Tech resolutions for the new year

January 2 2010, By Troy Wolverton

It's time to take stock of the year that was and figure out how to make the next one better.

But rather than the typical New Year's resolutions, I'm offering my Tech Resolutions -- ideas to make tech work for you, not the other way around:

BACK UP, BACK UP, BACK UP

There are no perfect options for backing up your files. But one thing's for sure: Any solution is better than none at all. The hard drive inside your computer is bound to fail sooner or later. With much of our personal lives now stored on hard drives -- things such as pictures, music, videos, letters and more -- when one dies, you stand to lose much or all of your most cherished and irreplaceable data.

Fortunately, back up doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. You can find a 1-terabyte external drive for as little as $100, and online backup services with unlimited storage space cost as little as $55 a year. Meanwhile, many external drives come with software programs that make back up easy and automatic. One such program is built into the Mac operating system.

TAKE A LEAP INTO THE CLOUD

The "cloud" -- computing resources that are available over the Internet rather than on your local PC or network -- may or may not be the wave

of the future. But there are a growing number of compelling cloud-based services -- many of them free -- and reasons for using them.

Services such as Google Docs, a Web-based word processor, are getting good enough to replace similar PC-based software, potentially saving you hundreds of dollars. But they also offer features that are either better than or not available on their PC counterparts.

Cloud-based services make it easy to share things like documents and calendars, allowing you to collaborate in real time on a memo or to book an appointment without having to swap e-mail. And such services can function as ubiquitous storage lockers, allowing you access to important files or media on any device with an Internet connection.

CONSIDER DUMPING CABLE

Cable bills just keep rising, no matter what's going on in the economy. To date, most folks had little choice but to just accept it.

But that's changing, thanks to the Internet. You already can watch a wide variety of TV shows online for free, streamed to your computer from sites such as Hulu. Netflix subscribers can choose from some 12,000 television shows and movies that the company streams to customers at no extra charge. Those willing to pay a bit more can find additional thousands of videos available for rent or purchase on online services such as Apple's iTunes or Amazon.com.

You won't find as much content as you would from your local cable provider, you often have to wait until after the shows or movies air to find them online and it's not always easy to access such videos from your big-screen TV. But you can save a good deal of money, watch much of the same content on demand and not have to pay for programs you don't watch.

CONSIDER BUYING A SMARTPHONE

Smartphones are quickly becoming the center of gravity for computing, with a kind of virtuous circle developing around them. Developers are creating thousands of applications for them, making smartphones increasingly useful and versatile. This versatility attracts growing numbers of users, who in turn attract more developers.

For many functions, my smartphone has replaced my PC. I use it daily to check [e-mail](), read the news, play games, listen to music and get sports scores and the weather forecasts. I also get directions to local stores, pay bills, check Facebook, watch videos and shop.

Some people find the touchscreens on certain smartphones difficult to use. And both the phones and the data plans needed to make them work can be pricey. But once you have one, you'll wonder how you ever lived without one.

TAKE YOUR TECH IN MODERATION

Our technological wonders often have their negative aspects, even if we don't always see them. I don't think the answer is to turn your back on tech. Instead, try to strike some balances. Such compromises don't have to be painful.

Turning off devices when you're not using them doesn't take a lot of effort, but can save considerable energy. Holding on to your computer a year longer or giving it to someone who will use it can save money and ease the burden of landfills. And taking a step away from your gadgets and services from time to time can help you focus on family and friends.

Have a very Happy New Year!

Citation: Tech resolutions for the new year (2010, January 2) retrieved 23 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2010-01-tech-resolutions-year.html