

SHEERAN I.T. NEWS

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IT Mission

Information Technology is a tool for productivity. Our overarching goal is to *proactively contribute to the company's success.*

BLACKBOX PROJECT

The Blackbox project is an integration venture that will connect our fulfillment system (TOPS) with a client's shipping system (Trax). The Blackbox can be used in three different ways:

cTrax: allows our shipping department to use the client's Intranet to ship packages. This option streamlines international shipping by associating products to their appropriate HTS and Schedule B codes and creating the necessary paperwork.

iTrax: enables us to retrieve shipments from the Blackbox to update tracking numbers and other shipping information back into the fulfillment orders.

bTrax: represents full integration between TOPS and the Blackbox. With bTrax, we'll be using a custom application within TOPS to scan orders, retrieve package weight, and send the shipping information to the

Blackbox. The Blackbox in turn can perform rate-shopping among shippers and send all shipping labels and forms back to us for printing. Tracking numbers, weight, and shipping costs are updated automatically back to the orders.



We expect to start on the Blackbox project sometime this fall. It is a large project that includes VPN setup, XML programming, and coordination with client vendors.

BUILDING A WINNING TEAM

The best projects come out of winning teams. With the wrong people on the bus, even the easiest projects can become drudgery.

The hard skills I look for in team members may vary based on the type of project we're tackling. However, there are certain characteristics that are inherently part of all of us. These are traits that aren't easily taught. In my opinion, the best teams consist of people who have these qualities, regardless of the skill-sets required:

1-Intelligence: When it comes to implementing technology, intelligence rules. Intelligence is necessary to create smart solutions. Thinking clearly and formulating creative solutions are what intelligent people are all about — and these are crucial skills in technology jobs. Nothing else does what intelligence can do.

2-Enthusiasm: Within a team, enthusiasm is contagious. Unfortunately, so is apathy. Enthusiastic team members are simply more fun to work with. Be one.

3-Honesty, Integrity, Accountability: When all team members are trusted to do their part (and do it well), the team works. However, a single undependable or dishonest team member can ruin a project, causing more work for everyone.

Next time you're part of a team project, keep these points in mind and do your best to use these virtues to get the job done (remember, the whole point of a team is to *get the job done*). Why not have fun while doing it?

Count a Word in Word

Need to know how many times a certain word is used within a Word document? You can't use "Word Count" for this, but there is an easy work-around:

- Click 'edit', 'find' - enter the word you wish to count.
- Click on the 'replace' tab and enter the same word under 'Replace with'.
- Click 'Replace all'.

Word will simply replace your word with the same word, and give you a count of the number of replacements when finished. The number of replacements is the number of times you used the word within your document. Easy.

There is a natural aristocracy among men, the grounds of which are virtue and talent [character & skills].

— Thomas Jefferson

Create a Pivot Table in Excel

Pivot tables are easy, but the raw data must be in the correct format before you start. Here is an easy example—create a spreadsheet with 3 columns of data. It might look something like this:

Source	Month	Count
Mail	Jan	53
Mail	Feb	47
Mail	Mar	65
Phone	Jan	12
Phone	Feb	32
Phone	Mar	14
Web	Jan	116
Web	Feb	98
Web	Mar	241

Now, to create a pivot table from this data, simply highlight the data and click "Data", "Pivot Table". A pop-up window will display—you can take the defaults and click "next", click "next" at the range selection, then click "finish". You'll end up with an empty pivot table on the left and the field list on the right.

Next, click the "Source" field and drag it to the box labeled "Drop Row Fields Here" under column A. Then drag and drop "Month" in the box labeled "Drop Column Fields Here". Finally, drag and drop "Count" in the box that says "Drop Data Items Here".

Congrats! You just created a pivot table!

Attack destroys data for 100,000 websites

—Attack on Web Hosting Provider Knocks Out 100,000 Sites (June 8, 2009)

An attack on UK web hosting provider Vaserv has reportedly destroyed data for about 100,000 websites. The attackers appear to have exploited a zero-day vulnerability in a virtualization application called HyperVM.

The flaw allowed the intruders to gain root access to the system, allowing them to "execute sensitive Unix commands..., including 'rm-rf,' which forces a recursive delete of all files." Half of Vaserv's customers had contracted for service that did not include data backup.

Imagine your web site is hosted with Vasery. What would this attack mean to you?

For starters, the site would be unable to respond to requests, which means your customers/users see an error when they visit your site.

If your SLA did not include backup services, you'd have to recreate the site from scratch, which may be difficult.

The lesson? Check the SLA of your hosting providers to make sure backups are included and you or your staff knows how to recover.

