

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

How high tech won't help

After five minutes in a Best Buy store, I've usually found three or four things I "must" have — new software, a portable phone, some audio gizmo. Tech does that to you. Tech toys change constantly, luring us with more memory, more features, smaller size, sleeker design — you name it. They're almost irresistible.

Two things about tech amaze me: the quick and constant innovation and the speed of obsolescence. My four-year-old laptop works fine but it's almost embarrassing to admit it doesn't even have a built-in CD-ROM drive. And it only has 100 MHz. Get serious!

Many of us mistakenly think that because our tech toys are faster and more versatile, they'll make us smarter, faster and more productive. That's the promise, anyway.

If you've actually used every feature in your Word program, please give me call. And if you've never gotten sidetracked using the Internet, call me also. I want to meet you. Even learning the new features of a software upgrade takes lots of your time and effort, not to mention your employees'. I know what you go through when you completely change your computer systems — a hassle of the hundredth magnitude.

Tech's here to stay

Let's face it — tech is taking over. In response, we've focused several articles on new technology developments for your "mobile" office (page 24); new Internet business services that might solve some of your problems (page 36); and GPS systems that may soon make your management chores much easier (page 32).

But remember, it's so tempting to think that tech is

all you need. It may be fun to use your palm device on the fly, but is it really the most useful thing you can buy for your organization?

I love talking with our editorial advisors, because they have so much good sense. Dwight Hughes, of Dwight Hughes Nursery in Cedar Rapids, IA, purposely keeps his organization small and constantly finds business growth through efficiency.

What does he think about the new tech toys? Dwight uses palm devices and computers, but he gets enthusiastic about his real love — landscape machinery. He tells me about his visits to landscape operations full of gleaming computers and office setups.

But Dwight doesn't want to see that. He wants to know why the owners haven't bought equipment to help their crews work smarter, easier, faster. He wants to know why megabytes are a more important measure than revenue dollars/employee. He wants to know why the production crews are in the 19th century and the front office is in the 21st.

It's a matter of priorities and situations, and smart landscape professionals remember that production is the core of our business. If tech tools make you more productive, go for it. But if your crews need help being efficient, take another look at ground level. Your best investment might be in iron, not silicon.

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