Syscon U

What's New

In early July I had the opportunity to enjoy a retreat in the Denver CO area. Time alone, reading, reflection, and a beautiful landscape all around; what a blessing! Thanks to our team and Larry for holding down the fort.

Later in July, Larry and I spent a week in IL sorting through our 20+ years of documents, furniture, and stuff! We're looking forward to having all team members in IL for our annual State of the Company in late August. We're anxious to celebrate our wonderful experiences in Hinsdale IL and our Hinsdale Management relationship. So many memories, great people, and wonderful clients that we will continue to service in the coming year! - *Catherine Wendt*

In this Issue

August 2024

We Are a Full Service IT Company (yes, Cyber Security too!)

We serve the technology needs for Construction companies. For 38 years, if a construction company needed technology to reduce overhead and become more efficient so they can build our communities, Syscon was, and is, the partner of Choice.

In fact, we started as an IT company back in 1986. Contractors in the Chicago area were just adding computers to their offices. The most common uses at that time were to provide better accuracy when bidding jobs, and to turn around bid alternates more quickly. For many union contractors, an added goal was to speed up processing payroll, cutting checks, and preparing union reports with accuracy (and not by hand!).

Since my father-in-law was a Mason Contractor in the Chicago area, we knew many of the larger Masons. One day we received a call. 'Your dad tells me you know computers,' he said. 'Yes sir, we do.' He said, 'Mine's broken. Come fix it' - and hung up. This was a time when the forward-thinking contractors knew that these computers were going to rock their world, and they wanted people they could trust; people who could help them navigate this unknown territory.

Talk about changes! Desktop computers to calculate pay checks and taxes, AP and Payroll checks; spreadsheets for fast and accurate calculations of production rates, materials, and the many aspects of the bid process. Then access to email and FTP sites to receive drawings, submit pay apps, and more. This led to backup technology (remember the tape drives?). I remember some of the first timecard scanners — what a time-saver

for everyone! Fax machines for faster communication, signed agreements, **and PO's. Jump to right now: we** have hosted servers; cell phones to access email, websites, Power BI reports, and games!; shared documents available from anywhere with an internet connection; video meetings **with the ability to collaborate 'live' in** the shared documents; and more!

Every now and again, one of our clients is surprised to learn we are a Full Service IT company! Perhaps our Techs have assisted their team in support of Sage 100 Contractor on their server; or they read some of our Tips and Tricks regarding Social Engineering and bank scams, but they **didn't know we can take care of ALL** of their computer-related and security needs.

We provide a full suite of IT Services including Managed Services for computers, remote computers and tablets, and office network equipment (switches, firewalls, wi-fi, etc.); backup technologies including cloud and on-premise; as a direct Microsoft Solution Provider, we can provide, se-

cure, and back up Microsoft 365 licenses for email, SharePoint, OneDrive; SharePoint and email migrations; and Azure hosted servers.

Servers have changed a lot! For years, most of our clients had on-premise servers with solid backup solutions, and a few still do. The majority of our clients have moved to the cloud and are part of the Azure hosting environment, fully backed up, maintained, and supported by our Networking team. Support of Active Directory, LAN and Azure/Entra, along with InTune automation are all part of this technology shift. These offerings have allowed our clients to attract talent outside the traditional geographical confines of the past, expanding their team and their business opportunities.

Ten years into this IT journey, we started hearing a new group of questions; 'What software should I use for construction Accounting and Project Management? From there, many clients needed custom reports, additional analytical tools to pull data right from its source, and more recently, apps that are integrated for

electronic field time collection. The result? Our Consulting, Programming, and newest department, Business Applications teams!

We live in an amazing moment in **time. In so many ways, it's truly a** small world. Information and research is at our fingertips, literally! News from across the globe is in our **living rooms 'live' and on demand.** Unfortunately, just like the old west 'snake oil' salesmen, **there are those** who exploit others for their own gain using the exact tools that have enriched our lives — Cyber Security is part of the landscape now. Next **Month, we'll dive into our Cyber** Security offerings! - *CMW*

> *"Purity of motive amplifies impact."*
> - Michael J Fox

Book Nook

Big Little Breakthroughs by Josh Linkner

We heard Mr. Linkner speak at an industry evening in Texas. He shared his background as a jazz guitarist, then starting several tech companies, and the dream to rejuvenate Detroit.

