

Straight **Talking**

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This year sees CBS celebrate 25 years in business. Over the next few months, we will be looking at how business life has changed over the years. This month we focus on technology.

It's hard to remember back to a time when typewriters and calculators were essential items of office equipment. The advent of the personal PC, together with email, has brought greater flexibility and speed, simplifying operational procedures as well as improving communications with clients. The Internet has also transformed our lives, opening up access to a wealth of information at minimal cost.

Is technology giving you a headache? The explosion in technology does have a downside, however. Too much information can be as difficult as too little – and who hasn't suffered from email 'inbox' fatigue? Technology advances have also increased the pace at which we work and may mean we are available 24/7. Establishing realistic deadlines is important but basing these on what is reasonable, rather than what technology allows, is crucial. Allowing extra time will generally result in improved performance and productivity and just as importantly, reduce stress and anxiety on staff at all levels.

Social networking – good for business?

Social networking sites are increasingly popular

and can be valuable business tools. However, getting the most out of the medium requires an understanding of how the tools and applications available can best be exploited for your business.

Has informal communication become too casual? Electronic communications offer an easy way to keep in touch but may also depersonalize relationships and can lead to a relaxation of grammatical and business standards. A few simple rules and a clear communications protocol should ensure you always present a professional image. It is important, however, to remember the value of face to face and telephone communications in establishing and building relationships. Your clients will feel more valued and staff less isolated.

Is it just about bits and bytes? With changes in technology an ongoing feature of business life, it is important to plan for an efficient and safe working environment. Desking, seating and cabling all need to evolve as businesses adopt new technologies - such as data and voice communications for example.

Modern technology has much to offer small businesses but it is important to remain in control of the technology rather than letting it drive you. Ultimately true connectivity is about keeping it personal – good client relationships remain the cornerstone to business success.