MANIFESTO FOR AGILE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT

Over the past year, I've had the opportunity to learn some new approaches to software development. One of the most exciting (for a geek like me) is the Agile Software Development movement, which includes these values:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools.
- Working software over comprehensive documentation.
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation.
- Responding to change over following a plan.

This approach runs counter to the typical Software Development Lifecycle (SDLC) approach most of us learned in college. Where SDLC supports scope definition up front, Agile development encourages changing requirements throughout the project.

Having worked on both SDLC and Agile-type projects, I can see benefits to both. Web applications can often benefit from an agile approach, where the client is provided with a simplified version of the working software quickly, with frequent updates provided ongoing.

However, large-scale integration projects may require more scope definition up front to accurately identify every integration point between systems. When multiple systems/companies/vendors are involved, agility becomes more difficult.

Regardless of the approach to software project management, simplicity, good design, and having the *right people on the team* is what makes a great software development project.

More info: check out agilemanifesto.org

NEBULA: NASA'S CLOUD COMPUTING

First, let's define cloud computing. YouTube has a video of Web 2.0 experts who explain cloud computing as everything from liquid paper to computing while on an airplane. Here are a few (somewhat clearer) excerpts:

Jay Cross, Internet Time Group: "I don't care what's up there, just so it works. I don't have to mess with the stuff in the middle."

Dan Farber, CNET News: "There are 3 platforms: Desktop, Mobile and Cloud. Increasingly, people will start using the cloud just like we use electricity."

Tim O'Reilly, O'Reilly Media: "World in which the Internet is the platform for all computing."

So, cloud computing is essentially using computational power as a service over the Internet. The nuts and bolts of it may involve APIs (application programming interfaces) and databases, but cloud computing is basically high-capacity computing on a dynamically scalable platform.

NASA has created a cloud computing environment from an integrated set of open-source components. NASA is offering Nebula as a self-service platform for rapid development of policy-compliant and secure web applications.

Say it again in plain English? Educators and businesses can use NASA's Nebula cloud as a software-as-a-service (SaaS) model for

their IT projects.

Nebula uses Virtualization, MySQL, Apache, Java, and Python, as well as other open-source components, such as Trac+Agilo project management interface (Agile PM solution—see article above). Additionally, Nebula test metrics include compliance with a variety of government policies, including Section 508, COPPA, and others.

Nebula is currently in Beta. When it becomes a viable option for business, it will be interesting to see if it ends up in competition with vendors currently offering their own cloud services (Amazon web services, Google, etc).



Read the details at: nebula.nasa.gov/

"A cloud does not know why it moves in just such a direction and at such a speed... It feels an impulsion... this is the place to go now.

"But the sky knows the reasons and the patterns behind all clouds, and you will know, too, when you lift yourself high enough to see beyond horizons."

NEBULA web site at nebula.nasa.gov



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A plea from IT

Please provide details when asking IT for help. I found myself covering for my staff often over the summer and I noticed that we're often asked to correct problems without knowing basics, such as the client or actual error message.

Remember, we work with ALL clients and our tasks range from researching orders/products to adding IP addresses to firewall filters. The more info you provide, the faster we can solve your problem.

DEFINE YOUR MISSION

If you don't know why you're here, how do you know if you're spending time on the right things? Deciding which tasks are important for you requires knowledge of your mission. If you feel that the most important job in your life is raising your kids to be productive and honest members of society, this should influence what you spend your time doing. Saying that raising your children is your mission, but spending most of your free time watching TV doesn't mesh. This is where it breaks down for most people. We say one thing, but our actions reflect a different reality.

Here is a quick exercise: List the top five most important things in your life. These are the things that you would sorely miss if they were gone.

Now, list the five tasks you spend most of your time doing each day. My top two are career and driving. What are the remaining three? Watching TV? Reading? Cleaning? Do your tasks align with the things you've listed as most important? If not, consider what this means to you.

Since we are all given exactly the same amount of time each day (and it's never enough time to do everything we want to do!), I find the best solution is to multi-task

in a meaningful way. Take one of your time-consuming top five tasks and turn it into something that will work as part of your important life success moments.

For example, if you spend your time driving your kids to events (and what parent doesn't?), use that time to build your relationship. Don't assume the radio must be on when you are in the car with your kids. If you spend hours each week commuting to work, use that time to improve your knowledge within your career, or learn a new language. I've taken Physics classes, studied for college courses, and listened to dozens of InfoSec podcasts during my 9+ hours each week in the car.

Structure your time so that each day is spent on important activities (defined as those activities that contribute to your life's mission). In our [SANS Security Leadership class](#), we define important vs urgent in this way:

- Important tasks contribute to your legacy
- Urgent tasks are the things you must to do keep your job

Urgent tasks seem to get a portion of our time without effort, but the important tasks require planning and diligence. Plan time everyday to work on important tasks that contribute to your life's mission.