In the event and in the book, he shares some pretty intriguing stories. He admits these are **not the 'rocket scientists' but rather everyday** people who saw something that needed attention. Similar to other authors, he stresses the importance of habits that lead to amazing achievements.

You'll definitely enjoy the opening chapters in Part I that have several varied stories of everyday issues, everyday people, who saw a need and pursued an answer. Moving into Part II,

he talks about falling in love with the problem, being obsessed. He spent a full chapter talking **about getting started before you're ready.** There are some great examples of where this has worked and the problems that are a result of this approach. The chapter on opening a test kitchen reminded me of our test environments. I even proposed calling our Programmers our Head Chefs (not sure this will stick, though). Chris was inspired by the Brilliant Ideas section and has created a Sysbulb board to gather ideas from the teams.

I really liked reading through the Daily Creativity Workout. Not everything is a fit for me, but The Daily 3 questions, What am I grateful for, What will I focus on today, and What will I let go of, are some daily reminders we can all embrace! Recommended - *CMW*

Tech Talk

If You're In Growth Mode, Can We Talk?

Quite a few of you are GROWING! **Whether it's larger contracts, new lines of** work, or expanded geography, quite a few of you are growing. That means your **teams' needs are growing as well, and** that includes technology, our specialty!

We would really like to join the discussion regarding your technology. **Whether it's rolling out new laptops** (check out our InTune automation!), a new office space, increased need for access to documents, or any number of things, there are all kinds of new and improved tools to meet these needs.

And as teams grow, it's time to revisit Cyber Security solutions, which ones to upgrade, which ones to consider adding, and how to keep your data safe!

How about a 45 minute call to hear what you need and brainstorm some **technology options? Call Liz and she'll set** it up! - *CMW*

Phishing, Smishing, Vishing, and Quishing... What?

With the explosion of technology in the last 40 years, there's a whole new **dictionary of words that didn't exist a few** decades ago, and some have new meaning (mouse!). Here are four (4) you should get familiar with.

Phishing: This scam technique focuses on email. The sender is trying to get you to provide sensitive information. The email may look legit (especially with the new **AI tools). They're asking for user names,** passwords, account numbers; they often tell you an account is locked or

passwords are expiring, so just 'click the **link' and enter the requested information.** They may use the info themselves or provide it for sale on the Dark Web. Best line of defense here? Do Not Click The Links! Never provide this type of info through email, even if it looks legit!

Smishing is when they take the email fraud and scams to your cell phone through text messages. These links are also looking to steal information, and can even install malware such as viruses, ransomware, or spyware on the device. Often these are made to sound urgent, about a delivery, a problem with your **bank, or in Larry's case, his new cell** phone purchase. How to safeguard here? Do Not Click The Links! These institutions will not text you like this. If **you're worried, call them!**

Vishing: This one is all about phone calls and voicemail messages. Often these are prerecorded robocalls. Some pretty common ones are targeted at the senior community and claim to be with Social Security, Medicare, a Hospital, the phone company, utility company, an extended **car warranty, and on it goes. They'll often ask for your full name, address, Drivers'** license number, Social Security number, **credit card details, 'just to confirm' their info. In some cases, they're trying to get** you to say specific phrases, or the word **'Yes' so they have your recorded voice.** Nuts right?

Quishing: This is a take on the resurgence of the QR code which was brought back to popularity during COVID. Similar to Phishing, **it's usually an email with** something they want you to do right away, but they use a QR code image instead of a URL link to click on. With **this small change, it's harder for email** filters to recognize the attack. Once you follow the QR code, it takes you to their site (URL) and the game is on. In this **case, don't follow QR codes from an email. If you're using** one in a public place (restaurant, traveling) be sure NOT to click on any links or enter any personal data. — *CMW*

Construction Corner

S100C — Bank Feeds

More and more of our clients are taking advantage of the new bank feed options. **There's one for the bank reconciliation (which isn't that new), and one in the** Credit Card module. In both cases, data is downloaded directly from the bank, then you make the various updates and Account selections to process in S100C.

