

Successful Networking:
A Guide to
Small-Office
Technology

How Technology
Helped Harry Chapin
Food Bank Work
Smarter and Harder, and
Feed More People



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Foreword

In February 1997 the Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida signed up for what seemed a fairly easy experiment. Go forward as millions of small businesses have done over the past few years and replace your old computer system with one of those slick Internet-ready models. Not a bad deal for a small nonprofit organization: Get a bunch of new computer stuff in exchange for letting the eyes of a mega computer-equipment manufacturer watch as you plug things in.

Besides, all this computer gear has come a long way. Getting computers to talk to each other isn't much harder than plugging in a crock pot, right?

OK, so the proposal seemed a bit odd on the surface. What could one of the most successful computer companies in the world learn from a local nonprofit organization dedicated to distributing food to southwest Florida's hungry and homeless?

To our surprise, it was plenty. In fact, the development of this guide was one of our recommendations. *Successful Networking* offers insight on how to make the computing experience easier and more valuable -- not simply another "what to buy" list.

Perhaps more important, *Successful Networking* illustrates how technology can help with virtually any mission in life. According to a recent study, 21.4 million Americans are fed through the Second Harvest Food Bank Network.¹ As part of this network, our goal is pretty basic: Get meals to the people who rely on emergency food programs.

The Harry Chapin Food Bank project has broadened from its small beginnings in 1997 to become Hewlett-Packard's *Networked to Fight Hunger* program with Second Harvest. Three additional food banks have been added to the program, as well as Second Harvest's Chicago headquarters. Second Harvest hopes its 187 food bank members will eventually be brought together into a computer community of sorts; HP is assisting with that through product donations and technical expertise.

Most experts agree there is enough food to feed everybody in America. The trick is to figure out how to distribute those bountiful harvests more efficiently to those who have little. Do we think computers solve that puzzle? No, not completely. But technology can expand the possibilities of finding solutions.

Hawley Botchford, Executive Director
Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida

¹Second Harvest National Research Study, *Hunger 1997: The Faces & Facts*.

Chapter 1

Separating Technology Fact from Fiction

The amount of how-to information on making computing successful and rewarding for the average Joe and Jane has been nothing less than overwhelming. There's no shortage of advice.

It's ironic that so much is written about how to make computing easier when technology is *supposed* to simplify things to begin with.

We're taking a different approach to how-to information in *Successful Networking*. Inside are practical hints that assume you worry about the task at hand (your job!) and are not as concerned about the bits and bytes of the tool (your computing equipment). Ultimately, if you're like most folks, you'd like to install your equipment and never really think about it again. So our goal with this guide is to set you up for success rather than give advice on what to buy.

This guide includes vignettes from a survivor of a major computer transformation: me! I'm Hawley Botchford, executive director of the Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida. My seven-member staff and I were "lab rats" (as one press report described us) for an experiment sponsored by the Hewlett-Packard Company.

The "lab" was our office and food bank warehouse, where we work everyday. With no technical staff on board, our place represented the crossroads that hundreds of thousands of typical small businesses face every day. Can you optimize the use of computers as easily as technology companies state? Or is it a more complicated process to get hooked up and supported?

Like many small businesses, our food bank has experienced its share of growing pains -- we've grown about 800 percent over the past seven years. Virtually debt free, we stretch every dollar nearly to the breaking point. We operate on a thin 7 percent overhead, a fact of which I'm proud. It's also a ratio I want to lower using technology.

Of course, we have the added pressure of knowing that if we fail in our mission, tens of thousands of hungry people in southwest Florida will be impacted.

My measure of success before this project began was to be able to turn a one-dollar donation into nine dollars worth of food for the hungry and homeless. With technology, my goal is to increase that ratio to 10:1 by becoming more efficient. We may have a different bottom line from most small businesses: The smarter we work, the more people we can serve. The concept is the same, however. We all ask, "How can I do more with the resources I have?"

