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STEVEN D. STRAUSS is America’s leading small business expert. An internationally recognized lawyer and columnist, he is also a popular speaker who regularly addresses groups around the world. His syndicated USA TODAY column, “Ask an Expert,” appears weekly and can also be found on dozens of major websites. Steve is a frequent media guest and commentator, a sought-after small business spokesperson, and a serial entrepreneur. Visit him at www.MrAllBiz.com.

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EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO SUCCEED IN YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

STEVEN D. STRAUSS

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CHAPTER 31

Negotiate Like a Lawyer

Everything is negotiable.

— LARRY STRAUSS

Deservedly or not, attorneys have a reputation for being, well, a bit smarmy. One of the reasons my old profession gets kicked around a lot is that they (we) get paid to be the jerk. People love to hate lawyers... until they need one. And then, when they do need one, one of the things people expect is that their lawyer will have the negotiation skills necessary to get the best deal possible.

Similarly, having good negotiation skills is vital to small business people because it is something we use every day. Whether it is asking a vendor to lower a price or getting a potential customer to sign on the dotted line, negotiations are part and parcel of small business life. Of course you do not need a lawyer to do the negotiating for you; not only would that be cost-prohibitive, but also it would take some of the fun out of the game. And if you do not see negotiating as a game, then pull up a chair for Lesson No. 1: don’t take it too seriously, and most certainly, don’t take it personally. Lawyers have a reputation for being good, tough negotiators precisely because they know that the whole thing is about getting the best deal possible, nothing more and nothing personal, thank you very much. It really is a game.

In this chapter, you will be offered a variety of tips, tricks, tactics, and strategies that attorneys employ to help their clients win the game. Some will pertain to you, others will not. Pick and choose those strategies and tactics that fit your style.
NEGOTIATION STRATEGIES

It is conventional wisdom these days that one should strive for a win–win outcome. But, as is often the case with conventional wisdom, it is not always right. Now, I am not saying that win–win negotiations and results are not good things—in the right circumstances, sure they are. But the point is, win–win is not always the way to go go.

Win–Win

A win–win negotiation is one in which both sides strive to understand the other and give the other what he or she needs, if not what is wanted. It is one in which tactics such as good cop/bad cop or storming out play no part. Win–win means that you work to come up with a mutually acceptable compromise that gives everyone as much of what they want as possible. The win–win negotiator does not try to talk someone into something; rather, the negotiator tries to get what he or she wants by helping the other party get what is wanted. As a result, win–win negotiations generally leave people feeling better about the negotiation, the other side, and often, the deal itself. This type of negotiation maintains relationships. For all of these reasons and more, there are many times when the win–win style makes sense and serves your best interests.

Creating Trust

Creating a win–win atmosphere requires creating a context of mutual trust. One way to do that is to ask for or offer help early on. Maybe it’s a minor point that you need help with, or maybe it is a gracious offer on your part. Either way, making an early show that “we’re in it together” fosters trust.

Win–Lose

As we lawyers know, there are times to worry about feelings and looking like the nice guy, but there are also plenty of other times when you gotta buckle down, go for the best deal, and handle whatever hurt feelings or other fallout may result. Having a win–lose mind-set also just fits some people better. Highly competitive people, litigators, and people who like
to argue all may find that they simply want to go for it, not worrying about whether the other side accomplishes their goals or gets what they want or feels good. No Kumbaya for these folks—they just want to get what they want. There is no shame in this either. People have different styles and personalities, and it would behoove you to pick a strategy that fits yours. That said, the win–lose strategy usually works best when a great deal can be had if you push, or when you aren’t worried (or don’t care) about upsetting the other side.

The downside to a win–lose strategy is that, should you really have leverage and thus the ability to cram down a deal, the people on the other side may be more inclined to breach the agreement down the road, either because it left a sour taste in their mouths or because it was so one-sided they are unable live up to their end of the agreement.

