CST TECHNOLOGY TIMES

Insider Tips To Make Your Business Run Faster, Easier And More Profitably

Tech Talk...

with Lisa Brown, CEO of CST Group Inc.

It takes a Village! I know this to be true!! When I was deep into raising two kids, I relied heavily on family and friends who assisted with pick-ups, drop-offs, appointments, and sickness while I worked my day job for local government.

When I decided to open my own IT firm, I bent over backwards to ensure my clients (many of them residential) were taken care of with exceptional service – even at the expense of those two kids. I still had my village who regularly came to my rescue when schedules got crazy.

Over the years, this taught me some hard lessons. One, I still believe in exceptional service, but I will no longer prioritize that over family and neither will my staff. I mean no disrespect by this statement because we truly do accommodate our clients, but if we must choose, we will always choose family and our clients respect that. Two, it takes collaboration and cooperation to ensure your technology is always protected, performing at its best and growing at a pace that meets your goals.

Your IT Firm, whether that is CST or another firm, should always be your first call when any technology related issues arise.

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CST Group Inc.

This monthly publication is provided courtesy of Shawn & Lisa Brown, Owners.

OUR MISSION:

CST Group Inc. is a PROACTIVE technology management firm who's mission it to SECURE, PROTECT and MANAGE technology for Small to Medium Businesses like yours.

7 QUESTIONS You Should Be Asking Your IT Provider Every Quarter *(But Probably Aren't)*

If you're only talking to your IT provider when you renew your contract, you're doing it wrong.

Technology isn't a "set it and forget it" part of your business. It's constantly evolving, and so are the threats that come with it. That's why quarterly IT check-ins are nonnegotiable if you want your business to stay protected, productive and competitive.

But here's the thing: **Most business owners don't know what to ask.**

So today, we're giving you a cheat sheet. These are the questions your IT provider should be ready to answer every single quarter – no tech-speak, no vague promises, just straight answers that keep your business running smoothly.

1. Are There Any Vulnerabilities We Need To Address Right Now?

This isn't just about checking boxes.
Ask:

- Is our antivirus up-to-date?
- Are there unpatched systems?
- Have we had any near misses or red flags lately?

You're not being paranoid – you're being prepared.

2. What's The Status Of Our Backups? And Have You Tested Them Lately?

Backups are like seat belts: You don't think about them until you really, really need them.

Ask:

- When was the last time you tested your backup?
- Are we using the right backup strategy? Off-site? Cloud? Hybrid?
- Are we backing up the right things?
- Is everything being backed up and stored securely?

You'd be shocked how many businesses think they're backed up…until they're not.

3. Are All Employees Following Security Best Practices?

It only takes one team member clicking the wrong link to bring the whole network down.

Ask:

- Have there been any unusual logins or risky behavior?
- Do we need another round of phishing training?
- Are employees using multifactor authentication?

Bonus points if your IT provider brings this up before you ask. That's how you know they're watching.

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4. How Has Our Network Performance Been? Anything Slowing Us Down?

Slow systems = slow teams = lost productivity (and money).

Ask:

- Are there any recurring performance issues?
- Are we outgrowing our hardware or software?
- Is there anything we can optimize to speed things up?

Even small tweaks can make a big difference.

5. Are We Still Compliant With [HIPAA, PCI-DSS, Cyber Insurance, etc.]?

Regulations change. So do the rules about how you store and protect data.

Ask:

- Are we meeting the standards for our industry?
- Have any requirements changed?
- Do we need to update policies, software or training?

Fines for noncompliance aren't cheap. Stay ahead of them.

6. What Should We Be Budgeting For Next Quarter?

Good IT is proactive.

Ask:

- Are there any software licenses expiring?
- Any equipment nearing the end of its life?
- Any upcoming projects we should be planning for?

This helps you avoid surprise expenses and plan like a pro.

7. What Trends In IT Or Cybersecurity Are We Behind On That Are Making Us Slower Or More Vulnerable?

Technology doesn't stand still – and neither do cybercriminals.

Ask:

- Are there new tools or best practices we're not using yet?
- Are we lagging behind in any security protocols or performance benchmarks?
- What are other businesses our size doing that we're not?
- Are there any rising threats that we need to be more cautious of?