Think with the End in Mind

Many people get off to a rocky start when embarking on a new technology project because “planning” has been equated with “compare the specifications and the prices and then decide what you need.” I’ll explain later why this is backwards thinking. For now, the five main points to remember are:

- ◆ Start by analyzing what you truly need to accomplish rather than studying equipment specifications.
- ◆ Identify an ongoing support team *first* unless you really desire to become a computer technician. (The important task of finding a “trusted advisor” is explained further in Chapter 3.)
- ◆ Establish a training plan *before* anything arrives.
- ◆ Spend as much time selecting products and services that are connected to your computer as the computer itself.
- ◆ Select your equipment on total value rather than price. Beware of false economy. Can that discount source truly provide what you will need?

These five points may seem like a lot of work just to install a computer system. (It holds true for replacing an old system with a new one, too.) Spending a little time planning up front, however, will save hours later on when you can’t get things to work right.

Did we follow this advice completely? Absolutely not! Learn from our mistakes. Many are highlighted in the “Kernels of Wisdom” boxes sprinkled throughout the guide.

Fact Versus Fiction

Many legends, distortions, and outright wrong information have developed about life with computing. Let’s identify some of the bigger myths:

- ◆ *Buy the latest technology and you won’t have problems because everything will be compatible.* Technology development is a moving target, so deciding what needs to get done should drive the decision on what technology to buy.
- ◆ *You really need to understand how computer technology works to get the most out of it.* This is a bit like saying you need to know how to rebuild a transmission to keep your car running. What you need to find is an expert you can trust.
- ◆ *Once everything is installed it pretty much runs by itself.* This is true -- assuming you never add new software, download anything from the Internet, or have your cousin Eddie try to write his resume using your nifty word-processing software.

Kernels of Wisdom

There are a lot of self-proclaimed experts out there. Perhaps friends, relatives, or business acquaintances. Seek their advice -- but always verify their opinions with a paid professional. Things change so fast that it’s good to check with someone who works with this stuff every day.



- ◆ *Training isn't needed because everything is so intuitive.* Do we really need to dispel this one? Training is not just an initial event; it should be an ongoing project of its own.

Chapter 2

Being Prepared Isn't Just for Boy Scouts

Do you remember a time as a kid when you didn't know how to spell a word and your teacher would say, "Go look it up in the dictionary"?

Then you'd mutter to yourself, "If I knew how to look it up in the dictionary then I'd know how to spell it."

Figuring out the complex world of computers is similar to leafing through Webster's with no clue how to begin looking up the word *chivalry*. (Does it start with an "s" or a "c"?)

Where do I start? What do I ask? How do I learn?

Tougher yet is figuring out how to plan when you don't know what you're planning for.

Like most things in life, preparation is the key -- and preparation takes a little discipline. Whether you're considering new technology just for yourself or an entire company, the beginning process is basically the same:

- ◆ Analyze the top two or three tasks you're primarily using computers for now and considering in the future.
- ◆ Document your equipment, software versions, and who uses computers for what tasks. (This will be very important later.)
- ◆ Determine if there are other *significant* tasks you could complete through technology. Talk to those who have already been there.

What Am I Doing?

The most basic question many people fail to ask when considering new equipment purchases is, "What do I use computers for now?" Computer use generally follows the 80-20 rule. About 20 percent of the tasks you perform produce 80 percent of the results.

For some people, it's creating reports based on information plugged into a database. Others use computers primarily to communicate over e-mail or the Internet. Or maybe churning out letters or marketing materials is your thing.

Odds are you perform basically the same type of task repeatedly each day. So why not start with how you can make that specific task or process more efficient?

It's all in the math. What has a bigger impact for an administrative assistant over the course of 10 days:

- ◆ A 5 percent improvement when writing and editing letters six hours out of every eight-hour day?
- ◆ A 20 percent improvement when printing out invitations to upcoming events -- perhaps printing takes six hours over the 10-day period?