Doing Your Homework

Before you begin any negotiation, you will need to do your homework. Not only do you need to decide which strategy you will employ, but also you need to decide which tactics, if any, you want to use to further that strategy. But beyond strategies and tactics, you first must decide what you really want out of the negotiation. Prior to any negotiation, then, you should settle on these things:

- **What would be a home run?** If the negotiation goes perfectly and everything breaks your way, what will the parameters of the ideal deal look like? What is your best-case scenario? Maybe your client will pay $10,000 for that new website that you are going to design.
- **What would you like to get?** Assuming the best-case scenario does not emerge, what things are more important than others, and what can you live without? Getting $7,500 for the site is not chopped liver!
- **What must you get?** Which issues are deal breakers for you? What price or terms must you get in order to make a deal? Anything less than $6,500 is not worth it.

The nice thing about prioritizing an upcoming negotiation in this manner is that it allows you to be creative and flexible. Knowing your bottom line, and knowing what a great deal looks like, means that you will
immediately know a good deal when it is offered. And more important, you will be able to see when a decent deal is on the table, even if it is not the crème de la crème. Having done your homework, an offer of $7,000 is not half bad.

You also need to learn as much as you can about the other side, as well as any extrinsic factors that may be in play. Understanding the other side’s motivations can make a huge difference. Here’s an example: say that you have found a location you like for your business and are going in to discuss the terms of the lease with the potential landlord. Without doing some research, you would probably be inclined to pay whatever rent is proposed. But, if you learn first that the space has been vacant for two years, then you will also know that (1) the landlord is very motivated to rent it; (2) he or she will likely be amenable to a lower monthly rental payment just to get someone in the place; and (3) reading this book really helped! That is the power of research.

NEGOTIATION TACTICS

Tactics are used in negotiations very deliberately. They can break an impasse, create a good or bad impression (there are indeed times when it helps to have the other side be wary of you), move things along, stall, or even force a resolution. This section offers a wide variety of tactics from the negotiator’s bag of tricks. The skilled tactician will have some at the ready before the negotiation ever begins, to be used as necessary.

Only Nixon Could Bomb Hanoi

In an attempt to strike a peace deal with the North Vietnamese, President Richard Nixon employed a novel negotiation tactic that he dubbed the madman theory. The idea was to force the North Vietnamese into a settlement by frightening them with the threat of nuclear consequences. As Nixon told aide Bob Haldeman, “I want the North Vietnamese to believe I’ve reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We’ll just slip the word to them that, ‘For God’s sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can’t restrain him when he’s angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button!’” The tactic didn’t work.
The Opening Gambit

At the beginning of a negotiation, it is almost always smart to seem friendly, open, and reasonable. In that vein, these tactics may be helpful:

- **Use questions to obtain undisclosed information.** When you wander onto a car lot, what is the first thing the car salesperson does? That’s right, he or she asks a series of seemingly mundane questions:
  - What kind of car are you looking for?
  - How much do you want to spend?
  - What is your time frame?
  - What will the car be used for?

  But far from being humdrum, these questions actually help the salesperson craft a pitch to you. It helps him or her figure out which cars to show you and what to emphasize. It’s a tactic any of us can use in any negotiation, and we should because it works. Not only does it make you seem interested and cooperative, but it also often fosters the disclosure of useful information. Have a friendly little chat before things get started. You never know what juicy tidbit of information you may discover simply by showing interest.

- **Avoid making the first offer.** Although this tactic is Negotiating 101, it is still worth remembering. My brother gave me this advice when I was just starting out, and it has always served me well. I was applying for a job, and as he explained, “Steve, if you say you want $10 an hour, you will never get more than $10 an hour if you make the first offer. Certainly you won’t get $12 an hour once you say that you want $10, will you? And what if they are actually willing to pay $15 an hour? Then your first offer of $10 really puts you in a corner.” Whenever possible, get the people on the other side to make the first offer. What if they won’t and you are forced to make the first offer? In that case, try being outrageous: “Well, if you really want me to tell you how much I want to make, I guess $50 an hour would be great!”