Falling behind on emerging trends doesn't just slow you down – it leaves you exposed. A great IT partner will keep you ahead of the curve, not playing catch-up.

You AREN'T Having These Conversations? Red Flag.

If your IT provider doesn't have clear answers to these questions – or worse, if they aren't offering to meet with you quarterly in the first place – you might not be getting the support you need.

Technology changes fast. Cyberthreats move faster.

You need someone who is not just reacting when something breaks but actively working to prevent the break in the first place.

Lisa requests quarterly business reviews via email so please ensure you schedule those to discuss your technology each and every quarter!

"I DIDN'T KNOW"

Unfortunately, That Excuse Doesn't Replenish Your Bank Account, Resolve A Data Breach Or Erase Any Fines And Lawsuits.

It's coming...

- That day a hacker steals critical data, rendering your office useless...
- That day when your bank account or credit card is compromised...
- That day when your customers' private lives are uprooted...

Cybercriminals and hackers are constantly inventing NEW ways to infiltrate your company, steal your assets and disrupt your life. The ONLY way to STOP THEM is this:

You Must Constantly Educate Yourself On How To Protect What's Yours!

Now, for a limited time, we have the perfect way to help reduce your risk and keep you safe! Simply sign up to receive our **FREE "Cyber Security Tip of the Week."** We'll send these byte-sized quick-read tips to your e-mail inbox. Every tip is packed with a unique and up-to-date real-world solution that keeps you one step ahead of the bad guys. And because so few people know about these security secrets, every week you'll learn something new!

GET YOUR FREE "CYBER SECURITY TECH TIP OF THE WEEK" AT:
WWW.CSTSUPPORT.COM/NEWSLETTER-TECHTIPS-SIGNUP/

CARTOON OF THE MONTH

"Unfortunately, not only have they stolen your identity, they're also living your best life."

YOUR VACATION AUTO-REPLY MIGHT BE A HACKER'S FAVORITE E-MAIL

You set it. You forget it. And just like that, while you're packing for vacation, your inbox starts broadcasting:

"I'm out of the office until [date]. For urgent matters, contact [coworker's name and e-mail]."

Harmless, right?

Actually, cybercriminals love these auto-replies. That simple message gives them valuable intel: your name, title, when you're unavailable, who to contact, internal team structure and sometimes even travel details.

This provides two major advantages:

Timing – They know you're unavailable and less likely to catch suspicious activity.

Targeting – They know who to impersonate and who to scam.

This sets the stage for a phishing or business e-mail compromise (BEC) attack.

How It Happens:

- Your auto-reply is sent.
- A hacker impersonates you or your alternate contact.
- They send an "urgent" request for money, passwords or documents.
- A coworker, trusting the e-mail, complies.
- You return to discover fraud or a breach.

Businesses with traveling executives or sales teams are especially vulnerable. Admins often field many requests, handle sensitive tasks tasks quickly and may trust a well-crafted fake e-mail.

How To Protect Your Business:

1. Keep It Vague

Skip detailed itineraries. Instead, say: "I'm currently out of the office and will repond when I return. For immediate assistance, contact our main office at [info]."

2. Train Your Team

Educate staff never to act on urgent, sensitive requests based solely on e-mail. Always verify through another channel like a phone call.

3. Use E-mail Security Tools

Advanced filters, anti-spoofing protections and domain monitoring reduce impersonation risks.

4. Enable MFA Everywhere

Multifactor authentication across all accounts blocks hackers even if passwords are compromised.

5. Partner With A Proactive IT Provider

If your not already working with us, please give us a call. An experienced cybersecurity team can detect suspicious activity early and stop attacks before they cause serious damage.

SHINY NEW GADGET OF THE MONTH

PLAUD NotePin

Your voice recorder just got way smarter. The PLAUD NotePin combines a wearable digital voice recorder with an AI notetaking assistant, all in one small device. Plus, its sleek, versatile and lightweight design lets you wear it in several different ways: bracelet, necklace or lapel pin.

With the press of a button, it will create advanced, accurate transcriptions in over 112 languages, complete with labels for different speakers. You can also choose your preferred large language model, such as GPT-4o or Claude 3.5 Sonnet, for the NotePin to use.