The 5 percent savings in writing and editing letters equals about three hours of time saved during the course of 10 days. Speeding up invitation printing by 20 percent only saves 18 minutes!

Human nature plays tricks on us, however. You feel like you're watching grass grow as the invitations slowly chug off the printer. The printer is probably working just fine. In reality, because the printer is doing all the work, you basically become bored.

Meanwhile, a seemingly minor step -- maybe learning how to create "automatic text" when writing letters -- doesn't register as a significant productivity improvement. Yet, saving 15 minutes each day by not having to retype boilerplate information in letters could actually save you a week in labor over the course of a year!

I'm not suggesting that all of the big leaps in productivity are locked inside a PC. Quite the contrary -- you should consider the impact printers, fax machines, scanners, and other equipment have on your productivity. You may find these devices have as much, if not more, impact on your overall computing experience than the PC itself.

Get the Facts Straight

Documenting the specifics about your current technology will come in handy, as you'll read in Chapter 3. Some of these technical details can be tough to find, but they are the ones that will hang you up when installing new technology.

Don't feel compelled to know how to find this information. That's what the experts are for. Besides, does knowing how to configure the network address on your PC really help you do your job? Probably not -- especially if it takes you six hours to learn the skill.

What Other Cool Things Can I Do?

Once you've figured out how to make your basic job easier, you can begin concentrating on how to expand the ways in which you use your technology.

Example: A new PC may seem like a good thing to have -- especially one with a cool CD player in it. But how often do you need to research the migration habits of mountain goats from the electronic encyclopedia that can run on a new PC?

At this point, take some time and think back on all the times when you've said to yourself, "Wouldn't it be great if I could do this on the computer?" This exercise should stimulate numerous ideas.

Once the list is drawn up, it's best to prioritize in this order:

Kernels of Wisdom

We determined we spent a lot of time re-entering information. So we knew we could save significant energy if we could simply scan old documents into the system. Our first scanning attempt was to get 34 pages of text from two handbooks into computer form so we could make revisions. It took just 15 minutes. We saved four or five hours just with this one job!



Chapter 3

Planning for Success

OK, now it's time for the radical thinking. For now, put any thoughts of new equipment out of your mind. You've analyzed what tasks could be improved through "better computing." It's time to create a plan to meet your objectives.

A good first step is to articulate -- preferably in writing -- the objectives you want to meet. This will serve as your map for future discussions with resellers or other computer experts.

There are three primary steps -- which are often afterthoughts for many people -- that should drive your planning:

- ◆ Who am I going to rely on to help me decide what's the best solution for my needs?
- ◆ Is any training necessary -- and where can I get it?
- ◆ What support team do I need once I get things up and running?

Finding a Trusted Advisor

Obviously, the level of advice you may require can vary widely depending on what you're trying to achieve. It could be as simple as going to the Web site of a reputable manufacturer to gather some hints. A good computer reseller who wants to build a long-term relationship with you may offer solid, objective ideas. Or you may need to hire a consultant on a short-term basis to guide you through all the options available.

As in identifying any other information resource, it's a good practice to gather references from business partners, friends, or relatives. And again, having clear objectives for what you want to accomplish will help both you and your prospective "trusted advisor" determine whether you have the elements of a good relationship.

By talking through the objectives, you should quickly get a sense if a potential advisor can either provide you with what you need or point you to other resources. The objectives motivate these experts to provide examples of how they have solved similar situations.

A good technical resource can help you complete the rest of your plan. As an example, you should have them verify all technical details you've recorded. You may think you need more memory in your PC, but perhaps the existing memory hasn't

Kernels of Wisdom

Keep asking questions of technical people if you have any fears or concerns about how your equipment is installed. Don't assume everything will be all right. Avoid answering technical questions -- let the experts survey your current equipment and find the answers. We had days of downtime as the installers revamped things because we provided wrong information.



been configured properly. An advisor can check this and reduce your costs.