- **Ask for more than you want.** A corollary to the preceding tactic is that, no matter when you make your offer, be sure it is for more than what you want. Some people are so reasonable that they simply state what they want up front, forgetting that it is a negotiation. Big mistake. Not only will you be expected to lower your asking price (this is a
negotiation, after all), but doing so shows how reasonable you are and thus creates goodwill. Starting out with an offer of more than you expect, therefore, has little downside.

- **Never accept the first offer.** Say something like, “You are going to have to do better than that!” You need not say it in an accusatory or snide way, simply be matter-of-fact about it. It could even be a joke. Even in a win–win negotiation, you want to get the best deal possible, and you do that by asking for more and negotiating down from there.

- **Don’t act too interested.** When negotiating, remember the immortal words from the great musical *West Side Story*:
  
  Go man, go  
  But not like a yo-yo school boy  
  Just play it cool, boy  
  Real cool!  

  It will really help you to stay, and act, a tad disinterested—just a bit above it all. You can take or leave the deal. When you seem less than totally invested in the outcome and can walk away at any time, you gain leverage.

---

**Example:** Jay was looking for a new office and found a place that he really liked. He learned that several other people were also interested in the space. So, very deliberately, when he was shown the property, instead of telling the landlord how interested he was, he turned the tables on her. He quizzed her about the property and acted as if the place was not good enough for his business. At the end of the showing, she offered him the space on the spot.

---

**As Things Progress**

Once begun, negotiations tend to have a life of their own. The smart negotiator will realize this and plan accordingly.
• *Don’t fall in love.* When it becomes clear to the other side that you have to have something (whether it be a price, issue, or thing), you’ve tipped your hand—and your opponent will use it against you. If the car salesperson knows you just love that blue Beemer, watch out! And if you do fall in love, hide it. Play it cool!

• *Play good cop/bad cop.* We all know this old strategy because people use it, and people use it because it works. Decide up front who will be the good guy and who will be the tough guy; these are roles that will be used throughout the negotiation. The value of this tactic is that, as things progress, the other side will come to trust the nice cop and dislike the bad one (or at least not want to deal with him much). There are all sorts of advantages to be had once this routine is established:
  - The bad cop can deliver the bad news (the nonnegotiable items), thereby reinforcing his bad cop image, which also serves to reinforce the good cop’s image.
  - Things the bad cop says are usually accepted as nonnegotiable. Why? Because the bad cop’s a jerk and won’t negotiate!
  - In contrast, things the good cop says are deemed reasonable. This allows the good cop to even take stances that, although possibly unreasonable, are nevertheless more acceptable because they come from the good cop.

**Hint**

For maximum effectiveness, it helps if the good cop says to the other side, “in confidence,” that the bad cop is a jerk and he or she is very sorry about it. This establishes the good cop’s bona fides as a reasonable negotiating partner.

• *Have a red herring.* Having something you do not really care about and are secretly willing to give up serves two purposes. First, it can create goodwill by making you seem reasonable when you do give it up. Second, it helps you get more of what you really want because you are faking giving up something of importance. And after giving up the red herring, there is a greater chance you will not have to give up other things that are more important. By giving up what you know to be superfluous items, you gain on the truly important ones.
• **Make unilateral concessions.** As an adjunct to the preceding rule, a carefully crafted unilateral concession, even a red herring, can create trust, especially when negotiating with someone you do not know well. It makes you seem reasonable and friendly and, moreover, creates the impression that you understand what the other side values. Better yet, it often forces the other side to give something up in return.

• **Be creative.** Lawyers know there are many ways to get the same result. Maybe you can’t give your manager that raise he or she wants, but you could give time off for a few afternoons a month. The manager feels as if he or she got something, but really you didn’t give up much at all.