Very Important! Once you engage these **bank feeds and they're turned on, please** leave them. We had one client who panicked because they pulled a much larger range of dates than they meant to, and they turned the bank feed off. When they tried to turn the feeds back on, it **didn't work. We found out the only way** to re-**engage is through the 'backdoor' of** S100C. — *CMW*

Tracking Employee Training and Licenses

There are two great tabs in the Employee 5-2-1 screen — one to track Training, one to track Licenses. There are some existing reports that pull info from these tabs, and they are quite handy. The info can also be pulled into Power BI reports, BTW.

On the Training tab, you can create a short list of common training programs across your team. It tracks Last Date, the Training Cycle (quarterly, monthly, **annual), and the Next Date. There's a** Notes field for additional info such as scores or ratings from training events. If the person earns a certificate or something similar, it can be attached to their record using the paperclip.

On the License tab, the structure is similar. Create a short list of licenses **which might include Drivers' Licenses,** Asbestos Certifications, OSHA training **certs, and similar. There's a field to track** the license number, and to track the **Expiration. Like the other, there's a** Notes field for additional info. Copies of these licenses can be attached with the paperclip in the employee record.

Jump over to the 5-1-1 report and take a look at the various reports that are available. Now you might be thinking that the people who are tracking this type of info are NOT allowed in the Payroll module; understood. However, you can allow them to run these specific reports! Open up the reports only and exclude them from the other sub-**modules. Since they don't have rights to the actual employee records, they won't** be able to drill down or see any other personal info. Or, move the reports to Power BI and set the permissions there! - *CMW*

> ## *"Move the reports to Power BI and set the permissions there!"*

Top 10 Mistakes Construction Companies Make

In his presentation at this year's CFMA Annual conference, Mr. Billy Robinson with Brown Edwards CPA group, Tennessee office, shared the top 10 mistakes they see in their work with **Construction companies. Here's a recap** of what was shared.

1) Cash Flow: staying on top of receivables is very important; when you are underbilled, a reminder that you are financing their project!; and some things to consider regarding too much cash in the business and the exposure if there is litigation.

2) Inadequate Succession Planning: a reminder that there are families counting on you to have a plan; they also see a lack of communication among family members regarding what plans are in place and what to expect; there are a lot of emotions during the planning and execution of a succession plan, and these real emotions have to be considered and addressed.

3) Under investing in Report Systems and Controls: we see some of our fastest growing clients embracing new reporting tools such as Power BI; at the event, he mentioned Project Fade as margins erode due to blown budgets; the importance of a monthly WIP schedule review; and the risk of using unearned funds to pay current AP; lack of construction accounting knowledge; underestimated fraud risks.

4) Accountability: schedule meetings for a post mortem on jobs over a certain size; holding everyone to the same standards; avoid overlooking policy violations; hold clients and vendors to contract terms!

5) Equipment Investment: avoid too much debt on equipment; consider underutilized equipment; lease versus owned; staff to maintain.

6) Integrity Issues:

7) Culture and Loyalty: hold high performers accountable!

8) Growth versus Profitability: can you do the work with the team you have?; concerns for burn out of the team.

9) Professional Advisors: Spend the money and time and use them!

10) Blind Spots: Performance and Integrity as the standard versus Longevity

When considering this list, what are one or two items you could focus on as we look ahead to the end of 2024? Some of **these come down to your company's** goals and desired outcomes. Others are about being a good steward. Let us know if we can help with any of these or even just do some brainstorming with you! - *CMW*

M365 Education Station

Microsoft Meet: A New Way to Connect and Collaborate

Microsoft Meet was launched in October 2020, as a rebranding of the previous Skype for Business app. It's available for free to anyone with a Microsoft account, and it also comes with different subscription plans for businesses and education. The app can be downloaded from the Microsoft website or the app store, or it can be used from the web browser.

What is Microsoft Meet?