Train to Eliminate the Pain

Numerous studies find the majority of people use as little as 10 percent of the capabilities built into computing equipment. A primary reason for this fact is a lack of training.

It's mystifying why most people will spend thousands of dollars on new equipment yet not invest a dime on learning how to use the technology! Training must be considered as part of your overall technology budget. With a small training investment, organizations can easily double the value they receive from their computing environment.

Surveys also find that the lack of training is often the number one source of frustration among computer users in businesses. How many times have you said, "I know I should be able to do this"?

Taking a few minutes to identify a simple training plan will pay enormous dividends. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- ◆ What do I need to know about how to use the new hardware or software I'm considering?
- ◆ What other features does the hardware and software provide, and how could those features benefit me?
- ◆ Is there a specific task that I would like to simplify greatly?
- ◆ What are the one or two most frustrating things I'd like to resolve when using my system? (This should be an ongoing list to assist your continuing education.)

Once you've answered these questions, build in time for training as part of your plan *before* you deploy any new technology.

Finding Help Before You Need It

Finding good technical support is one of those paradoxes in life: You never really think about it until you need it. Then finding help immediately is the most important thing in life next to air and water.

The good news is that creating a good support plan is relatively easy, inexpensive, and painless -- that is, *if* you create the plan *before* you need to implement it! Be aware that it is not a case of if you will have a problem, but *when* -- and problems never find a convenient time to surface.

There's nothing more stressful than having your employees waiting for their paychecks while you scramble to find someone to call

Kernels of Wisdom

An area of training often overlooked is how to get the most out of your hardware -- particularly fax machines, printers, and scanners. And now there are all-in-one devices that fax, print, and scan! With a little training, you can be sure to get the maximum use out of these devices.



because there's a network problem that is preventing you from printing out payroll.

A simple solution is to create a list of important resources -- telephone and fax numbers and Web sites for the various hardware and software products you use. Sooner or later you'll create the list -- usually it's after a major hiccup and you vow never to get caught short again. It's easier to create the list in the beginning before you forget that you stored all the equipment manuals in the attic.

I've included a fill-in-the-blank "My Help Team" sheet to help you get started.

Your reseller can likely help you identify this contact information if you're confused about whom to call for what.

Finding answers fast and at any time of the day or night is an excellent reason to be connected to the Internet. Most technology suppliers, and even some resellers, have excellent support resources available on-line.

Another option is to purchase up-front support. Many hardware manufacturers, software vendors, and resellers provide additional support at a moderate cost. These support plans are economical because they provide ongoing support once the warranty period ends for a set fee.

Deciding if you should spend on support and how much is a question of how much downtime impacts your mission. You can probably survive if you can't send out letters for a few days as a real estate agent, but your career as a writer could be in jeopardy if the deadline is fast approaching to complete a cover story and you can't get things up and running quickly.

At a minimum, you should identify a backup plan that you can quickly implement should a major failure occur. (See "My Help Team" sheet.)

Kernels of Wisdom

When we upgraded our equipment we ended up with 28 pounds of manuals, guides, and other documentation. It all sits on a shelf. Buried in all that are probably answers to any questions we have. Time is money. It's worth paying a little extra for support to get your questions answered.



Chapter 4

Making Computing Come to Life

So you're ready to shop for equipment. First, forget about costs for a minute (difficult, I know!) and really think about the kind of work you will be using your equipment to produce.

It's extremely important that your choice of equipment complement the type of work you do. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ How much printing will I do?
- ◆ How much space do I have for equipment?
- ◆ Will I need color printing capabilities?

Buying equipment doesn't have to be a daunting task. With a little preparation, you can make informed purchasing decisions.

To get you started, here are some tips to think about *before* you buy anything.