• **Use the poker play.** We all know that good poker players never reveal their hand by the expressions on their faces. Try playing poker in your negotiation: when presented with an offer, have a stone-cold poker face. Say nothing. The uncomfortable silence that ensues will be broken by whoever gets more uncomfortable first. If it is not you, you will often hear the people on the other side upping their offer, worrying that they have insulted you.

---

**Get Them to Negotiate against Themselves**

Great negotiators love this trick: when given an offer, discuss it but do not give a counteroffer. Instead, tell the other side that the offer is not good enough and has to be increased. This is called “getting them to negotiate against themselves.” If successful, you can get the other side to up the ante without ever having to do so yourself. Car salespeople are great at this. Think about when they come back in the room and say, “My manager says you have to increase your offer.” They’re trying to get you to negotiate against yourself.

The other advantage that silence gives you is that the other side may end up talking, just to fill in the gaps. There is a lot of valuable information that can often be gleaned from such ramblings.
Dealing with an Impasse

There are times in a negotiation when things get stuck, for whatever reason. Here are some techniques you can employ in these sorts of situations:

- The calculated blowup. I love this one and use it a few times a year. Here’s why: sometimes it behooves you to have people dislike you a bit or, even better, fear you. Say that you bought a new computer system for the office and it just isn’t working right. You have had the company that installed it out to fix it two or three times, and you always act reasonably. If the system malfunctions again, then it is time for the calculated blowup. Call the computer company and get mad—I mean really mad! Threaten to sue. Tell them that you are tired of being reasonable and are going to go to the press to tell everyone what a horrible job they are doing! Do not back down. Get them to think you have become a bit unglued.

  You can bet that they will not only try to calm you down, but more important, they will work to placate you. Later, you can apologize and say you are sorry for getting so mad. Everyone will make nice. But know this, too: they will not want to deal with you like that again. They will be nice to you for sure, but they also will be a bit afraid of pissing you off again. You will probably get what you want because they will want to avoid another confrontation.

  This technique can be used in almost any negotiation. It certainly gets people’s attention and often moves them off a stubborn position. But know this, too: do it too often and they will decide dealing with you is more effort than it is worth. This is a technique that can be employed once, maybe twice, in a negotiation.

- The walkout. Similar to the blowup, the temporary walkout can also be very effective in getting a stalled negotiation back on track. When a union and a company are at an impasse, what will one side sometimes do? That’s right, they will walk out and not come back to the negotiating table for a while. Again, it works, but it can’t be used too often without seeming like the boy who cried wolf.

- The ultimatum. Another nuclear bomb sort of negotiation tactic—and one that often creates more problems than it is worth—the ultimatum
is an occasionally effective way to get what you want, especially when you think the other side may be tired or otherwise ready to buckle. But be forewarned: ultimatums get people mad, often leading the other side to employ the walkout.

Agreements

Remember that contracts are also called agreements for a reason: both sides have to agree to everything. Even so, too many people think that when offered a preprinted contract, the terms are nonnegotiable. Nope. Remember the rule stated at the beginning of this chapter: everything is negotiable. When given a lease or other contract, change the parts you do not like. Initial and date the changes, and have the people on the other side do the same (assuming they agree). Know this, too: contracts almost always favor the side that drafts the contract. It’s a contract, but also an agreement, and you have to agree to it or no deal!

- The gesture of goodwill. A less confrontational way to create movement is to make a large, magnanimous gesture. Unilaterally give the other side something they really want, but explain that you are only doing so to move things along and fully expect that your generosity of spirit will be reciprocated.

Wrapping It Up

As things move toward a conclusion—either with a deal or without one—there are a few last tricks that may help you get more of what you want.

- Make a last-minute demand. Once you get to a point in a negotiation when the parameters of a deal have been hashed out and you are simply considering the final language, consider this tough but effective tactic: make a last-minute demand. At that point, everyone has invested substantial time and effort and wants the proposed outcome. Therefore, few people will be willing to rock the boat or scuttle the deal simply because you are being a jerk and making a new demand. They will probably be inclined to give it to you so as to salvage the
deal. They will certainly dislike you for it, but you will probably get what you want, too.

