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THE 7 GREAT SINKHOLES OF AN I.T. DEPARTMENT'S TIME

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As someone who works in network security, I've worked closely with plenty of IT teams. It's given me a front row seat into the issues that unnecessarily use up valuable IT resources that could be used more productively as well as some insights into how companies could prevent these sinkholes in the future.

1. Manual chores
2. Clean-ups
3. Fire fights
4. Data anarchy
5. Off-duty jobs
6. Winging it
7. Data glut

SEVEN SINKHOLES THAT SWALLOW I.T. TEAMS' TIME

It disappears— you never get it back.

1. MANUAL CHORES
Installations, updates, patches... Are you implementing technology, or fiddling with it?

2. CLEAN-UPS
A little knowledge can be dangerous. Users prove it every day.

3. FIRE FIGHTS
Who has time for preventing them if you spend all day putting them out?

4. DATA ANARCHY
Does anyone know where that file is? Didn't think so.

5. OFF-DUTY JOBS
When you need something fixed, call IT. They can fix anything.

6. WINGING IT
No process, no documentation, no manual? Just make something up.

7. DATA GLUT
What happened? The answer's somewhere in this 2.4 GB text file.

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1. Manual chores

Installations, updates, patches…
Are you implementing technology, or fiddling with it?

Perhaps one of the biggest difficulties that IT teams have to face is the number of tasks that have to be done manually: software installations, updates, corrections and enhancements, just to name a few. All take up valuable time for the people responsible for managing the technology.

In a survey of IT leaders at more than 3,700 companies, respondents said they spend an average 72% of their budgets on such keep-the-lights-on functions as supporting ongoing operations and maintenance, while only 28% goes toward new projects.[1]

Think about implementing IT automation solutions with the ability to orchestrate and integrate tools, people and processes throughout your workflow. Automating updates, reports, monitoring and other tasks is a simple and effective way to save time. Once you've implemented these solutions, be sure to keep using them.

2. Clean-ups

A little knowledge can be dangerous. Users prove it every day.

How much of the time spent on dealing with incidents could be saved if our users were adequately educated? Anyone whose day-to-day work involves IT surely feels that a lot of time is wasted on handling requests that, if users were more aware of what they were doing, could be prevented.

In a 2012 survey, workers said 37% of time wasted at work was due to "fixing other peoples' mistakes".[2] And 52% of IT security professionals said their biggest challenge is dealing with limited end user knowledge regarding risk.[3]

The best solution would be to think about investing more time and resources into educating users and bringing their knowledge up to date with regular, scheduled conferences, webinars or in person training, rather than wasting valuable minutes every day in dealing with a large quantity of small requests that could be easily prevented.

1   Source: IT Maintenance Costs—http://spendmatters.com/2013/10/23/maintenance-costs-keeping-lights-kills-innovation/, 2013

2   Source: Wasting Time at Work—http://www.salary.com/wasting-time-at-work-2012/slide/11/, 2012
3   Source: Ponemon study 2013 cost of data downtime study—http://www.emersonnetworkpower.com/documentation/en-us/brands/liebert/documents/white%20papers/2013_emerson_data_center_cost_downtime_sl-24680.pdf, 2013

3. Fire fights

Who has time for preventing them if you spend all day putting them out?

All too often, urgent issues take precedence over what's actually important. Unfortunately, IT teams often become the "firefighters" of the company, putting out all the technical glitches that spring up on a day-to-day basis.

Here's why prevention matters:

- Lost revenue from unplanned outages has increased by 56% since 2010.[4]
- IT professionals say 27% of interrupted computer tasks take them two hours of time to get back to.[5]

Naturally, unexpected events are always going to arise, but the main effort should be focused on reducing the occurrence of such incidents rather than on tackling them.
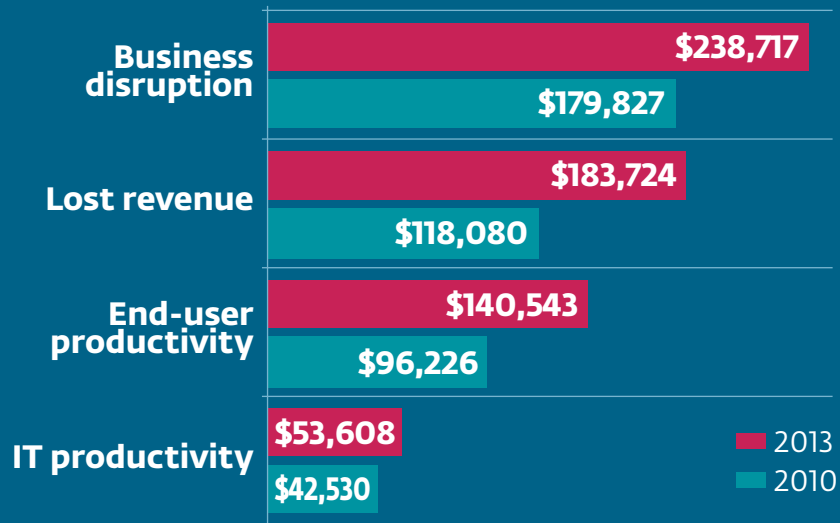
Having *multi-layered security solutions* in place can help prevent downtime caused by events such as successful phishing scams or denial of service attacks. Also, consider using a cybersecurity product with U.S.-based support teams in or near your time zone that can help if any issues arise.

