say or do on the web is archived.** Even if the NSA happens to miss it, odds are that Twitter, Facebook, Google and/or other platforms have a way of archiving the information. Consider everything you write these days on the Internet to be permanent. Trolls may delete their comments but they still leave a trail.
3. **Still debating saying it? Sleep on it.** This is familiar but often good advice. If you really feel the need to say something that might be taken the wrong way, consider sitting on it overnight. Waiting until the next day will rarely hurt your point, and it may save huge amounts of embarrassment.
4. **If you do say it...make sure you feel that you could defend it in a court of law.** Falsely accusing someone of something is a big deal and the repercussions could amplify beyond your original intentions.
5. **Remember that your reputation is cumulative.** How you respond to the unfair and uncivil will either enhance or detract from your reputation. Don't let others bait you into ruining your reputation.

How do I react when I am targeted on social media?

1. **Grab screenshots.** If someone truly is going after you, the first move is to gather evidence. Make sure you have copies. Odds are that they will quickly realize what they have done and will try to erase their trail, so the best thing you can do is make sure you have a copy on hand.
2. **Report them.** Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and most other platforms have safeguards against those who harass others. Don't hesitate to put in a report—that's why it's there!
3. **Try not to react.** This goes back to my above points about guarding yourself. As hard as it is, try to remember that once integrity is lost it is extremely hard to recover. The more reaction, the more fuel you pour on the fire.
4. **Remember that the truth is the best defense.** As someone who has been egregiously accused of something I did not do, I took solace in the fact that I was innocent and as such the accusation cruelly asserted could never be proven.

We live in a world where unscrupulous people have migrated to online communities and live among the rest of us. I hope you never have to use the above actions, but that when you do, I hope they serve you well.



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Your Company's Hidden Security Weakness: Your Home Wireless Network

As a business owner who also spends time working from home, do you make assumptions about your home's wireless network security? Between your home and business, chances are your home wireless security is lacking. This can prove to be a serious liability.

WiFi security at home tends to be more lax. It isn't something business owners worry about. You feel safe at home and you might assume since your business's network is locked down tight, your data is secure. When an intruder wants to access your business's proprietary information, they're going to search for the easiest point of entry.

That is often the home. Intruders are looking for information they can profit from, including financial and identity-related documents. The fact is, there are people who roam around searching for unprotected or poorly protected wireless access.

Never assume your data—personal or business—isn't accessible. You may inadvertently share critical data without realizing it. You may share files among colleagues and employees and simply forget to turn off sharing permissions. You may place documents and files in a publicly accessible folder. Data-sharing is convenient when you need it, but a liability when it's readily accessible.

What can you do to protect yourself and your company assets?

- Be aware of when you're sharing data. If you have any files in a public folder, move them to a more secure location.
- Use a strong password for all your wireless networks. A string of letters, numbers and symbols about 14 characters long is ideal.
- Use WPA2 security. Make sure your router is set up correctly. If you are using WEP or WPA security, change it as soon as possible.
- Change your network's name (SSID). Routers include a default name, and keeping the default tells potential intruders lax security measures may be in place.

And ask yourself how protected your network—and your data—really is.

Shiny New Gadget Of The Month:



Sony Xperia Z3 Compact

Every fall a batch of cool new phones from nearly every major manufacturer hits the market. People are clamoring for the new, larger Apple iPhone or the new Google Nexus phone. This October saw the release of a rather interesting new Android phone from Sony called the Xperia Z3 Compact. What makes Sony's phone remarkable?

Have you noticed how big phones have gotten lately? Not only that, but these big phones require quite a bit of battery power. The Z3 Compact is a premium phone that returns to a more palm-friendly size, with a 4.6-inch display. It also boasts a battery that lasts two days (or more, in some cases) with average use. That's basically unheard of anymore. It also runs the latest version of Android, and it's water-resistant. That's right! The Z3 Compact is certified water-resistant up to one meter for a total of 30 minutes.