Before You Buy: Printers & Scanners 101

The printer -- no piece of equipment will represent you more directly to the outside world. After all, every document you produce -- letters, presentations, brochures -- reflects your personality and professionalism. For this reason, think about these points:

- ◆ *Inkjet or laser printer:* If most of your printing will be in color, an inkjet will probably work best for you. For a smaller office, inkjet printers provide an affordable color option while offering high print and image quality. For high-volume printing, when color is not required, a laser printer is the better option.
- ◆ *Image quality:* You want the best image quality your budget allows. Go to your local computer retailer and get print samples on each printer in your price range -- let your eyes be the judge.
- ◆ *Ease-of-use:* You want a printer you can start right out of the box. Software that takes you through the setup and day-to-day use is a plus. Look for fonts that install in a single step. If the printer has too many buttons and lights, don't be impressed; choose a simpler model.
- ◆ *Reliability:* If the printer breaks down, your work comes to a screeching halt. For this reason, you should go with a well-known brand and a trusted manufacturer.
- ◆ *Compatibility:* Look for a printer that is compatible with the application software and operating system you are currently using or plan on using.

OK, now you can print, but how else can you enhance your capabilities? Whether adding a client logo to a presentation or sending a graphic-loaded

Kernels of Wisdom

Investigate what else you receive when you select a particular brand of equipment. Can the manufacturer (or reseller) install it? Do they have easy-to-access support? What does the warranty cover? Is it easy to locate and purchase parts and supplies? Is there any place to turn beyond the guy selling it to you?



document electronically, scanners are a great tool for adding professionalism and maximum impact. When choosing a scanner consider the following:

- ◆ *Will the scanner help complete your task quickly?* When using a scanner, your goal isn't just scanning -- you want to use the images or text to accomplish a task. Is the scanner going to help you accomplish that task quickly? Or is it going to add to your total task time? Every scanning-related step that is not automated means more work for you, leaving you feeling frustrated.
- ◆ *Does the scanner have "intelligence"?* It doesn't take much to build a cheap scanner these days -- low-end hardware components are readily available, and the basic design can be copied from other scanners. But if "intelligence" isn't built in, you're going to do more work and may never get satisfactory results.
- ◆ *Is the manufacturer reliable? Consider this:*
 - ◆ Are you familiar with the manufacturer?
 - ◆ What is the manufacturer's reputation for reliability and support?
 - ◆ If you have a question about scanners, how easily can you reach tech support? Or if the scanner has a problem, how easy is it to get service?
- ◆ *What about resolution and bit depth?* High dpi numbers are not the only indicator of image quality. Keep in mind that you want the appropriate resolution for the type of document you're scanning, and it's rarely the highest resolution.

The vast majority of scanning projects require resolutions lower than 300 dpi. For example, scanning a photograph at resolutions higher than 150 or 200 dpi produces only a larger file -- not more detail. If the file is too large, your computer monitor won't be able to display the entire image.
- ◆ *Will you get high image quality?* Don't stop at resolution and bit depth. Consider that low-cost scanners may have small lenses, poor optics, and weak light sources, preventing you from getting high-quality images. Does the scanning software include automated features to optimize images, or are you going to have to work hard to get acceptable results?

Is an All-In-One Right for You?

For a small office, an all-in-one unit that includes a printer, scanner, copier, and maybe a fax is an excellent choice. You will save time and trouble by having high-resolution printing, plain-paper faxing, scanning, and copying in one package. Most importantly, an all-in-one unit is less expensive than buying units separately and can save you space in cramped quarters.

Equip Your Equipment

Before you buy any equipment, try to find out whether supplies for that particular model are readily available at your local stationary or computer

supply store. You don't want to waste time looking for replacement ink or toner cartridges in a crunch.

Also, think about what supplies would best showcase your work. For instance, letterhead looks best when printed on white premium paper, but glossy paper works better for poster or color image printing.

Finally, don't forget about specialty paper. Custom banner and greeting card paper can save you money on outsourcing special projects such as customized thank-you notes.

Chapter 5

So You Want to Network

Network computing is a lot like exercising for most people. You know it's good for you, but it's just so hard to get started.

