

# INSIGHTful DISCUSSIONS

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## THE BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF TECH-POWERED BUSINESS



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greene resources  
RECRUITING with PURPOSE



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**T**echnology continues to have a major impact on nearly every part of our daily lives and our interactions with others, including how we do business. Tech-savvy business leaders have adapted the way they present products and services and embraced trends that increase productivity and streamline operations. We asked four such leaders to discuss the role technology plays in their organization.

### How does technology continue to impact your business and/or industry?

**DREW SMITH:** Over the past few years, our industry has undergone a dramatic shift toward a model that revolves around software and solutions. Previously, we focused on machines and break-fix service.

With document workflows overwhelmingly shifting away from paper-intensive processes and going to the cloud, scanning and device applications have become mandatory elements.

We have provided the solutions approach for several

years now, which has brought a continuing number of updates and enhancements. One of the updates – security – is a key component of data transmission and archiving. All too often in the news, you hear of data breaches and disgruntled employees compromising company data.

Discovering new ways to combat hackers and unrestricted access while also implementing user-friendly efficient workflows requires an in-depth analysis of how a company operates. If we were to just sell a copier and scanning software without stepping foot into the business or organization – or without talking to end-users about how their current document management process is handled – then we would not be able to ensure that

our proposed offer would truly be right for them.

To better serve our customers, we receive daily updates on new software and applications we can offer, along with the vulnerabilities and threats outdated programs now pose. We know we must stay vigilant in our knowledge of the ever-changing technology landscape and evolving workplaces that we serve, so we can be seen as trusted advisors to our clients.

**KEITH HOLDEN:** Every business of every size can benefit from utilizing the right technology in the right ways. Our market is predominantly made up of small to mid-sized businesses and, even at this level, we are seeing that their demands for better technology solutions are

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in a constant state of evolution.

So many of them are much more advanced now than they were just two to three years ago. Most are moving toward cloud-based services for e-commerce, data backup and recovery, point of sale, and network connectivity. These are driving the push for us to provide bigger connections to the internet to businesses of all sizes.

We began several years ago moving away from traditional telephone services to more broadband-enabled, hosted services for these small businesses, which offer scalable solutions to businesses who want to control cost while staying ahead of the technology curve.

**DEAN EXLINE:** For DocuVid Global, technology is what drives our business. We created the business because we saw the need to incorporate video documentation, along with surveying, to help give our clients a clearer view of their job sites.

As we've grown, we have had to look for new tech, such as drone mapping, to help keep us at the forefront.

As technology gets better, we, as a business, have to adapt and change with it, which means we have to spend time on education, making sure employees learn new software and how to use new devices, and that we are teaching them new procedures.

### What is the biggest technological challenge you currently face?

**SMITH:** For our business, I think the biggest challenge is perception. Often, people see or hear "copiers" and automatically envision a "copy machine"

or, in other words, a tech dinosaur that simply shoots out ink on paper.

The fact is, we utilize copiers as conduits of business-critical information getting to the screens or hands of those that need it in the most efficient process possible.

We spend a majority of our time with prospects and customers customizing software strategies that expedite business processes, integrating with their cloud program, and implementing new technology that replaces archaic faxing practices. All of this is done in addition to managing print fleets and providing industry-leading equipment and service.

Just like malls are a thing of the past, so, too, is the term, "copy machine," at least as far as Copiers Plus is concerned. We want to embrace new technological advances and bring your workplace up to speed. To do this, we, as a company, must remain committed to the process of educating our staff and customers on technological practices and how to always stay up-to-date, secure and compliant.

**EXLINE:** Our biggest challenge is keeping up with new advancements in technology. With drones and video, the technology is forever changing and with new apps, software and products launching daily, it's almost impossible to keep up.

**DEFREITAS:** The biggest challenge we have in terms of technology is ensuring we are partnering with the right best-of-class technology provider that will integrate well with the systems we have in place.

Technology providers are introducing new services at a very rapid pace many of which are not providing a complete product or feature set. It's important to be thorough with the due diligence

process when procuring new technology solutions to ensure that all core business requirements are being met.

It's also important as a business to be agile – to be ready and able to scale and quickly adapt to new technologies – while being strategic in selecting the right partner, whereas the technology landscape in a few years will look much different than it does today.

**HOLDEN:** The biggest challenge we face is the pace of change. What was new 48 months ago is often now end-of-life.

As a company that supports local business, we must constantly invest in our technology to be able to support our customers. One of the ways we are doing that is by deploying fiber optic services to many of our local business districts.