Costs from outages are on the rise. ALL the average total costs of consequences from unplanned outages increased over the three years. Most notable? **Lost revenue from unplanned outages has increased by 56% since 2010.**[6]

	2013	2010
Business disruption	$238,717	$179,827
Lost revenue	$183,724	$118,080
End-user productivity	$140,543	$96,226
IT productivity	$53,608	$42,530

4   Source: Cost of Data Center Downtime Study— Ponemon Institute, 2013
5   Source: Extrahop survey—https://www.extrahop.com/latest/press-releases/it-professionals-blind-to-application-activity-on-networks/, 2013

6   Source: Study on Data Center Outages—Ponemon Institute, 2013

90%
of all data created in the next decade will be of the unstructured variety.

4. Data anarchy

Does anyone know where that file is? Didn't think so.

With the increasing volumes of data we find ourselves having to manage, keeping information centralized and organized can be a real headache. According to a 2011 IDC study, 90% of all data created in the next decade will be of the unstructured variety—making it almost impossible for organizations to manage, store, share and dispose of it in any meaningful way.

What often happens is that users develop their own systems for storing things on their own devices, with reports containing sensitive data ending up far from the company's official storage drives. Obviously, this creates problems for IT teams in terms of how to guarantee the availability and integrity of data.

Being able to correctly identify information assets is a must when it comes to managing data. IT teams should learn to collaborate with users to determine effective, easy-to-use systems that will save everybody time and improve security as well.

5. Off-duty jobs

When you need something fixed, call IT. They can fix anything.

Given how readily available IT teams are, and their curiosity and talent for resolving incidents, they often wind up resolving problems that fall outside the scope of their duty, which keeps them away from the tasks that should really be occupying them.

In a survey of 200 IT professionals, 29% of respondents said they had lost count of the amount of time they spend each month on troubleshooting issues; 59% said that more than four people are involved in fixing these problems.[7]

And in a survey of 272 IT managers conducted by OpTier, one-third reported that they have been interrupted on their vacations to deal with problems.

Guidance from the department's coordinators is important, to make sure tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined and that the "Swiss Army knife effect" doesn't adversely affect your hard-working IT staffers.

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7   Source: Executive Summary—http://www.emc.com/leadership/digital-universe/2014iview/executive-summary.htm, 2014

6. Winging it

No process, no documentation, no manual? Just make something up.

This point, like the previous one, is due to the lack of documentation and poor definition of procedures. Naturally, it's important to be able to improvise and this is an important part of an IT team's skill set, but improvisation shouldn't be the general rule.

The OpTier survey indicated that 35% of IT managers felt that service level requirements were not clear. Lack of visibility into IT transactions was cited by 32%. Both were cited as major time wasters.

Documenting tasks and procedures is the best way to be prepared for dealing with incidents, staff rotation and for the continual improvement of tasks dealt with on a regular basis.

7. Data glut

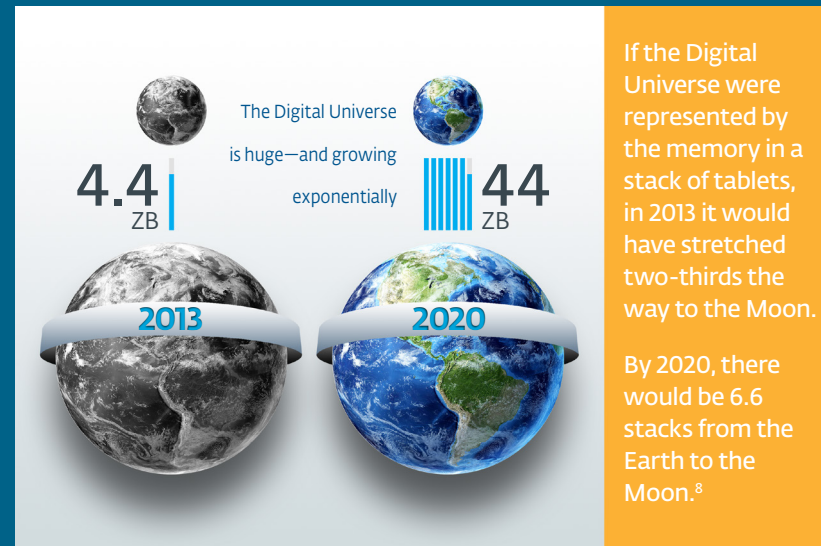What happened? The answer's somewhere in this 2.4 GB text file.

Having systems that generate apparently infinite lists of events is not going to help much in improving the way IT tasks are managed, unless we have the necessary tools and IT employees to process all those data and convert them into truly essential reports.

Between now and 2020, the digital universe will grow by a factor of 10x—from 4.4 trillion gigabytes to 44 trillion. But the number of IT professionals available to manage all that data will only grow by 1.5 times today's levels.[8]

By focusing our efforts on processing only the data of real interest and use to us, we can achieve the results we are hoping for and not waste resources on collating, storing and processing more data than is necessary.

And by encouraging more people to get into the field of information technology—perhaps by acting as mentors for students or colleagues— we'll have some welcome help dealing with those 44 trillion gigabytes.

8   Source: Digital Universe Study—IDC/EMC, 2014

The Digital Universe is huge—and growing exponentially

4.4 ZB — 2013

44 ZB — 2020

If the Digital Universe were represented by the memory in a stack of tablets, in 2013 it would have stretched two-thirds the way to the Moon.

By 2020, there would be 6.6 stacks from the Earth to the Moon.[8]

8   Source: Digital Universe Study—IDC/EMC, 2014

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