Client Spotlight : Hannah's Off The Square



In 2001, Hannah's Off the Square humbly opened its doors to the city of Denton.

Now, more than a decade later, Hannah's has grown along with the town and its people. Once located in a modest building off Hickory Street, Hannah's is now situated in a historic site that was home to a turn-of-the-century blacksmith business. This original space has helped to inspire an eclectic cuisine reflecting the artistic and imaginative atmosphere of downtown Denton.

Sheena Croft, the Executive Chef and native of the South Georgia and North Florida area, uses her Southern Heritage to bring you what has been called "Upscale Comfort" food.

Hannah's restaurant enjoys working with local farmers, ranchers and businesses, to bring you the best of our bountiful area in North Texas. Fresh locally pastured chicken and eggs, Farmers Market Vegetables, recyclable to-go boxes and a rotating seasonal menu are just a few of the ways we strive to meet our community's expectations.

We are honored to showcase more and more of these items on our everyday menu as the seasons progress.

Thanks to our community and to our customers for growing with us and for your constant support.

Some of the front and back of house staff on a recent Vineyard trip

Reducing Distractions In The Workplace

Distractions are everywhere. Our phones, our computers, our tablets, our co-workers, and on and on. When we're trying to get work done, there is always something, and it's getting worse. We're more connected to the Internet than ever before, and there is always one more thing we want to check. It's safe to blame technology for this constant distraction, but we do need to step up and take a little responsibility for ourselves.

It's tempting to give in to distraction and let your mind wander for a few minutes, but a few minutes can easily slip into 20 minutes, then 30 minutes, and before you know it, you're through the first page of Reddit and you've filled your quota of cat pictures for the day. There's nothing wrong with a distraction every once in a while, but when deadlines loom and projects need to get done, it can do more harm than good.

And that doesn't mean missing your deadlines. The more distracted we become, the more stressed out we become. The deadlines aren't going to go away, and the more distracted you are, the less time you'll have to work. Productivity is lost.

What can you do to get productivity back and cut down on distractions? Consider the source of

your distractions. Your cell phone? Put it on silent, or better yet, turn it off and put it in a drawer. Out of sight and out of mind. Make sure you cannot hear any notification sounds, whether it's a little ding or jingle or a vibration. This is crucial. Why? You may not realize it, but you've been trained to respond to those sounds, much like a cat to a can opener.

What about the Internet in general? If you're working on a project and you already have the materials or information you need, consider cutting yourself off. If you're connected to a WiFi network, disconnect. If you're hardwired, pull the Ethernet cord out from the back of your computer. It may sound like a drastic step, but it works.

If you work in a busy environment, where people are chattering, phones are ringing and the printer is printing away, see if you can't track down a different workspace. Look for an empty office or meeting room (don't forget to ask first, just in case someone has a meeting later), and close the door.

It's all about being proactive in cutting down the distraction. There isn't a foolproof way to eliminate them all, but a little adjusting can go a long way.

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We love having you as a customer and, quite honestly, wish we had more like you! So instead of just wishing, we've decided to enact a new "refer a friend" policy. Refer any company with 10 or more computers to our office to receive a FREE Computer Network Assessment (a \$397 value). Once we've completed our initial appointment with your referral, we'll donate \$100 to your favorite charity (even if that favorite charity is you) for every referral that you've sent, as a small thank-you for thinking of us.

Simply call us at 940-220-7817 or e-mail us at connect@master-computing.com with your referral's name and contact information today!



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Where Did Christmas Trees Come From?

Every year millions of families around the world enjoy the Christmas tradition of finding the perfect Christmas tree, decorating it, and enjoying the way it makes our homes feel and smell. Some of my favorite memories of Christmas are centered around the tree. But why do we bring trees into our living rooms? Why do we decorate our trees and put lights around them? Before Christianity, Evergreen plants and trees were a very popular decoration for European people in the winter. Many Europeans would bring in these plants and trees because they believed they would keep away evil spirits, illness, ghosts, and witches. This was done during the winter solstice (December 21 or 22).