Fiber optics delivers the fastest internet speeds of any method commercially available today, and it will accommodate future needs for a long time with the cost of capital investment. It's as close to a future-proof means of broadband delivery as there is.

As part of our strategic upgrade and expansion plan, ATMC is upgrading all key business districts in our service area to fiber optic technology. We've already completed work in Shallotte and Leland and are now working on Ocean Isle Beach and Oak Island. Holden Beach, Calabash and the business district near Sunset Beach are scheduled to receive fiber optics in 2019.

### How can small businesses effectively integrate technology to increase productivity?

**EXLINE:** A small business can integrate technology in so many ways to help them be more productive, whether it's a matter of using QuickBooks to help with accounting or something as simple as a call forwarding service to your cell phone.

As a business, you need to look at how you are doing your daily job and evaluate what new technology you might need to help do the job better and more efficiently.

**HOLDEN:** Find the right partner. It's so difficult to implement new technology on your own. Pick a partner to help you not just implement a solution, but also be there to help you after it is implemented.

Technology is not just a purchase-and-forget-it item; it's something you use and something that evolves. So, work with vendors who will work with you on an ongoing basis.

At ATMC, our business services include hosted voice, business broadband, managed services, cable TV, business security, and creative services. We help implement solutions, but because we are local, we are in the community too and available to help when needed.

We want long-term customer relationships and when that is your goal, you make sure you do right by your customers every day to keep their loyalty.

**SMITH:** The small businesses we work with every day are always looking for the new-and-improved way of doing things. This aptitude for change allows us to bring viable solutions into the field and bring enhanced efficiency at affordable price points.

One key way we have been effective at integrating technology to make our customers more efficient has been by

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enhancing their document scanning processes through the automation of their document workflows.

We achieve this by integrating our multifunction devices with the customer's ECM (Enterprise Content Management) system. Doing this allows the automatic indexing of files and routing to specific users within the organization or folders on their network. The end-user is then able to utilize this functionality with a single click of a button on their device.

By implementing this technology, we can simplify a user's intensive scanning process, save them valuable time, eliminate errors in data capture and routing, and provide increased security through a secure file transfer process.

**DEFREITAS:** There are many SaaS and cloud-based subscription model applications and tools now available that allow for quick deployment with minimal costs to implement or integrate.

We leverage several cloud-based solutions to help us automate processes and increase productivity to better serve our clients while keeping costs to a minimum. Most of these provide an interface for integrations, often through an API. Integrations, however, can be costly if not native to an application, so organizations need to weigh the benefits to the actual costs and level of effort required to build.

To effectively integrate new technology into an organization it's important to: 1) not introduce too many new technologies at once; 2) include stakeholders in the selection process where possible; and 3) ensure that the end-users are properly trained and new processes are documented.

### How has technology integration influenced the kinds of job skills your industry seeks?

**HOLDEN:** As a technology company, now more than ever, we are seeking out candidates who have the skillsets to match today's needs.

From our installation and repair technicians and technical support staff to our sales people, the need to understand how these new technologies work and to be comfortable communicating

with customers about it is critical.

Specifically for employees that are working with businesses and in our technical support roles, we require specific certifications, which ensure they are competent in their knowledge base. After that, it's constant training to make sure they stay up-to-date.

**DEFREITAS:** As a recruiting firm, we are tasked daily with identifying candidates with emerging technology skill sets, such as Amazon Web Services, Cloud Engineering or Security. Our recruiting teams must be able to leverage technology to assist them with identifying, qualifying and connecting with candidates with these skills.

Prospective employees are fully vetted through computer testing to ensure that the employee is the right fit for each role. Employees are required to rapidly adjust to newly integrated technologies by applying existing computer and technology skills and through continuous learning and constant expansion of skills.

**EXLINE:** It changes what you are looking for in an employee. Having the basic skills for a job just isn't enough anymore.

Especially in video or drone flying, you need someone who stays current in the new trends in technology to help your business keep up.

**SMITH:**

As our industry has evolved from a focus on machine sales and maintenance, so have our requirements and expectations for potential employees. This goes for both our sales and service teams.

In sales, we look for employees that are knowledgeable of today's business climate, technology trends and the challenges workplaces have regarding ever-changing technology. We know that if sales representatives are able to understand and utilize the technology of today, then we will be able to train them on the other aspects of our business much more effectively.

A candidate's social media acumen is

something we also consider since social selling is becoming more of a tool we look to utilize.

