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TECHBLDRS, INC.

Providing Skilled, Professional, Comprehensive IT Services and Support



JOSEPH AWE

By Kathy Hunt

Whether you run a business of one or 100, technology plays an integral role in your day-to-day transactions, facilitating everything from reaching clients to managing productivity and finances. When a system crashes, a file is lost or keyboard breaks, time and expertise are of the essence. Yet, few business owners have both at their disposal. That is where Exton-based TechBldrs saves the day. The 23-year-old technology consulting company offers prompt and skilled IT and Office 365 support, disaster recovery and business resumption, ransomware removal, and other essential IT services. All of this is performed by its team of Microsoft certified IT professionals.
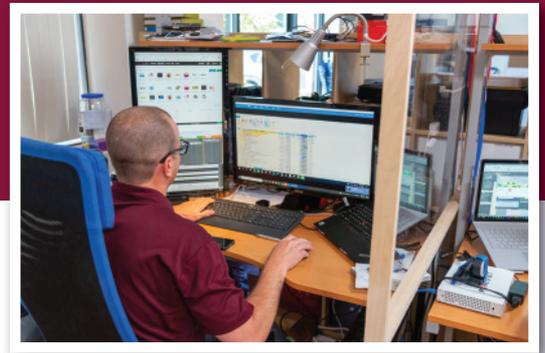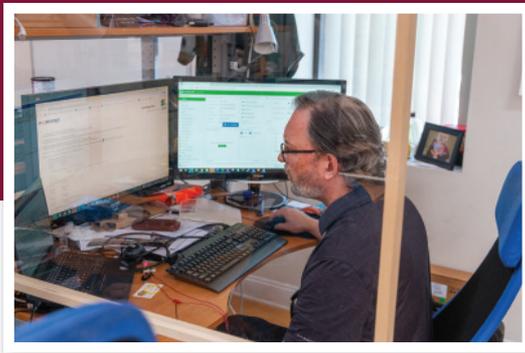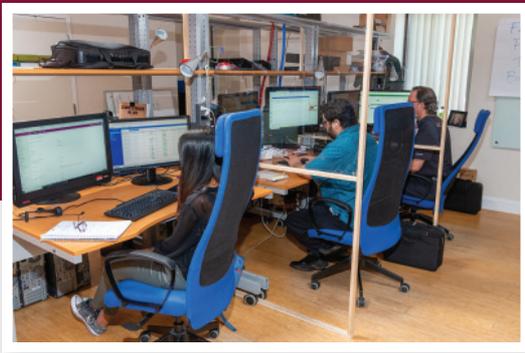
"We know that IT is not your specialty," says Joseph Awe, founder of TechBldrs. "Our job, not yours, is to stay on top of the tech. All of our clients are trying to do something else to make money. They're on a journey and we're helping them get to that end point together. With IT it's a continual expense but it's an expense that you need to generate the revenue that you want," he said. Prior to starting TechBldrs in 1998, Awe served as the chief technology officer for PECO Energy.

As a managed service provider, TechBldrs delivers technology services and support to small and medium-sized businesses in Philadelphia, the surrounding suburbs and Southern New Jersey. According to Awe, their clients are those who want to put their technology needs and issues into the hands of experts and allow those experts to take care of them. They approach technology as they would electricity. They don't necessarily care about the nuts and bolts of how it operates. They just want to keep it running.

Generally, TechBldrs works with four types of businesses — Specialty contractors, such as electricians and plumbers, and professional service providers, including law firms and financial institutions, comprise the largest, while manufacturers make up the second biggest category. Awe points out that both groups have security and compliance standards to which they must adhere. Manufacturers are also vulnerable to range of IT threats that can compromise production.

Churches are the third type of client. Awe notes that TechBldrs has installed and maintains both IT and video systems in churches. The latter system enables congregants to view services remotely, a capability that proved invaluable during the pandemic.