Something very similar was done in Egypt, where people would bring green palm rushes into their homes which symbolized life over death. While many countries around the world recognized the Winter Solstice with these traditions, the Germans are credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we know it.

German Christians brought evergreen trees into their homes and decorated them with apples, candies, nuts, and candles. This tradition almost died out in Europe until Queen Victoria urged her husband to display a tree like he did when he was a boy in Germany. He did, and when a picture of the tree was featured in a popular newspaper, many families copied them and Queen Victoria effectively brought the tradition back to life.

While Christianity adopted these old, magical traditions, the Christmas tree actually has very little to do with Christ.

So, whatever your beliefs, hopefully this year you can appreciate this ancient Pagan symbol of life.

Jessica Shelley

"History of Christmas Trees." *History.com*. A&E Networks, 2009. Web. 24 Nov. 2014.

Simple Ways to Use E-mail More Efficiently

There used to be a time when e-mail was supposed to increase productivity. Yet, that is often not the case. Many users don't use e-mail as productively as they could, and you may be one of them! Consider these tips to improve the way you use e-mail:

Skip attachments. Find alternate methods of sharing documents, such as Google Drive or Dropbox. It makes organization and collaboration more efficient, and it's easier to track who has what. Plus, many e-mail clients, such as Gmail, are notorious for marking e-mails with attachments and links as spam.

Watch your replies. When you reply to an e-mail, it's too easy to write and send, not realizing who might end up with your message. If you receive a CC'd e-mail with several names attached, be sure to reply only to the sender and not the group, unless it's 100% relevant. It creates useless in-box clutter for others and wastes time.

Use the subject line effectively. When a subject line is vague or difficult to understand, it's frustrating for the recipient. They might not even bother with it. Be clear and concise, while also being descriptive. The recipient should know what the e-mail pertains to before they open it.

Not everything needs a reply. Replying to every e-mail you get, or even a majority of them, wastes your time and the time of the recipient, especially if your reply doesn't say anything meaningful (such as a thanks or acknowledgment of a previous e-mail). Unless it's absolutely necessary to continue a conversation, move on.

Who Else Wants To Win A \$25 Gift

The Grand Prize Winner of last month's Trivia Challenge Quiz are Jaclyn and Lesanne from Argyle Orthodontics! They were the first people to correctly answer my quiz question from last month: **Which infamous criminal was born on the 12th of November, 1934?**

a) Ted Bundy b) John Gacy c) Charles Manson
d) Al Capone



The correct answer was c) Charles Manson. **Now, here's this month's trivia question. The winner will receive a gift card to STARBUCKS. What film released in December 1988 went on to win an Academy Award for Best Picture?**

a) Working Girl b) The Accidental Tourist c) Rain Man d) Dirty Rotten Scoundrels

E-mail Us Right Now With Your Answer!
trivia@master-computing.com

The Lighter Side: Glowing Clouds Above Los Angeles



In the early 1990s, southern California was hit by a major power outage. During the outage, a number of people in Los Angeles called 911 to report very strange, glowing clouds in the night sky. It was something the worried callers had never seen. With the acid-rain scare still in many people's minds, their concern was understandable.

Of course, anyone who has lived outside of a city or has gone camping knows what those strange clouds in the Los Angeles sky were. No glowing acid rain here—it was the Milky Way! They were seeing an incredible flowing band of stars, gas and dust stretching across the entire sky for the first time in their lives.

When you see that band of stars, it's clear why we call our galaxy the Milky Way. Many other cultures have their own names for it, including "The Way the Dog Ran Away" (Cherokee), "Ganges River of Heaven" (Hindi), "The Road to Santiago" (Spanish) and "Hay Merchants Way" (Arabic).