Most of us think networking is complicated -- which it can be.

On the bright side, however, most of us use networks every day and never think about it. Telephones, electricity, cable television, on-line services, and ATMs all employ networks.

The only difference between using the telephone and a computer network is that the telephone company does all the work to get everything installed, maintained, and expanded.

A small business can easily pay \$100 per month for the right to use the telephone network -- after the business either buys or rents equipment and pays for installation. In essence, the monthly fee simply spreads the cost of the network among all the users.

Ultimately, networking improves your efficiency by allowing you to communicate faster and more clearly. And you can get more out of your computer resources by fully using equipment.

For organizations that have affiliates spread out over a large geographic area, the benefits are immense. You can send messages to a large number of people instantly. You can conduct business on-line and avoid phone tag and missed faxes. There are fewer errors and less confusion because the information is documented. Information can be accessed quickly or exchanged as individuals need it, not when it's convenient for someone else to send it.

Within an office, networking means several people can share software applications, printers, scanners, faxes, and other devices without leaving their desk. Not only can you buy fewer pieces of equipment, that equipment can be shared among many people.

Kernels of Wisdom

If you plan to change network operating systems (say from Novell NetWare to Windows NT), make sure you can easily reconnect your old network should problems occur while installing the new system. You want to be able to restart your old system in case it takes some extra time to get the bugs worked out.



Five Secrets to Successful Network Computing

Five key ingredients I've discovered for successful network computing are as follows:

- ◆ *Don't go it alone.* Network expertise is widely available and well worth the money. It pays to purchase up-front expertise to get things started right.

- ◆ *Start small.* It's not necessary to network everything all at once. This is where the expert can help by building a plan to transition functions in a calm, rational fashion.
- ◆ *Mentally prepare for a few bumps in the beginning.* No matter how well planned, there will likely be a few glitches. It may be as simple as reloading some software a second time. Don't panic; most problems are easily fixed.
- ◆ *Schedule ample time for installation.* Don't install a network the day before your year-end close or another big event in which you'll need your computers. Schedule a reasonable amount of time that you can go without your computers and not suffer a major setback.
- ◆ *Have a backup plan.* Prepare contingency plans for the unlikely event of a major problem. Save important information on disks. Have computers, printers, software applications, and other resources pre-identified and reserved in case you need to quickly divert to Plan B.

The Public "Network"

For all the hype about the World Wide Web, the fact is that relatively few people are connected today. Things are changing fast, however. The number of people going on-line is growing at such a brisk pace that within five years it will be the exception when someone is not connected.

While you may not require it now, it's advisable to plan to be on-line in the near future. The on-line future offers some exciting advantages:

- ◆ *Lower costs:* Communicating and conducting business over the Internet is extremely cost-effective. Recent studies show, for example, that the typical bank ATM transaction costs 27 cents. The same transaction over the Internet costs a penny. This level of savings is available for many business transactions beyond getting things paid electronically by the bank.
- ◆ *Broader business opportunity:* Many organizations are re-engineering their processes to take advantage of on-line cost savings. By using the new systems, you'll likely enjoy quicker delivery times, easier access to important information, and a clear, easy way to communicate with people no matter their location.
- ◆ *Marketing opportunity:* The Web has become a new marketplace. You can think of it much like the Yellow Pages for a worldwide audience. You can even change your ad every day if you like! And the smallest organization can reflect an image as big as a large corporation.
- ◆ *Community building:* The unique characteristic of the Web is the ability to link related parties together quickly. A food bank can link its Web site to many beneficial sites, bringing together food donors, financial support, and volunteers. You can even link to the local chamber of commerce site to create a larger presence in the community. Every small business can find that the Internet is the great equalizer -- your image can be just as big or bigger than your competition. In the end, your mission can be exposed

to new, untapped members of the community -- so the possibilities are ever expanding.