Rounding out TechBldrs' client base are parochial schools. Similar to manufacturers and those in specialty and/or professional services, schools face security challenges as well as a flood of different technologies brought in by staff and students.

"We have a very horizontal mix of different clients as well," Awe says. "We branch out into any small business that works with IT technology, but we specialize in those four areas."

KEEPING CLIENTS INFORMED AND SECURE

TechBldrs begins all new client relationships with a diagnostic evaluation of the company's current technology system. This, in turn, produces a customized IT plan that addresses the client's specific needs. Included in all IT plans is 24/7, remote monitoring, which ensures the system's health and safety as well as consistent, daily backups. The latter, Awe stresses, are essential to system safety.

All plans feature TechBldrs' help desk. Manned by the staff of nine IT professionals, it provides immediate assistance seven days per week from 7:30 AM to 10:30 PM. During off hours clients are encouraged to email, text or phone in their IT issues. Staff receive and respond to alerts 24 hours per day. "We act as your entire IT department, covering everything the runs from the other end of the AC cord to the software running on people's desktops to Cloud services," Awe says.
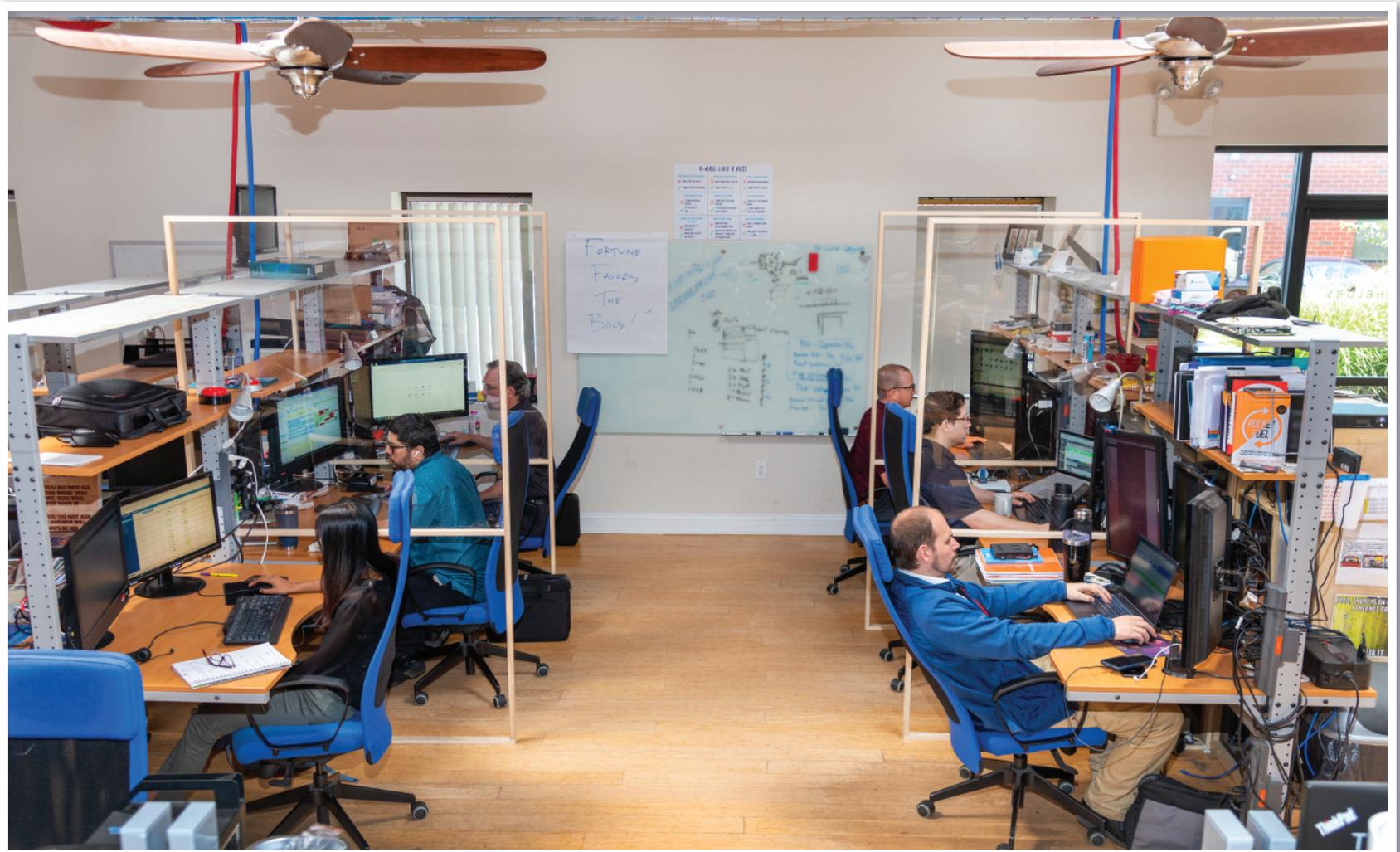
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TechBldrs provides quarterly IT planning sessions and bi-annual review plans so that a client's IT investment remains aligned with business goals. The company values clear communication and remaining transparent with its clients. Monthly, in-person visits are arranged around each client's schedule. On these occasions TechBldrs's staff perform updates, resolve any glitches that have popped up, and they work to ensure that future problems don't arise. Prevention, rather than resolution, is the goal.