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT:

Blue Line Insurance Agency
Lake Placid, Tupper Lake, Champlain and Plattsburgh NY

Proudly serving the Adirondack Region, Blue Line Insurance Agency is known for their personalized service, deep community roots, and commitment to protecting what matters most. From home and auto to business coverage, their knowledgeable team goes above and beyond to deliver trusted solutions with a hometown touch. We're honored to spotlight a client who like us, truly puts people first.

If you are looking for a company to take the headache out of your insurance needs and save you a bundle too, look no more!

BLUE LINE INSURANCE

Would you like your company highlighted here in our "Client Spotlight"? Give us a call today at 518-483-4100.

Passionate NOT Pushy

WITH LISA BROWN

PASSIONATE, NOT PUSHY: WHY LOVING WHAT YOU DO SHOULD NOT BE OPTIONAL

The phrase "Passionate Not Pushy" wasn't something I came up with. It was given to me -- probably by someone trying to describe me with a little sass. But the truth is, I embraced it. Because it fits. It's more than a motto. It's a mindset. And lately, it's taken on an even deeper meaning.

For those who've followed my journey, you know I started CST Group with grit, a whole lot of heart, and a very clear mission: to raise the bar in tech services. My early days in local government showed me exactly what not to do. I worked with vendors who were arrogant, underqualified, and wildly inconsistent. They overpromised and underdelivered. I saw the gaps. And I knew I could fill them with something better.

That "something better" was me, fueled by passion, driven by standards, and determined to lead with integrity. I didn't just want to fix technology problems. I wanted to prove that expertise and empathy could coexist in this industry.

Over time, I've realized something important: passion is not a flaw. It's not something to tone down, apologize for, or keep in check. Yet too often, especially as women, we're told to ease up, dial it back, be more "approachable." But here's the thing - - if someone mistakes purpose for pushiness, that's their limitation, not mine.

Let me illustrate it in the most human way possible.

Not long ago, I had a medical emergency that involved serious heart pain. It was unexpected and terrifying. And in that moment, I didn't care about credentials alone — I wanted my doctors to be passionate. I wanted them to care. I wanted them to be so invested in their field that they had studied, trained, and refined their craft to the point of excellence. Passion, I realized, is what builds trust. It's what gives us confidence in the people who are responsible for our outcomes, whether they're saving lives or safeguarding data.

I could feel that energy in the cardiac team. They loved what they did, and it showed. That experience reminded me why I lead CST the way I do. My enthusiasm isn't just a business tactic, it's a life philosophy. I want clients to feel that same assurance when they work with us. I want them to know that we're not just doing a job, we're showing up with intention, with pride, and with a relentless commitment to excellence.

So yes, I'm passionate. Unapologetically. Because the alternative - mediocrity, complacency, indifference - doesn't align with who I am or how I lead.

If that makes me "too much" for some people? I'm okay with that.

I'm going to lead with heart, deliver with excellence, and surround myself with people who believe that passion is a *superpower*, not a shortcoming.

So, I hope all of you lead with **PASSION** and **LOVE** what you do because life is simply too short to have it any other way!

I hope you enjoy this new section of CST's Technology Times. As we expand and grow, I am asked to speak and inspire other groups of business owners - this is what lead to the Passionate Not Pushy Podcast. My experience as an entrepreneur, business owner, cyber security expert, #1 Amazon Best Selling Author and Executive Producer and co-star of "Cybercrime: Fallout" along with my unique business model is a true testament that you can start from nothing and make something incredible!

Lisa

WHAT I'M READING....

Okay, I am going to cheat a bit as this is the first "What I'm Reading" article and I feel compelled to start with my own book - because YES, all business owners should read it!

From Exposed to Secure: The Cost Of Cybersecurity And Compliance Inaction And The Best Way To Keep Your Company Safe

I had the privilege of working with 25 other author's on this book so it is not just my opinion - you get other cybersecurity experts all who explain compliance and the costs of taking NO action.

With risk of virus and ransomware attacks at an all time high, this is an important read.

If you like to read using your tablet or kindle, please email tasha@cstsupport.com to receive a code to download a FREE copy.

If you would like to purchase the book, it can be found on Amazon (note: all proceeds are donated to St. Jude's Children Hospital).