The “Five Secrets to Successful Network Computing” apply equally to creating your plan for the Web. In addition, you should consider the following:

- ◆ *Create a plan to develop new content on a regular basis.* There’s nothing older than yesterday’s news -- or an outdated Web site. As with any medium, people keep coming back if they expect something new and exciting to appear. The key is to offer something of value -- hints, ideas, success stories, or tools -- not simply “background” information on your organization.
- ◆ *Budget time, money, and effort for the Web just like any other communications vehicle.* It’s rare when Web sites are maintained well through an all-volunteer effort. Make sure you know up front if you’re willing to invest the resources to keep a Web site alive.
- ◆ *Work with a knowledgeable expert to get your Web site recognized.* Getting people to your site is usually a direct result of how easy it is for people to find you. The primary way to do this is through a major search engine, such as Lycos or Yahoo. An expert can guide you on the best ways to get your site referenced when a search is conducted.
- ◆ *Consider your Web site a continual work-in-progress.* Try new things and new ideas. Your ideas can come to life here. Again, get good advice and help. It’s worth it!

Chapter 6

Expanding Possibilities

You might note that we haven't talked much about what PC or printer to buy. Hopefully, if you follow the steps in this guide, those recommendations will come naturally.

Each company, nonprofit organization, office, and person is different. Each has a different set of needs that a combination of technology can help solve.

Below are some additional resources of information you might find useful, followed by an easy-to-follow checklist of issues to think about as you explore the possibilities that technology can bring.

Publications

- ◆ The “Dummies” (*Internet for Dummies*, *Windows 95 for Dummies*, etc.) series by IDG books is excellent. Most Dummies books are available at your local bookstore.
- ◆ *Inc. Technology* describes in plain language how to achieve business benefits from computers rather than being enamored by technology, as some computer magazines tend to be.

Web Sites

- ◆ A good source for small-business computing is www.hp.com/go/smallbiz (a Hewlett-Packard Web site dedicated to small businesses).
- ◆ Nifty utilities, screensavers, and good advice can be found at www.zdnet.com, the Web site of Ziff-Davis, which publishes PC Magazine and many other computer magazines.
- ◆ The www.geeksquad.com site provides fun on-line help if you're having trouble. They'll even help you tune up your PC to get it running better for a modest charge.
- ◆ If all else fails, go to www.yahoo.com, www.lycos.com, www.excite.com, or another major search engine. Each has a special section with lists of other computer-related Web sites on virtually every topic.

Other

- ◆ Check out user groups in your area, especially if you use a specific application a lot. Other users can be valuable information resources. User group information often can be found at libraries or in “calendar” listings in the local newspaper.

Kernels of Wisdom

Utilizing technology in food banking or any endeavor is no longer a luxury but a necessity. The bottom line: by becoming more efficient we can help more people. My goal is to improve our overall efficiency by 40 percent using technology. That means I can devote more money to achieving our ultimate mission of helping the hungry in our community.



Checklist

Setting Clear Objectives

- ❑ What are the top three tasks I do or perform on my computing equipment?
- ❑ How much time during an average day or week do I use a computer to complete *each* of these tasks (example: word processing, three hours per day; spreadsheets, one hour per day)?
- ❑ How could I simplify or reduce the time it takes to complete these tasks?
- ❑ Thinking about printers, scanners, fax machines, and other devices, what features would help me be more productive or look more professional?
- ❑ Is there a specific task that I would like to greatly simplify?
- ❑ What are the one or two most frustrating things I'd like to resolve when using my equipment?
- ❑ What additional *significant* tasks would I like to complete with the help of technology?
- ❑ How much time would it take to learn these new tasks? Would I do them enough to remember what I've learned?