One effective means for avoiding IT issues is through user training. "Personal, one-to-one training is critical," Awe explains. "You can't teach a thousand youngsters how to ride a bicycle as a group. 'Hey, all thousand of you. Let's get on a bicycle and let's all ride.' You have to teach each one individually how to do it. Same with technology. Each one has to be an individual hand-hold. It can be a simple thing, like changing passwords, which people find inconvenient to do. Tech is the thing we implement but we work on the issues of inconvenience and what are the hurdles slowing people down, stopping them from getting what they want to get done," he said.

Anyone who has ever experienced being hacked can attest that this is a major inconvenience, one that can bring work to a standstill. "Compromised usernames and passwords account for 45 to 50 percent of all hacks," Awe points out. "People are using the same username and password in multiple locations. We're trying prevent those kinds of things from happening. We teach a specific, manual method on how to create passwords that require you to pick a word, number and special character that you like. These are three specific things that you'll never forget. Remember that your password has to be long; short passwords can be brute force hacked. It must be unique for every single account you create. And you have to know them all because you'll have to change them once a year," he said.

TechBldrs' method for generating passwords is detailed on the company's website: www.techbldrs.com.

Along with training modules on safety and productivity, IT and Office 365 support, disaster recovery and ransomware removal, TechBldrs creates and puts in place cybersecurity plans.

"Cybersecurity is our number one issue these days," Awe said. "I think we have the correct mix of services and technology to help people stay safe. Our goal is to make sure that our clients are not a target. We can't build a dome to secure your systems, but we can build a fence that keeps getting higher and higher."

The company focuses on five core areas of cybersecurity — identifying risks and dangers to a system; protecting a system through safeguards; detection that includes routine updates, security audits and closure of security holes; rapid response to a threat alert; and recovery of technological capabilities and services impacted by a cybersecurity event or physical disaster.

"Multibillion dollar corporations don't get their fixes implemented fast enough," Awe said. "The window between the time people need to implement security updates and people being comfortable updating is too great. The lags are getting longer and longer and that's what's allowing holes in cybersecurity to open and malware (malicious software) to get in," he explains.

In addition to cybersecurity, TechBldrs does system performance audits to determine whether a client's productivity is being hampered or helped by its current technology. It performs structured cabling, ensuring that the latest Cat or fiber optic cable is installed safely, securely and sensibly. Its team carries out both simple straight-through and complex multi-mode cabling projects and does so with minimum disruption to the workday.

