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Thrifty business

Technology can help companies save cash



By **Jim T. Ryan**

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RecoupIT Inc. employee Pradeep Muddasani inspects computers that were returned to a major manufacturer. The Silver Spring Township, Cumberland County, firm refurbishes and resells the units to businesses and consumers at a discount. Photo/Amy Spangler

Technology can be expensive. It's no surprise when companies pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for computers, servers, tech support and software.

But in a recession, spending that kind of money may not be possible, even if you need a new laptop or software program to track your sales. So what do you do?

The same thing you do when you go to the grocery store: look for deals. That's a good thing about technology - often the deals are built in.

Whether the shopping list is for hardware or software, companies in Central Pennsylvania offer other businesses ways to save money.

"The thing that limits people about technology is that people can't think about it too long without running up a big bill," said Treff LaPlante, president and chief executive officer of [WorkXpress](#), a Carlisle-based tech company that offers a platform for businesses to create customized software applications.

Companies can save money when they build customized software applications using WorkXpress, LaPlante said. Some software-development firms' quotes exceed \$300,000 to design applications linking a company's sales, shipping and production departments. WorkXpress can beat most of those prices by 70 percent, LaPlante said.

With that type of pricing, WorkXpress is trying to conquer an estimated \$700 billion North American software market. The worldwide software market is worth roughly \$1.3 trillion, LaPlante said.

Customized software also saves company executives' time.

"It frees them up to think, 'How do I really want my business to run,'" LaPlante said. "WorkXpress should be the glue that ties everything else together for a client."

OK, now you're saving on software, but what about the hardware? Most computers can cost a couple thousand dollars by the time you add the bells and whistles and pay for shipping.

"We do very well during recessions," said Peter Sobotta, president of Silver Spring Township-based [recoupIT Inc.](#), a computer and electronics reseller.

The company offers refurbished computers and other equipment at a cut rate because it buys the electronics from big-box stores like Wal-Mart that don't want to restock returns, Sobotta said. It also buys tons of computers from companies going out of business, leasing companies and overstocked retailers, like the Home Shopping Network.

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RecoupIT has contracts with the network and Wal-Mart to refurbish and resell products. "We make headaches disappear for these large companies," he said.

RecoupIT opened in 1999 during the bursting tech bubble, when companies had to sell computers and other technology as they folded. Its customer base runs the gamut from individuals looking for a deal to entrepreneurs and companies working with limited budgets to build a company.

Some computers are selling for as low as \$160 on recoupIT's Web site. Flat-screen televisions that cost thousands of dollars at other stores are selling for about \$400.

"It's very hard to sell high-end items in this environment," Sobotta said. "People come to us because they can get computers and laptops cheap, for \$200 instead of \$2,000."

Now you have the computer and the software, but you need to speak with a client in California, or maybe in Japan. Time to buy a plane ticket, right?

Not so fast. Internet videoconferencing allows you to have a meeting with your partner in Tokyo while sitting in Lititz.

Harrisburg-based [Digital Samba USA](#) sells and installs OnSync-branded Internet-based meeting products and services such as webcasting, webinars and desktop videoconferencing. The firm is the U.S. headquarters of Digital Samba, based in Barcelona, Spain.

"The features include the ability to see and hear one another with live video and (Voice over IP), document sharing, text chat and more," said David Hittinger, Digital Samba USA's president. "The key for us is to enable clients to have equally effective face-to-face meetings over the Web, instead of having to travel for business."

The company's offerings range from free service for up to three users, to about \$200-\$300 for a monthly subscription. Companies also have the option of having the software installed on their own network. It just depends on what the client needs, Hittinger said.

Either way, clients get realistic and multilayered conferencing that saves them a lot of money now and over the long haul.

"Our business is strong despite the recession, and many companies are now more receptive than ever to our offerings," Hittinger said.

Technology has always promised to make lives more comfortable and more productive, even if you have to learn something new. During a recession that's important, and often the best technologies float to the top.

"The space we're in is a rising wave," said WorkXpress' LaPlante. "And it's rising fast."

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