- **Walk away.** The willingness to walk away from the table with no deal is the single most powerful weapon you have in your negotiation toolkit. To get the best deal, you have to be willing to walk away with no deal. Your obvious willingness to do so will likely force the other side to give in more than they would like and consider concessions they want to avoid. And what if your willingness to walk does not get you the deal you want? Then walk. (You can always come back. Even that is negotiable!)

---

**Books to Get**

- *Negotiation Genius: How to Overcome Obstacles and Achieve Brilliant Results at the Bargaining Table and Beyond*, by Deepak Malhotra and Max Bazerman (Random House, 2007)
- *You Can Negotiate Anything*, by Herb Cohen (Citadel, 1983)
- *Negotiate Like the Pros*, by John Patrick Dolan (Penguin, 1992)

The bottom line: Everything is negotiable.
CHAPTER 34

Managing Your Technology

To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer.

—THE FARMER’S ALMANAC

Whether it is hardware or software, there is no doubt that running a small business today requires that one be, if not technically savvy, at least technically proficient. That competence will enable you to keep your computer systems and other technology up and running and, when things get beyond your ken, to be able to hire helpers and know what the heck they are talking about. In this chapter, we explore how to manage your technology and how to fix what will probably someday ail you.

TOP TECH TERMS

Just so that we are on the same page, and so that you will be able to speak geek when necessary, here are some essential small business tech terms that you might need to know.

- **B2B, B2C, B2D, B2E, B2G.** Acronyms that describe relationships, websites, or applications that are business to business, consumers, distributors, employees, or the government, respectively.
- **Bandwidth.** The transmission capacity of the lines that carry electronic traffic. The greater the bandwidth, the more data that can be
transmitted at one time. In popular slang, bandwidth has also come to refer to one’s resources: “We don’t have the bandwidth to deal with that problem right now.”

- **CMS.** An acronym for a content management system—software that allows you to manage large amounts of website content. Popular CMS systems include WordPress, Drupal, and Joomla.
- **CRM.** An acronym for customer relationship management—software that allows you to identify and target your customers.
- **Data mining.** Analyzing and extracting information, insights, and trends from the numbers, statistics, and information within a database.
- **DNS.** An acronym for domain name server. A DNS converts domain names into IP addresses and vice versa.
- **FTP.** File transfer protocol; a set of rules that allows two computers to communicate while transferring files.
- **HTML.** Hypertext markup language; the basic coding language of the web.
- **IP address.** Every computer that transmits information over the Internet has an IP address. Think of it as the telephone number for your computer.
- **Java.** Created by Sun Microsystems, according to Webopedia.com, “Java is a general purpose programming language . . . well suited for use on the World Wide Web. Small Java applications are called Java applets and can be downloaded from a web server and run on your computer.”
- **LAN.** Local area network, a computer network for a specific area and number of computers.
- **OEM.** Although this acronym stands for original equipment manufacturer, it is almost an oxymoron because OEM products do not come from the original manufacturer. In reality, an OEM is a customer of the original manufacturer who buys a product and then resells it under its own name and brand.
- **On-demand.** Having content available to users that can be accessed at any time, as opposed to content that is only available at certain times (a webinar, for example).
- **Organic search results.** Actual search term results, as opposed to paid-for listings.
- **Paid search.** Buying placement on search results.
• **Peripheral.** Any external device attached to a computer, such as a printer or monitor.
• **SaaS.** Software as a service; a business model that allows users to access software over the Internet. Cloud computing. It typically costs much less because users pay only a monthly fee and do not buy a full license.
• **Scalable.** The ability of hardware or software to adapt to increasing demands. If a website can grow as the business grows, it’s scalable.
• **Search engine optimization, or SEO.** The process of creating web pages to increase the likelihood that the pages will rank high in a search engine query. SEO uses keywords and links to create higher rankings.
• **Virus.** There are all sorts of Internet bugaboos out there: Trojan horses, programs that conceal their evil purpose; worms, programs that replicate themselves; viruses, software that takes over and slows down systems; spyware, programs that gather and transmit private information; adware, software that displays random advertisements; and phishing, e-mail attempts to fraudulently get you to release confidential information.
• **Web 2.0.** Describes a new Internet era that is more collaborative and interactive. Online communities, streaming video, podcasts, webcasts, and shared information—these are the hallmarks of Web 2.0.
• **WYSIWYG.** “What you see is what you get” (also sometimes called Wissywig). This means that what is on your monitor is what you will see in real life.