<BOOK>
<OF_THE>
<MONTH>

CST Group Inc.

YOU'RE INVITED!

TECH & CHILL

Passionate NOT Pushy

A Business After Hours Experience
& Customer Appreciation Event
Hosted by **CST Group Inc.**
&
The Malone Chamber of Commerce

14TH AUGUST
5:00 PM – 7:00 PM
14923 ST RT 30 Malone

ACTIVITIES

TECH & CHILL POKER CARD CRAWL
NETWORKING
GAMES
CYBER CRIME FALLOUT MOVIE NIGHT

SPECIAL GUESTS

Pig & Moo BBQ Food Truck
&
Mr. Ding-A-Ling of the Adirondacks

PRIZE DRAWINGS & AWARDS!!
SEE YOU THERE!

Let Freedom Ring & Keep Phishers Out Of Your Inbox

As fireworks fill the sky and inboxes flood with summer deals, cyber criminals are launching their own kind of "Celebration" - – Phishing attacks designed to trick you into clicking, downloading, or giving away access.

STARS AND STRIPES EMAIL SAFETY CHECKLIST

- **Think Before You Click-** If it looks to good to be true...It probably is.
- **Verify The Sender -** Always Double Check Email Addresses, especially from known Contacts.
- **Avoid Suspicious Attachments-** Unexpected PDF or ZIP file? Don't open it.
- **Hover Over Links-** If the URL looks Strange or unfamiliar, stay away.
- **Report Suspicious Emails -** Don't delete – report them to IT. Every report help your team tighten defenses.

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If you want to add, change or grow any of your technology-related products your first call should be the experts managing it. Why you ask? Because if your technology team knows your vision, they have unique resources that will allow you to get ALL the information, choose the right vendor and deploy it all with seamless accuracy.

Let me give you a real-world example. I worked with a client a few years back who decided to install VoIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) telephone system at his location in the Adirondack's of NY. I got the call three months after the initial install from the business owner who complained about how terrible his phone system was, how it disconnected calls, the lines were "scratchy" and you could barely hear the callers. He hated the system and wanted me to fix it. This is all AFTER he'd already spent over $30,000 "trying to get it to work". He was in the medical field and could not have his patients disconnected or not being able to hear the call clearly. I understood but informed him that it would NEVER work, no matter how much money he dumped on the problem. After explaining how his office was setup and how his Internet connectivity would never allow for the necessary speeds to accommodate that type of phone system, he was understandably upset.

He had been played by a sales guy! When I asked him why he didn't get in touch with me before he made this decision where I could have explained this all to him AND saved him $30,000, he said "I know, Lisa, I should have, but this sales guy came to my office and made it sound so good that I jumped at it without thinking".

Does any of this sound familiar? This client should have called in his "VILLAGE"!

As your technology and cybersecurity expert, I have resources that all of you don't! The team at CST works on client issues, talks to your vendors and documents EVERYTHING! We have knowledge you simply do not. Every business you work with is part of your village and keeping us informed when having issues or making decisions will not only save you money, but time and energy as well. Plus, great decisions are made by having information from multiple sources. So, even if my client decided to go with installing this phone system after I gave him my recommendations, at least he would have made an INFORMED decision and understood the risks.

Also keep in mind that salespeople are built to sell. In my above example, the salesperson that showed up in his office had no idea the logistics behind installing their solution. His goal was to add to revenue so he or she could collect their commission. Once the sale happened, it was passed to engineer who probably knew it wasn't going to work as intended but it was revenue, so they didn't care if it worked for their client. Grrrrr – and this sort of thing happens all the time!

As we enter into 3rd quarter, many of you are thinking about budgets and project timelines. No matter the topic, consider calling in your "village" for assistance. Getting information is key for all business owners and I hope this inspires you to reach out to the people in your village with the expertise to guide your decisions.

I also want to remind all of you that October is coming fast which means Windows 10 will no longer get critical security updates. My team will be reaching out to ensure your computers get the Windows 11 upgrade or they are in line to be replaced.

Happy 4th of July!

Lisa

BIG REWARDS

For Your Referrals

We'll offer you **$50** as a gesture of appreciation, once you introduce CST Group to a qualified colleague and they complete the initial appointment whether they become a client or not.

