

# I-T MADE E-Z

## How to have Information Technology Without Paying for an IT Department

By Christia Gibbons

**JULIE OTT HAS ADVICE** for companies who can't afford their own IT departments: "Make friends with people who are computer nerds or who know computer nerds."

Fortunately for Tempe-based strategic communications agency, Off Madison Ave, Ott was kind of one herself, and knew plenty others.

Now the firm's associate creative director, Ott came to Off Madison Ave seven years ago with a knack for fiddling with computers. She, through the aforementioned nerds and other IT consultants, created the office network. For the past 18 months, the company has had a full-time IT person with a part-time IT intern.

But before getting to that point, Ott figured out everything from how to organize data on the server for optimum efficiency to installing security and backup systems.

"It's all about solving problems," Ott says. "Show no fear and play around with your systems."

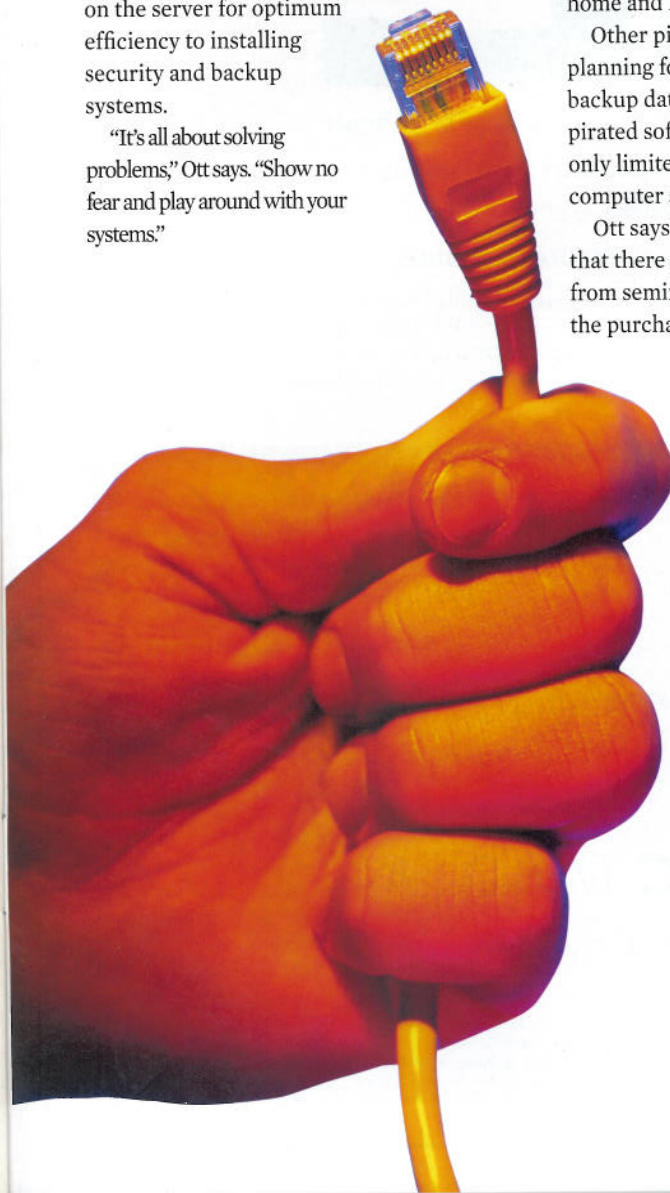
Other tips from Ott:

- Don't just think of the current problem; think of how to solve the problem that will crop up 18 months from now.
- Don't latch on to the newest hardware or software; it can be costly. The same goes for upgrades. "Let others work out the bugs," Ott cautions.
- Keep all purchase dates, serial numbers and passwords in a safe deposit box for easy reference if something goes wrong.
- Think security to protect office information. Learn about smart passwords.

Thane Smith of Phoenix Networks says, "The biggest mistake people make is they assume that 'I have a computer, a laptop, at home and I can handle my office.'"

Other pitfalls for businesses include not planning for a disaster and having appropriate backup data; doing it on the cheap or with pirated software; and hiring someone with only limited experience in one or two computer systems, Smith says.

Ott says businesspeople need to be aware that there are plenty of resources to turn to from seminars to help lines, many free with the purchase of particular hardware.



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#### Top 5 Search Engine Optimization Mistakes

*Optimizing your Web site so search engines can find and display it for potential customers can be a business boon. If done haphazardly, however, it can have disastrous results. Alex McArthur, director of search engine optimization at OrangeSoda, offers these pitfalls to avoid.*

##### 1. Wrong Keywords

A small niche shoe Web site shouldn't target "shoes" or "fashion." There are simply far too many Web sites, many well established, that you must beat out for such a commonly used word. "[Niche] + shoes" or "[area] + shoes" is a far better strategy.

##### 2. Boring Title Tags

The title tag is the most important place to put keywords, and should reflect what the document is about. Too many companies choose instead to use a generic title, such as their company name, for every Web page.

##### 3. Not Optimizing the Landing Page

So you've done everything else to get ranked and are now getting lots of traffic. If the landing page isn't optimized to convert, then all that great traffic will be wasted. Ensure that the page clearly defines your goals and all means necessary to accomplish them.

##### 4. Misuse of Flash

Search engines have difficulty indexing Flash content. Web sites that use Flash for a majority of their content are missing out on the major benefits of SEO.

##### 5. Not Targeting Keywords That Actual Shoppers Use

Sure, it's easy to rank for the keyword phrase "guacamole colored orangutan statuette dancing in a corn maze," but nobody will ever search for that. Do your research and find keywords that will provide you with enough traffic to make your efforts worthwhile, while bringing customers that convert, and are realistically obtainable.

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