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**Top Text Terms**

According to Netlingo.com, these are some of the top text terms used in business:

- BHAG—Big hairy audacious goal
- CYA—Cover your ass
- DD—Due diligence
- DQYDJ—Don’t quit your day job
- EOD—End of day
- IANAL—I am not a lawyer
- KISS—Keep it simple, stupid
ADOPTING NEW TECHNOLOGY

Technology is supposed to make your business life easier and more productive. But too often, it has the opposite effect. Whether it is the challenge of learning new software, computer crashes, or e-mail snafus, technology is not always the panacea it is made out to be—or should be. That said, if implemented properly, new technology should be more of a help than a hindrance. The secret is to implement it properly. Here’s how:

- **Choose right.** There is nothing worse than laying out big bucks for a new technology solution, only to find out that you made the wrong choice. Buying everyone an iPhone is a big mistake if a BlackBerry or Android smartphone is the better choice. So do your homework, comparison shop, get feedback, and choose wisely.

- **Create buy-in.** Employees resist new technology either because they don’t see the purpose behind the switch or because they do not want to put in the time necessary to learn new tricks. It is your task, then, to show them how the new technology will make the business better and their jobs easier. They also need to understand that the new way is going to be the only way and that using the new technology (or software or whatever) will be required. So, although buy-in is important,
so is leadership. You’re the boss, so it’s okay to boss your employees around sometimes.

- **Take time.** Often the biggest barrier to new technology adoption is time. Solo entrepreneurs especially may be loath to put in the time to really learn how the new thing works and how it can make them more productive. That’s a big mistake. If you are going to shell out money for new technology or software, it is shortsighted not to take the time needed to learn how it works. Make a commitment to spend a few hours, or days even, and learn it. Remember, the companies that create products for small businesses put a lot into their research and development; these products are built with you in mind. It would be a shame if you did not take full advantage of all that is offered.

- **Train.** Almost all small business software and hardware solutions now come with some sort of training, either embedded or online. Partake. Beyond that, if you are implementing a big change across a wide spectrum, don’t skimp on the training you offer your staff. Weekly sessions may be needed. E-mail and other assistance should be offered. Training should be experiential as well as theoretical. If cost is a concern, consider your local community college—most offer a wide array of computer classes, and at fees any small business can afford.

**SECURITY**

Technology security can mean many things.

**Internet and Computer Security**

The basics of prevention and Internet security include these elements:

- **Passwords.** Using the same password everywhere invites trouble. Try this instead: use the same password, but add the name of the site as a prefix. For example, if your normal password is 4444, then use Gmail444, MSN4444, and eBay4444.

- **Firewalls.** As the name implies, a firewall is a wall between your computer and the outside world. It does two things. First, it hides your computer from the Internet at large so that hackers and viruses can’t see you. Second, if a virus does infect your computer, the firewall
warns you and lets you stop it from transmitting to other computers via the Internet. Zonealarm.com has a fine free firewall that you can download. Windows also has one that you can turn on.

- **Software.** There is no shortage of software protections available for unauthorized Internet intrusions.
- **Automatic updates.** Be sure to turn on automatic updates for Windows, as security patches are issued regularly.

