



Computer Technology Good or Bad? By John Schwery

We all think our businesses are simple. We Clean! Right? Well, yes and no. Computer technology has affected even the way we clean today and it has or will change your competitors. In fact, look at every business. In some way computer technology has touched and changed that business. Automobile service garages track each car's maintenance history and the history of which service tech worked on that car is known. Fast food service related businesses know how many of which menu item sells at what time of year. Hotel / Motel service desks know when and how long to schedule their rooms, turnover rate during the year. Even churches produce itemized computer reports to show who donates in the weekly offering. These are some examples of how other industries have focused on computer technology as a way to improve their business and provide information to make better decisions.

Also, the computer has enabled smaller companies to compete with larger businesses. In our industry, the computer and software available can make our businesses easier to manage by providing a system and a way of business for our staff to follow, thus this improves profits. Let's discuss several tools that can help.

First, customer information is always at your finger tips. Being able to display customer information such as addresses, phone numbers, etc. is important. However, displaying and, if necessary changing a customers schedule and work order is also handy. Better yet, documenting a customer's phone call for future use can be invaluable. Some software also allows seamless integration with word processing software to write preprinted letters to a customer.

Scheduling is everyone's concern. Today, the computer can display any customer schedule at a glance and display other scheduled customers for that day as well. Also, new technology allows you to set your schedule, display it and then develop printed individual routes to hand to your employees. In fact, many businesses will assign a zone number (or zip code) to a customer and they will schedule customers and staff to a specific zone. A scheduling tool like this can be invaluable when moving customers to different days or just finding a schedule for a customer that is new to your business. In seconds you know how many

houses you have committed to clean next Thursday and Friday! Print a report that displays your next five weeks and take that with you to an estimate.

Employee documentation and payroll generation are available. Each business pays employees for their time worked. Some as a hourly pay or some as a percentage and still some pay as a mixture of both hourly and percentage pay combined. Keeping this all straight can be a full time job in itself. However, the automation of these tasks can be done for you. Payroll is our biggest expense in our industry...let's manage it.

Accounting sometimes can be a time consuming task. However, software is available that will easily handle the creating and printing of invoices and applying payments for each customer that is scheduled. Also, you can export that information to an accounting package. Thus, you only have to enter a customer's information once and that's it. Just think, a system will make sure you didn't forget about invoicing for a cleaning or maybe you clean for **FREE**?

How many of your customers pay for their service with credit cards? Technology allows you to get approval of credit cards in a matter of a few seconds. In fact some businesses report that 35% of their regular business clients pay with credit cards. Just think, more business with less accounts receivable? That's profit.

Some custom software can also help your business retain customers. Customer retention and customer follow ups are a great way to grow a business, but it is time consuming. A management system remembers. Just think if you can somehow keep 95% of your customers! By tracking frequency and follow-ups along with other methods of retaining customers, your business would keep customers longer thus less turnover and improved profit.

Reports can help you understand your business better. Reports can display very interesting facts about your business. Ask yourself, of your customers, how many have been cleaned 25, 50 or more times? Which customers are profitable for you? How much do you make on each customer? Are your regular customers more profitable than special customers?

The cost associated with this technology is affordable! If you budget \$1200 and \$80 per month for software, you can be a completely automated business. That's only \$4.00 per day over a three year period of time. That is much less than paying more administrative costs for office staff and super cheap to improve your quality of life. Remember, you don't need the biggest, *baddest* computer system, just something that works and you can rely on. Consult a computer professional you trust before purchasing a computer.

With all of these tools available, doesn't it make sense for your business? As your business grows, you are busy! Rely on technology to help you with the details. Think of computer technology as a tool to grow your business. If you take the time

to learn a system, you will make your life easier in the long run because the information is all at your finger tips.

Yes, computer technology is here. With a small amount of effort, it will provide tools you can use, knowledge about your business, and will push your business ahead. Bottom line: strongly consider computer technology, it will make you a better at what you do.... cleaning residential homes **PROFITABLY!**

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