Microsoft Meet is a video conferencing app that lets you host and join online meetings with up to 300 participants. You can use it to chat, share your screen, record your sessions, and more. Microsoft Meet is part of the M365 suite of productivity tools, integrating seamlessly with Outlook, Teams, and other apps. It's accessible from any device, a PC, a Mac, a tablet, or a smartphone.

What are the features of Microsoft Meet?

There are a range of features to make online meetings more engaging and productive.
- **Background blur** and custom backgrounds
- **Together mode**: See all participants in a virtual auditorium, making it feel like you're in the same room.
- **Live captions and subtitles**: Turn on live captions and subtitles in different languages, making it easier to follow the conversation.
- **Whiteboard and polls**: Use the digital whiteboard and polls to brainstorm ideas, get feedback, and collaborate with the team.
- **Breakout Rooms**: You can split your meeting into smaller groups, allowing for more focused discussions and interactions.

Ways to use Microsoft Meet
- **Business meetings**: Host and join professional meetings with colleagues, clients, and partners, and share documents, slides, and reports.
- **Online Classes**: Great for teaching environments. There are interactive features, too.

- **Webinars and events**: Organize and attend online events with large audiences, and use the recording and live streaming options.
- **Social gatherings**: Connect and chat with friends and family. This includes fun backgrounds and filters.

Go to Webinar, Teams, or Microsoft Meet?

When we asked Copilot what the differences were, it came down to three categories: Features, Price, and Ease of Use. Turns out that when it comes to security, they all use encryption to protect the data and user communication, and they comply with GDPR and other privacy regulations.

Pricing: Microsoft Meet is free for anyone with a Microsoft account, can host and join unlimited 60-minute meetings with up to 300 participants. Teams is also 'free' for anyone with a Microsoft account, host and join unlimited 60-minute meetings with up to 100 participants, with a $5/month upgrade option. Go to Webinar starts at $49 for the basic package, allows unlimited 60-minute webinars with each package offering different attendee limits, and upgrades.

Ease of Use: This was interesting. Microsoft meet doesn't require any downloads but users may find the interface and settings confusing or limited. For Teams the wording was 'cluttered or overwhelming.' Go to Webinar has an app or the browser and many attendee interaction options.

- CMW and Copilot

How Did They Do It?
Notch Mechanical Contractors

Fifty years ago, Roger Neveu started welding out of his garage to support his growing family. He decided to go **into industrial welding, which wasn't** as common at that time; a niche market with lots of growth potential. In **the year 2000, five of Roger's seven** children bought the business, opening the next chapter. The company continued to grow, and in 2020, made the next transition to an ESOP (Employee Stock Ownership Plan). Under this new structure, the leadership team has been growing and expanding beyond the Neveu family; very exciting!

When asked about the source of their success, Susan jumped right to their core values: Safety first, Keep customers forever, Meet the challenge, Working as a team, and Caring about family, the foundation of decisions over this 50 year journey. They have a unique apprentice program, holding a Weld Challenge where their team members go to trade schools, work with students and teachers, and test the students' skills. Then all are invited to the Notch office to win prizes. These investments in people feed their apprentice program.

Susan Rose, VP of Finance, CCIFP

Staying modern with IT has been a big challenge. With generational changes, demands for **'cool stuff' for new team members,** leveraging IT software and hardware has been a challenge. Syscon has been very helpful in this journey. Susan highlighted Chris as an example of the 'languages' Syscon speaks including IT, Accounting, and Business.

In her 12 years with Notch, Susan has moved to a more strategic leadership position. Seeing new faces coming together recently for a large detailed project, burning the midnight oil was so encouraging! - *CMW*

Fast Facts

Location: Chicopee, MA
Specialty: Mechanical Contractor
Founded: 1972

(www) ***Read more at www.syscon-inc.com/how-did-they-do-it***

Are you interested in having your story featured? Let's talk!

BIM—What it is and How it's being used (webinar)

When: Tues Aug 6th

Time: 11:00 am Central

The topic of BIM is almost as popular as AI. We're partnering with Santex to show and tell with Q&A; join us!

AI in Business including Microsoft Copilot (webinar)

When: Thurs Sept 12th

Time: 11:00 am Central

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a hot topic. Let's get practical and talk about where it belongs in our businesses!