TechBldrs chief information officer (CIO) services include strategic planning for IT growth that fits with a company's culture and needs. CIO services likewise ensure compliance with all regulations.

Office culture comes up again in TechBldrs' tribal knowledge collection. Tribal knowledge pertains to what makes a workplace unique, how office information is kept and disseminated, and how staff interact on a social and cultural level. Do employees dress up at Halloween, contribute to a coffee and snack fund, or celebrate colleagues' birthdays? Personal knowledge about clients — what time and where they prefer to hold meetings, their family members' names, or their interests — also comes under this heading. TechBldrs helps its clients gather and share this nuanced information through a cloud-based system.

TechBldrs also covers cloud integration, which allows companies to store and access documents and other pertinent information on the internet instead of on a computer hard drive. The Cloud affords employees the opportunity to access work information from anywhere, at any time, on any internet-connected device. It is an invaluable tool for those working remotely, traveling or collaborating with colleagues at a different site.

"The big driver today is the Cloud," Awe said. "We look at what a client needs with the Cloud. The throttle is going to be the speed of the internet. For most clients in the small business space, it's going to be 5G."
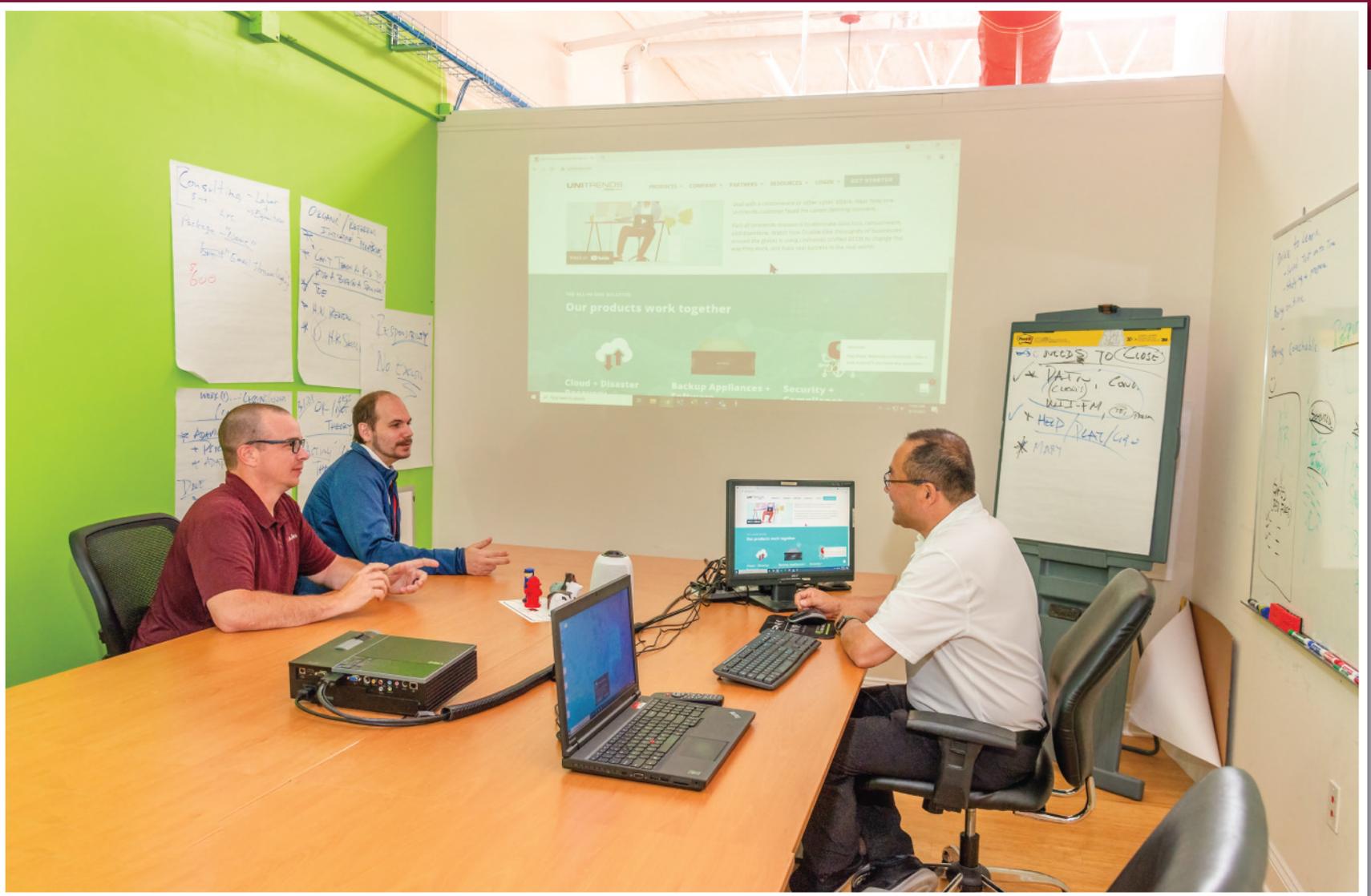
Lastly, the company oversees document management. With its FlowFile Pro system, clients experience faster, automated filing and organizing of electronic documents.