Getting Prepared

- ❑ Have I documented all the computer resources I have?
- ❑ Who is my trusted advisor who can guide me through the decision-making process?
- ❑ Have I developed a training plan up front to get the greatest benefit from my new technology?
- ❑ Have I identified my help team before I need help?
- ❑ Have I completed an analysis of how much downtime costs me in terms of lost business or productivity?
- ❑ How much downtime can I endure before it impacts me significantly?
- ❑ Do I have support plans in place to ensure I don't exceed my downtime limit?
- ❑ Have I researched alternative support options, such as purchasing a support contract?

Equipment Decisions

- ❑ Is it more important that I print in high-volume or color? Are both of equal importance?
- ❑ Do I have the space for the equipment I want?

Checklist (Continued)

- ❑ Can the manufacturer or reseller install my equipment? Do they offer easy-to-access support and are they reliable?
- ❑ Is the equipment compatible with the operating system I am currently using?
- ❑ How important is it to my work that I have the capability to add graphics, logos, and photographs?
- ❑ Does the scanner I want help accomplish tasks quickly or does it add to total task time? Does it have built-in “intelligence”?
- ❑ Does the scanning software include automated features or do I work hard for the results?
- ❑ Should I consider an all-in-one? (Am I a small office that needs printing, scanning, and faxing capabilities?)
- ❑ What type of supplies best showcase my work?

Networking

- ❑ Do I need to communicate or distribute information to colleagues within my organization as well as people in other geographic locations?
- ❑ Do I have several people who access or would like to

access a variety of printers, scanners, and other devices?

- ❑ Do I need to access information from other resources outside of my immediate office area?

Network Planning

- ❑ Have I identified an expert who can guide me in the design and implementation of the network?
- ❑ What are the one or two tasks that can be networked first to test the system?
- ❑ Have I scheduled enough time to install and test the network avoiding periods when critical deadlines are approaching?
- ❑ What’s my contingency plan should major network problems occur?

Internet Planning

- ❑ Do I have a plan and resources lined up to create new Web content on a regular basis?
- ❑ What valuable information tools or other resources can I provide visitors to my Web site?
- ❑ Who is my expert to help my site get recognized when potential visitors search the World Wide Web?

Conclusion: Now, Go Make a Difference

Second Harvest is America's largest and most efficient charitable hunger relief organization. Its mission is to feed hungry people by soliciting and judiciously distributing food and grocery products through a nationwide network of certified affiliate food banks and to educate the public about the nature of and solutions to the problems of hunger.

The Harry Chapin Food Bank, featured in this guide, is one of the 187 certified food banks that make up the Second Harvest national network. Through this network, nearly one billion pounds of food and groceries are provided each year to soup kitchens, food pantries, senior centers, day-care centers, shelters, and other charitable feeding programs in communities throughout America.

Food and groceries provided by the Second Harvest network benefit over 26 million hungry children and adults each year. Nearly half (11 million) of the people fed are children under the age of 18, and over 8 percent are seniors.

Feeding America's hungry is what Second Harvest and its member food banks are all about. Its established national network not only responds to the daily disaster of hunger, it is also well prepared to respond to the devastation of natural disasters -- a time when anyone can experience hunger as a result of a disrupted food supply. From the ever-present needs of people living in poverty to the unexpected needs of those affected by natural disasters, Second Harvest and its member food banks are prepared to help.

If you or your company would like to find out how you can make a difference in the lives of America's disadvantaged, contact Second Harvest at 800-771-2303 or visit its Web site at secondharvest.org.

Acknowledgements

The Harry Chapin Food Bank I help run is a relatively small operation for its type. But we will still managed to distribute 1.3 million pounds of food this year, benefiting the clients of 150 partner agencies in five southwestern Florida counties. We do it all with just a handful of employees and many dedicated volunteers.

Our transition into the world of high technology came with the support, dedication, and sacrifice of many special people. I thank my entire staff and board of directors for their patience and confidence and offer these dedications.

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Finally, to the spirit of Harry Chapin who taught me to take a chance, not to be afraid of failure, and to have faith that we *can* make a difference in the lives of the less fortunate in southwest Florida and in our country.