If your referral becomes a managed client, we'll provide you with a **$500** bonus at the end of their first month of service.

SO, YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING – WHO MAKES AN IDEAL REFERRAL?

- **ANY BUSINESS WITH 10 OR MORE COMPUTERS**
- **NEEDS HELP WITH ITS NETWORK, BACKUP, COMPLIANCY, SUPPORT, AND SECURITY**
- **WANTS 24X7X365 PEACE OF MIND**

Full Details Here:

https://www.cstsupport.com/about-us/referral-program/

or call us at 1-877-954-4100

MID-YEAR TECH CHECKUP:

IS YOUR BUSINESS READY FOR Q3?

As we head into the second half of the year, it's the perfect time to pause and evaluate your business's technology infrastructure. Just like a car needs routine maintenance to keep it running smoothly, your IT systems require regular checkups to ensure they're operating at peak performance. A mid-year tech review can prevent costly downtime, improve efficiency, and strengthen your cybersecurity posture.

At CST Group Inc., we believe that staying proactive with your technology not only helps you work smarter but also gives you the independence to focus on what matters most—Growing Your Business.

Why Does a Mid-Year Checkup Matter You Ask?

Waiting until something breaks can cost you time and money. A proactive review now can identify vulnerabilities before they become major problems. It also ensures you're prepared for upcoming projects, seasonal shifts in business, or staffing changes.

Mid-Year Technology Checklist

Here are five key areas to review as part of your mid-year IT tune-up:

1. Software & System Updates
Ensure all operating systems, applications, and antivirus software are fully updated. Outdated software is one of the easiest ways for hackers to gain access to your network.

2. Data Backups
Verify that your data backup systems are working properly and that backups are being performed regularly. Consider implementing automated cloud backups with redundancy for added peace of mind.

3. Hardware Health
Check the age and performance of your devices. Slow computers, failing hard drives, or spotty internet connections can drag down productivity. Now is a great time to plan for upgrades before the busy fall season.

4. Cybersecurity Audit
Review your security measures, including firewalls, password policies, and multi-factor authentication (MFA). Are your employees trained to spot phishing emails? If not, this is the time to schedule a refresher.

5. Cloud Services Optimization
Reassess your cloud tools and subscriptions. Are you paying for services you no longer use? Can your team benefit from better-integrated cloud collaboration tools?

Don't Worry, CST Is Here to Help!
We specialize in helping businesses perform stress-free technology assessments and upgrades. Whether you need help reviewing your cybersecurity policies, optimizing your cloud systems, or developing a long-term IT strategy, CST Group Inc. always has you covered.

Schedule a business review with Lisa to go over your technology.

Jessica

Passionate NOT Pushy WITH LISA BROWN

Introducing "Passionate Not Pushy" – A Podcast for Bold Thinkers!

I'm thrilled to introduce my new podcast, Passionate Not Pushy—where bold ideas meet authentic conversations!

In my next episode I'm Speaking to Jeanine Caron, President of MX Fuels. We will explore breaking barriers- women working in male dominated industries. What keeps Jeanine passionate in and out of the office, and what advice she has for other women to help them lead without compromising who they really are.

We hope you join us for this fun and uplifting episode! Don't forget to subscribe and like our podcast. Feel free to leave a review to let us know how we're doing.

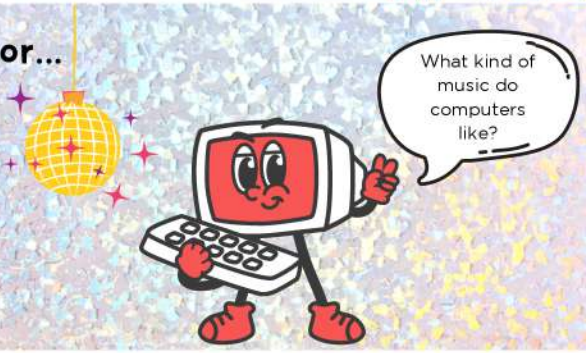
Jeanine Caron

QUALITY FUELS & SERVICE AT GREAT PRICES

Important Dates in JULY

- 4th- Independence Day
- 14th- National Mac & Cheese Day
- 20th- National Ice Cream Day
- 24th- International Self Care Day
- 29th - National Chicken Wing Day

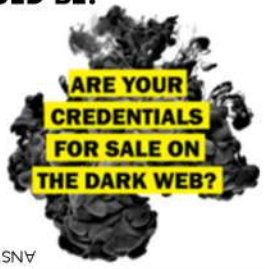
Tech Humor...



