CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Migration

By Douglas E. Welch

One high-tech career challenge you will face almost daily is the migration of resources—moving in new computers and moving around old computers at your company or client sites. In order to make the best use of the technology available, you will find that you are constantly reconfiguring old computers for new users and new uses. There are a few rules that can assist you in getting the most from technology while still keeping your productivity, and that of your users, as high as possible.

An End to Everything

First, there comes a time in the life of any piece of technology when it should simply be retired. It does no good, and might even damage productivity, to pass obsolete technology onto another member of the office team. If a computer is simply too slow to run even the most basic operating system and software, it is time to donate that computer to a charity, or simply discard it.

It can be difficult to justify tossing a computer that once cost $1,000 or more, but the effect of that system on productivity can be great. You might think that having a computer, any computer, is better than having no computer at all, but you will find that even if a user is sharing a current computer, their productivity can be higher than if they were struggling with an obsolete system of their own. Resist the urge to hold onto equipment for too long. You will be doing a disservice both to your client and to yourself.

Moving, Moving, Moving

As new computers and other technology come into an office, it is most likely your job to install the new units and then move older systems to new users. If you don't have a plan for these migrations, you could end up wasting large amounts of time, both yours and your users'. If you want to reduce the time spent on system migrations, there are a few ways you can make your life a bit easier.

One of the most difficult issues in installing a new computer is moving a user's data. Too often I find that data is scattered all over the computer, leading to a (usually) unsuccessful scavenger hunt. Even with the established data folders used in Windows and the Mac OS, users often don't understand where their data is going or where it should be stored. You can make your life easier by educating your users about the My Documents folder on their system as a standard repository for their data. If you have a network fileserver, this can make things even easier. This removes any need to move data from one computer to another, except for a few misplaced local files that might be scattered about. A few minutes spent today could save you hours in the future.

In some cases, if the user has a particularly messy hard disk, I make sure to leave any data intact on the system, even if I prepare the computer for another user. In many cases, users will realize that they are missing an important data file only after they have used their new system for a day or so. You would be well advised to avoid completely rebuilding a computer for a week or so until all the data issues have been sorted out. It is often easy to simply move existing data "out of the way" so a new user doesn't have to see the data, but it still remains accessible.

Personalization

Often, users will have personalized their computers to an extreme degree. While I am content to let the users reapply many of the personalizations to a new computer, you will want to make an effort to bring forward any settings that are directly related to productivity. This can include Internet bookmarks and favorites, template files, stored e-mail and address books.

Take some time today to make note of the most important files and how they can be exported and imported into a new system. Develop a checklist of procedures that you need to perform on both the new computer and the old. I keep a variety of these checklists, depending on the client, so I can easily start the process, no matter how infrequently I need it. Sometimes there might be months between each wave of new computers, so it really helps to write it down instead of trying to rely on your memory each time. In my case, I keep the list electronically in my handheld PDA so I can reuse the list and easily add and remove tasks as needed.

As with any task in your high-tech career, preparation can help to take the sting out of repetitive tasks. Developing an understanding of the particular migration of your company and clients can turn a somewhat painful process into a well-managed and controlled task. Controlling the day-to-day task of your high-tech work is just one more way to enhance your high-tech career. ❏

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