### Reformatting the Hard Drive

When getting rid of an old computer, merely deleting files is not enough. All of your old information remains on the hard drive, even if you do not see it. Before disposing of that old computer, then, reformat your hard drive to wipe it clean. The method for doing so differs depending on your operating system, so do a Google search for “reformatting a hard drive” and your operating system, and you will get instructions for how to do so.

### Social Media Fraud and Security

In this day and age, it is not enough to merely protect your base technology; you must also be vigilant about protecting your online identity. If you aren’t careful, if you don’t take some simple but necessary precautions, your Facebook account can get hacked, your Twitter account can get usurped, even your bank account can be robbed.

Indeed, according to the FBI, in 2008 and 2009, crooks fraudulently transferred more than $100 million out of small business bank accounts. How? They were able to obtain bank login information by hacking social media accounts. I recently spoke with Kevin Haley, the Director of Security Technology and Response for Symantec, the world leader in information protection, to get some expert advice on this issue.

Haley confirmed that getting hacked can be as simple as clicking on a bad link, one corrupted by the crooks. When Barack Obama first ran for president, his official Obama for President Twitter account was hacked, telling people they could “possibly win $500 in free gas” by taking an online survey (with link).
Here’s how these schemes work: Say that someone you know on Facebook or wherever instructs you to follow a link. So you trustingly click over to the site, which looks every bit as normal as a real site, and you click the link, except that it is infected with malware. Once you click the link, the malware is installed onto your computer without you ever knowing it. That malware might be, for example:

- Key logging software that records your keystrokes and that in turn allows the criminals to login to your social media accounts—or even your bank.
- Software that sends out fake social media messages as if it were you (Tweeting Viagra tweets would likely be bad for your business).

According to Haley, the danger is that with social media, we generally trust the information we receive from people. But your friend’s links can be infected and they might not even know it (e.g., “watch this cool video!”) or the bad guys themselves could send you a message, trying to fake you out (“Someone from the class of 2000 is looking for you, click here to see who asked about you”). Whatever the case, once you click the bad link, according to Haley, “Bam, you’re owned!”

So what do you do and how can you protect yourself? The first thing is to get the right software. You want an integrated suite that will block intruders and viruses, detect and prevent the installation of other sorts of malware, and protect your privacy.

Protect Yourself

Symantec offers plenty of smart and affordable ways to protect your business and online work. For example, Symantec Endpoint Protection, Small Business Edition “protects your computers and servers with the most effective antivirus, anti-malware technologies available in a single, integrated solution.”

Additionally, it is important to institute policies and educate employees about the dangers of using file sharing programs and free programs and
updates downloaded from the Internet. Also, if you don’t already, monitor your social media output. Infected accounts can send out ongoing malicious messages without you ever knowing if you are not watching.

Finally, change your passwords often.

**Data Security**

Computer security also means not losing your data. For starters, you should have an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) so that if you have a power outage in your area (or a spike or a surge), you will not lose any data stored on your computers. A UPS gives your system enough power to save your data and power down properly—a typical UPS will give your computer about 5 to 10 minutes of power. A UPS is essentially a large battery that plugs into the wall, and all of your computer components then plug into the UPS, just as they would with a power strip. Choose a UPS with an Underwriters Laboratories rating.

Another way to ensure that you don’t lose your data is to back up your computers on a regular basis. There are two kinds of computer users: those who have never had a crisis that caused them to lose data and so don’t back up (yet!) and the rest of us. Try losing two chapters of a book you were writing because you didn’t back up, and you learn the hard way. The fact is, you never know what might cause you to lose important computer files—a fire, a power outage, even someone kicking a cord. According to ADR Data Recovery, businesses lose more than $12 billion per year because of data loss, and the vast majority of that is from hardware or system failure. Other causes are software corruption, natural disasters, and, of course, human error. So the only real protection you have against losing vital information is to back up your important files, as they say, “early and often.”