CONCERNED ABOUT THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF YOUR ONLINE IDENTITY? YOU SHOULD BE!

If you've been following the latest news in cybersecurity, you know that attacks have only continued to grow in both size and sophistication. However, you might not be aware that small and mid-sized businesses like yours are the most targeted by Dark Web criminals. Would you be among the 60% of SMBs that would be bankrupted by the average cost of a data breach?

If you are reading this, you are eligible for a free and comprehensive Dark Web scan to identify how many of your credentials (DOB, SSN, User ID's and Passwords) have been compromised. To get your FREE Scan instantly, contact us today at 518-483-4100 or 941-249-3520 or email sara@cstsupport.com.



ANSWER: Disk-O

THE HIDDEN COST OF WAITING

Why You Can't Afford To Delay Your Windows 10 Upgrade

If you're still running Windows 10 on your business machines, let's cut to the chase: The clock is ticking.

On October 14, 2025, Microsoft is officially ending support for Windows 10. That means no more security patches, no more bug fixes and no more technical support.

But here's what business owners really need to understand: The cost of waiting isn't just about someday needing to upgrade.

It's about what waiting could cost you in the meantime.

"We'll Deal With It Later" Is An Expensive Strategy

We get it – upgrading every machine in your business isn't exactly your idea of a fun budget item. It feels easy to delay…until something breaks.

But here's what procrastination actually costs:

1. You're Operating Without A Safety Net

Once Microsoft discontinues Windows 10 updates, every new vulnerability becomes your responsibility.

Hackers love outdated systems because they're easy targets. It's like locking the front door but leaving the windows wide open.

One breach could cost you thousands – or worse, your entire business.

2. Software And Hardware Compatibility Issues

Many business apps, such as accounting tools, CRMs and industry-specific platforms, are already phasing out support for Windows 10.

If your systems stop working mid-project or crash during a client demo, what's that worth?

And it's not just software. New printers, peripherals and even security tools may stop playing nicely with your outdated OS.

3. Lost Productivity

Outdated systems are slower, they crash more frequently and they frustrate your team. Even small lags add up over time, dragging down efficiency, morale and your ability to compete.

If every employee loses 10 to 15 minutes a day to tech hiccups, what does that cost you over a month?

4. Emergency Upgrades Are Always More Expensive

Waiting until your systems crash or your team is locked out doesn't just create stress – it creates panic-spend mode:

- Emergency hardware orders
- Rush IT labor fees
- Business interruptions while machines are replaced

A little planning now saves a lot of scrambling – and money – later.

5. You're Risking Compliance Violations

If your business handles sensitive data or is subject to regulations (HIPAA, PCI-DSS, etc.), using unsupported systems could result in fines or lawsuits. Many regulatory frameworks require up-to-date security – Windows 10 won't meet those standards come October.

What Smart Business Owners Are Doing Now

They're getting ahead of the deadline, not just by upgrading devices, but by using this transition to:

- Audit what devices need to go
- Streamline tools and software
- Tighten up cybersecurity protections
- Plan smarter for IT spend in 2025

How To Make The Transition Easy

Here's what we recommend:

Run a compatibility check – Not all machines can run Windows 11. Find out which ones need to be replaced.

- **Audit your apps** – Make sure your essential tools are ready to run on Windows 11 or newer environments.
- **Budget for hardware now** – Don't get stuck in a supply chain crunch later.
- **Partner with an IT provider** – We can handle the transition from start to finish – no downtime, no surprises.

Don't Wait Until October To Panic

Waiting until the last minute will cost you more – in money, stress and missed opportunity. We're helping small businesses make the upgrade the *smart* way: planned, smooth and optimized for future growth.

Book a **FREE** Network Assessment and we'll help you identify what needs upgrading, what can stay and how to build a transition plan that won't disrupt your business before the deadline.