"We bring a set of tech, called the technology stack, that helps you protect yourself and provides you both the safety net and guidance that you need to help you do what you do," Awe said. "We come with a set of tools that we know work. We've tested them out on 100 to 150 local clients over the years. However, we haven't stayed with one technology all through that period. One of our core values is that growth comes from learning, and we are continual learners. All of our technicians have to get a certification every year. We have to stay on top of technology and the technology world moves pretty quickly," he said.

CORE VALUES DRIVE THE COMPANY

As Awe indicated, TechBldrs runs on a system of core values, all of which came from parenting. "I didn't want to imply that we came up with these values and these are just company core values. They are way we grew the company. They are things that we really believe in," he said.

The first of these values is "Your understanding is my responsibility." Awe gives the example of teaching a child how to tie his shoes for the first time but only demonstrating this skill once. "We're the guys who have to figure out how to make the other person understand it. It's our responsibility, not the child's, not the client's, to help them understand how to do something that they've not done before," he says.

Awe likens the next core value, "Growth comes from learning," to a fifth grader announcing that he's happy staying in the fifth grade for the rest of his life and that he doesn't want to progress any further. To grow, people have to go to the next level, the next school, get the next certification. This is why TechBldrs' IT engineers must keep their qualifications up-to-date and get certified each year on all of the products that the company supports.

As a core value, "Be smart enough to simplify" tends to be a bit more challenging. "You have to know what you're trying to simplify. I can't go to a client who's been successful for years and say, 'You know those 20 steps you do to do this thing that you do well? Why don't we cut out 10 of them?' You wouldn't do that to a child who's trying to accomplish something. Instead, you show them a slightly simpler way of doing things and why it should be done that way," he says.

The fourth core value, "I have your back," concerns being a team player who supports and strengthens both TechBldrs and its clients. "It came from the fact that, when we're working with a client, it's not about us maximizing our profit," Awe explains. "It's about what does and doesn't make sense for you. The end goal is the client's best interest. Within the company, as a team member, if I have your back, it's not like I'm the only person working on a project. I have to put the project in a state that someone else can pick it up and move forward and not reinvent the wheel. If I have your back, there is greater documentation and communication," he said.

The final core value, "Be grateful," centers on being grateful for the opportunity to pursue one's calling. TechBldrs consists of people whose passion is IT. They understand how fortunate they are to be able to do what they love, day in and day out. They enjoy sharing their knowledge and supporting, collaborating with and problem solving for their clients. Gratitude is the right attitude for getting the job done.

TechBldrs is headquartered at 604 Gordon Drive, Exton, PA 19341. For additional information please call 610.569.9603 or email: jawe@techbldrs.com. For a complete list of services offered please visit www.techbldrs.com.

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