In regard to our technical team, they must understand IT processes, business processes and general mechanics of electronics. We need to know that when we hire and train our service personnel, they are equipped to handle both the mechanical aspects and the networking scenarios that may come up on a service call.

Our customers deserve qualified experts that get the job done right and in an efficient manner.

### How can small businesses keep pace with tech trends on a limited budget?

**EXLINE:** Small businesses can keep pace with tech trends by knowing their business and not biting off more than



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they can chew when it comes to new technology.

Everyone wants to have the latest and greatest tech, but can your business afford it, and do you have a profitable use for it? As an example, you shouldn't just go buy a brand-new camera because it's the newest thing to come out.

When purchasing technology, it's always important to do your research and make sure whatever you're buying fits your needs and can sustain your needs for a while. That way, whatever you buy, you can at least hold on to and get good use out of it before it becomes obsolete.

**SMITH:** It is crucial in today's business climate to always be knowledgeable of new trends and practices, so your company doesn't fall behind the competition. This can be a tall task for small businesses because budgets are tight, and employees are often already handling several duties that eat up much of their day.

That is why we believe it is important to have vendors that serve as trusted advisors in the different areas of your business. When small businesses partner with vendors that provide high-quality services and align with them ethically and professionally, an invaluable partnership can be formed. This is also a great way to stay up-to-date with technology.

For instance, I recently decided to change veterinarians for my dog, Berkeley, because the location I was using did not keep me informed of what was needed in regard to his care. Notifications of vaccines and renewal dates were not given, which was frustrating because I depended on the vet's office to be the experts and provide me with updates on what needed to happen, when it needed to occur, and the problems that may be an effect of not taking care of it.

I share this example because, in much the same way, small businesses we work with look to us to handle how their office environment functions today, as well as how it will need to be in the future. When we communicate successfully with our client about the advances in the industry and the changes necessary for them to obtain optimal efficiency and cost effectiveness, we prove to them they are not just another billable account. We truly become their trusted advisor.

**HOLDEN:** Every company has a limited budget; some just have bigger limits than others.

No matter what size you are or what your budget is, do your homework and be selective. Don't chase trends. Select only those that make sense for your business and are proven. That's where the homework comes in.

We have a saying that we want to be leading edge, but not bleeding edge. Because we are a part of the local market, we feel we offer service priced for our local market. We offer all types of hosted solutions that allow our customers to take advantage of these trends without having to bear the brunt of a large capital investment. When upgrades come

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along, we make them, and the customer benefits.

We saw that very few of the businesses in our market can afford their own IT staff, so we offer an IT support service, too. From managing updates on PCs or fixing that printer that won't print, to network design and security, we offer local IT support to small businesses that allows them to focus their efforts on their business while we keep them up and going.

### In what major ways has technology made your job easier?

**DEFREITAS:** Technology has leveled the playing field for most industries. It's much easier for small businesses to compete with large companies now that cloud- and SaaS-based applications are readily available.

We are able to easily scale our infrastructure in just a few minutes to accommodate for special projects or client-specific requirements. Technology allows our geographically dispersed teams to stay connected. We've invested in a Unified Communications Platform, which has provided greater connectivity and flexibility for our employees and clients.

Technology has streamlined the application and onboarding processes for our employees, which allows our recruiting teams to focus on finding great talent for our customers.

**HOLDEN:** Technology has allowed businesses in our area to grow in ways that wouldn't have been possible.

To begin with, you can be a small local business and still sell worldwide. So many small businesses can start and grow 100-percent online and be run from the garage. It has also allowed businesses to become less manual and much more efficient.

**SMITH:** There have been many technological advances in the past several decades, with the internet and cell phones serving as today's staples. From these, areas of communication, data storage and the overall speed of business have been greatly improved. Business that took days to complete in the past and included burdensome logistics now can

be completed in minutes.

Both our sales and service teams have benefited from improved access to applications and information while on the go.

For sales, they are able to access customer files, pricing and necessary forms while on the road. These advances allow for faster processing of paperwork, information that is up-to-date, and the ability to stay in the field and avoid frequent office visits.

With real-time GPS monitoring, we are able to dispatch our service technicians more effectively. This technology not only allows us to route and account for the whereabouts of our technicians but also provide more accurate information to our customers in regard to when they can expect us to arrive.

The ability to remain adaptive and transparent with and for our customers has been a key to us achieving success with new technologies.

**EXLINE:** Technology has made my job a lot easier, with advancements in editing software to advances in camera equipment. I can do so much more with the editing software I use now compared to five years ago. Not just that but also the switch from tapes to digital format cut my work time in half. I can transfer footage or burn a DVD in a matter of minutes versus the hours it used to take.