You can back up your computers a few ways:

- Manual backups require that you regularly copy your data to an external hard drive.
- Backups to an external hard drive can also be done automatically using software.
- Automatic backups can be accomplished using an online backup service. The nice thing about these services is that they copy your data onto remote servers, so if there is a natural disaster, your data is stored...
far away. Make sure that the company storing your data keeps it secure and confidential.

**Stupid Google Tricks**

- Movie times and locations: Type in the name of the movie and the city.
- Weather: Type in “weather” and the city.
- Tracking FedEx, UPS, or Post Office shipments: Type in the tracking number.
- Flight times: Names of cities, for example, “New York to Dallas.”
- Measurement conversions: For example, “teaspoons in a tablespoon.”
- Calculator: Type in the equation.
- Word definitions: “Define ____.”
- Times in other cities: “Current time in ____.”
- Convert currency: “$5 USD-Euros.”

**TECH SUPPORT**

Most small businesses do not have an information technology (IT) person, yet as the business grows and as the network grows, the need for a network administrator of some sort grows, too. At a minimum, there should be one person in your office who knows how the system is set up and the basics of how it works. This person should be in charge of:

- All passwords and product keys, although you, too, need to know where they are stored in case this person should leave unexpectedly
- Regular system backups, if done manually
- Basic repairs and updates

Another option is to schedule a monthly maintenance and service call. There are companies that offer tech support for small businesses for a small monthly fee. This also gives you access to tech support online, over the phone, or in person, as needed. Some services to check out are:

- Geeks on Call, www.geeksoncall.com
- Gurus 2 Go, www.gurus2go.com
- Geek Squad, www.geeksquad.com
By putting in the time to learn how your technology is supposed to work, you ensure that you are running it and it isn’t running you (too much!).

TOP FIVE TECH MISTAKES

Whether we like it or not, being an entrepreneur these days also means you have to be a techno-geek. Computers, hardware, software, e-commerce, smartphones, dumb phones—there is a lot that can go wrong. Here then are the top five tech mistakes that small businesses tend to make and how to avoid them:

1. *Looking small.* Of all of the great things the Internet has brought to small business (the ability to sell anywhere, anytime for starters), maybe best is that there is no need for any business to look small, ever. No matter how small your small business, the Internet has leveled the playing field. In fact, while you may be small offline, the technology trick is that online you can look every bit as big and professional as your biggest competitor—and you should. If you do not already look big online, then it’s time to fix that. Getting a great website is simply a matter of using one of the many online site-creation services available or hiring a designer. Craigslist and Elance are excellent options for that. Either way, you would be smart to take advantage of this amazing opportunity to be small but look big.

2. *Lack of security software.* Of course you know that you are supposed to have computer security software in place to thwart potential online crime, malware, and scams. Your customer lists, account numbers, passwords, data, contracts, and other vital documents are the lifeblood of your business, but far too many small businesses act like the threat is not real. But it’s real, very real. So get some great security software. Now.

3. *Not scheduling regular data backups.* You know that you are supposed to back up your data, but do you? Maybe not. Take it from me—I lost two chapters of the rewrite of this book because I had not signed up for an online backup service. I won’t make that mistake again. So learn this lesson the easy way—from your pal Steve. He learned it the hard way for you.
4. *Never really learning the software.* Most software is not unlike the brain: people tend to use only 10 percent of it. And that’s a mistake. Software companies spend tons of time and money adding bells and whistles on their software, much of which is ignored. You would be wise then to surf on over to the software maker’s website and check out the many tips, tricks, and tutorials you will find there.

5. *Not disposing of old technology properly.* There are two problems with not disposing of your technology the right way. One, if you simply throw that computer away, it adds potentially toxic materials to landfills. Two, improperly disposing of your technology potentially exposes your valuable, sensitive data to being accessed by others. To get rid of your old technology properly, check with the manufacturer, your local department of waste management, or donate it to charity for a tax deduction.