

## **Top Ten Items for Your IT budget**

**To many people an IT budget consists of the £500 they included in the last funding bid that came through. Although this is usually enough to buy one computer or laptop – and maybe a printer - it doesn't reflect the true costs of setting up and using the IT equipment on a day-to-day basis.**

When budgeting for IT it is useful to consider the Total Cost of Ownership. When purchasing a car, for example, you need to think about running costs such as insurance, road tax, petrol or servicing. On this basis the following items need be considered when preparing your IT budget:

### **Top Ten Things to include in an IT budget**

- 1 Hardware
- 2 Software
- 3 Installation
- 4 Maintenance
- 5 Backup
- 6 Consumables
- 7 Insurance
- 8 Broadband
- 9 Web hosting
- 10 Training

Always leave a little time for planning your budget – do a bit of research and ask for help rather than plucking nice round numbers out of the air. Document as much as you can and keep your documents up to date – it saves time and money when someone comes in to help you if things go wrong.

## 1 Hardware

- Don't just go to PC World and buy the special offer. Call a couple of computer suppliers, tell them what you're trying to do and see what they suggest.
- You may want the latest kit, but do you really need it? Be clear about your needs, and start with the basics. For most people that's things like email, word processing, web browsing and calendars, none of which will put much strain on even a three year old machine.
- Don't forget that different users have different needs. Accessibility equipment may be costly, but it can be the difference between someone being able to work for you, or not.
- Remember to budget for extras like printers, carrying cases, extension leads, network cables, wireless routers, etc.
- And don't forget to allow for replacements every four or five years, and for enhancements such as bigger hard disks.

## 2 Software

- Look at [www.ctx.org.uk](http://www.ctx.org.uk) for REALLY low cost software deals for charities on popular software, including Microsoft.
- Start with full, legal copies of software such as Microsoft Office, plus specialist software such as Quickbooks.
- Consider open source alternatives, which will be free, such as OpenOffice, but be aware of compromises you'll need to make such as an absence of Dummies' Guides for self-help.
- Beyond the basics such as Microsoft Office you will very rarely guess correctly what software you need before you start work, so the best software budget is an ongoing amount. Don't just buy one big boxful at the beginning and not using a lot of it.
- High-end software such as Quark Express or DreamWeaver often creates a need for a training budget. It can be learned on the job by a self-motivated enthusiast but be realistic about its value in the grand scheme of things. Newsletters and websites can often be produced without having to learn the mechanics of the process, using software such as Publisher, or free tools such as Wordpress.
- You may also need specialist software if your clients are going to use the computers, which may include accessibility software. Don't expect this to be one-size-fits-all however. Once again you may want something in your budget for when new staff of clients along with specific needs.

### **3 Installation**

- Do you need someone to install new hardware and software when it arrives, including running cables around the office and troubleshooting if it doesn't work?
- Help like this is especially welcome when you're moving office, to make sure computers get back up and running as quickly as possible.

### **4 Maintenance**

- Good quality maintenance support means carrying out routine housekeeping and checks to prevent problems, as well as having someone available when things go wrong.
- A monthly routine can help keep software up to date, keep the systems tidy and spot problems before they cause damage. This could be handled by a volunteer, a trained member of staff or an outside contractor.
- Even if you rely on a volunteer it's useful to be able to afford some professional help when things go wrong, or the volunteer gets a job.
- Be sure to keep a record of important information, such as passwords, usernames and the main settings. You can usually get help a lot more quickly if this information is to hand when you call for help.
- Keep this information secure, but make sure senior staff can access it when needed, not just the IT volunteer.
- Many IT companies can offer remote access to your computer – logging onto your computer over the internet to work out what's wrong and put it right. This is a widespread solution and should generally be considered a secure option [assuming you trust your IT company] that can reduce maintenance costs to an affordable level.

### **5 Backup**

- Keep your important information safe, keep it secure, and make sure your backup solution is tested from time to time.
- A simple backup system will update itself at least every week, with the backup being taken off site, in case of fire or theft.
- A simple answer is that you have two external hard disks – costing no more than £100 for both – and software to save all the relevant files to it every week. Then someone takes one disk home each week, swapping it for the older one.
- If you have a backup system make sure the process for recovering data is documented and ask a non-techie person to test it. There's no point setting it all up if it doesn't work when you need it and there are lots of things that can go wrong with automated processes like backups.

- HINT: No one ever had to be persuaded to budget for this AFTER a system meltdown or office fire.

## **6 Consumables**

- The paper, ink and other stationery needs of an office are in some way linked to your use of IT. Have you allowed for it in your budgets?

## **7 Insurance**

- Cover yourself for accidental damage to equipment – and remember to include the cost of replacing any lost or stolen software.
- Then add in disaster recovery insurance to cover the cost of losing data when equipment fails.
- You may also need public liability insurance if your clients use the equipment.

## **8 Broadband**

- Internet access and email is just about as essential as the telephone these days, offering you access to cheap communications and a wealth of online information.
- People who work off-site a lot may want to have a mobile phone and internet access on the move – such as a Blackberry to access email or a broadband dongle for full internet access on a laptop. These are now much more affordable options, perhaps replacing the need for a small team to have a landline.
- Be realistic about your needs before signing up and remember that most deals tie you in for at least 12 or 18 months. Ask neighbours about their experience of different providers, or look at comparison sites online.

## **9 Web Hosting**

- Have you got a website? Then don't forget to budget for annual costs like hosting and registering the name.
- If you haven't got a website then you may well need a separate budget for setting one up.
- You may need to include a budget to pay someone to keep your website up to date – in the same way that you may want to pay someone to produce a newsletter or other publicity materials.

## 10 Training

- Be realistic about how much you can expect people to be self-taught or learn on the job. Having a training budget means you can invest in staff and volunteers and help them develop relevant skills that help the whole organisation.
- Basic IT skills are essential in almost every job now, such as word processing, using email or surfing the internet.
- More advanced skills may relate to particular tasks. For example:
  - Can your project managers use a spreadsheet for preparing budgets, or scheduling tasks?
  - Can the fundraisers prepare attractive bid documents using a word processor, or drop in graphs and pictures to illustrate their point?
  - Does your administrator use Outlook to set up meetings or share contacts with the team?
- Additional training for volunteers may be essential to help them use their skills, such as help understanding charity budgets for someone who is good with spreadsheets but only ever worked in business.
- Don't forget your Accidental Techie, the person who everyone else turns to for advice when IT problems arise. They are often a reluctant volunteer – perhaps the person who knows how to use the photocopier or fax – and may welcome training in how to solve everyday IT problems.
- A useful benchmark for any training budget is to aim for all staff and volunteers to pass the European Computer Driving License. It's a modular programme covering essentials such as file management, word processing, spreadsheets and so on.
- Costs vary according to where you study [there are free online resources] and exam fees.

## More help

- ICT Knowledgebase has user-friendly articles written specifically for voluntary and community organisations [www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk](http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk)

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