Also, the invention of drones has made aerial photography much more affordable and can now offer you more data than ever.

### How has technology improved the customer experience?

**HOLDEN:** There are numerous ways that technology has improved the customer experience.

Having an online presence through their website and social media platform gives businesses another way to connect with and engage customers.

Access to high speed internet allows a business to get a job done faster, which in turn makes the customer experience better.

**SMITH:** A key theme we have embraced

in regard to technology and customer experience has been the utilization of data collection.

Data collection has provided us with a new approach on how we handle meter collection, toner shipments and service notifications.

Meter-reading collection can be time-consuming and bothersome to the customer. The ability for us to pull meters from a data collection agent allows real-time reporting without a need for customer interaction.

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Founder & President,  
GeoInnovation Professional  
Surveying Services/DocuVid Global

a client anywhere in the world within minutes of taking it.

**DEFREITAS:** Our enterprise recruiting technology provides a sleek, intuitive design with an enhanced user experience. A fully customizable dashboard is available to our customers that provides visibility into positions and candidate recruitment activity.

Our customers are able to enter job requisitions with few clicks, at which point automated approval paths are triggered that route the requisition to the appropriate client contacts to approve.

Once approved, the requisition is automatically routed to our internal recruiting teams or through other vendors working within our program to begin recruiting for the requisition.

Greene has leveraged automation to provide real-time communication with candidates that are interviewing for positions

with our clients, and that automation provides greater efficiency for our recruiting team while also creating an overall better experience for our stakeholders.

### How has technology changed the way consumers make purchasing decisions?

**SMITH:** Consumers today are more educated than ever before. With access to information at their fingertips, consumers will often do research before they reach out to potential vendors. Even after a vendor has been engaged, there are a variety of resources available to consumers to investigate or verify the information they are given.

At the same time, once a vendor proves that they will go the extra mile and put in the necessary effort to ensure the client is well taken care of, the consumer is more likely to trust vendors that provide sound advice. Part of this trust is also gained by vendors through



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continually engaging with the consumers through social channels and emails. Sales representatives, for example, are able to do this by sharing articles and reports that they think would be beneficial to the client.

Another way we have been able to utilize technology with our customers to influence purchasing decisions is by providing webinars or remote location proofs-of-concepts. Since we work with a variety of providers of software, applications and equipment, it is not always cost- or time-effective to have onsite demos. By utilizing virtual meeting software, we can prove the concept will work in their environment and therefore shorten the turnaround time for the execution of contracts and implementation.

**HOLDEN:** Customers are more tech-savvy than ever, which gives them more power when making a purchasing decision. Today, the first thing customers do is go online to do research before deciding who they want to do business with. They read customer reviews, and if you aren't treating your customers right, prospective customers will read about it and they won't call you.

They also seek to learn more about how your company does business to see if they are a good corporate citizen. We are seeing that more and more customers want to feel good about the company they are doing business with, and our strong ties to Brunswick County and the fact that we give back so much to our community has helped us attract new customers who don't want to be just another number.

**EXLINE:** Technology has made the consumer a more-informed buyer. Having the internet has made consumers more likely to do research about a product or service they are buying, and it also allows them to compare pricing and quality of other business to make a more informed decision.

### How important is a website to a business's overall success?

**DEFREITAS:** Websites are crucial for every business. Often, our website is the first impression that prospective clients and candidates have of our company. A

business website should accurately reflect a company's brand, mission, vision, culture and service offerings. For most businesses, a website is typically only one of several components that make up a company's digital footprint.

We provide purposeful information about our company and services for candidates, clients and vendors that drives significant web traffic to our sites. Multimedia content is updated regularly to ensure it is both current and relevant to our subscribers.

It's important that a company's online digital presence encompasses social media sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, all of which should consistently represent the company brand.

**EXLINE:** A website is huge to a business's overall success. A website is part of technology and, without a website, most consumers won't even be able to find your business.

**HOLDEN:** Your website is your front door. It sets the tone and it is the key factor that makes a customer decide whether they want to give your business a chance.

It needs to be laid out well. It must have accurate information. And it must be optimized for mobile phones since the majority of web searches are done on phones or tablets.

When it comes to your website, spend the money to get it done right. It will pay for itself many, many times over.

**SMITH:** Websites serve as the prominent voice and first impression people have of a company. Ensuring your website is up-to-date and easy to use is key and allows users to get an idea of what doing business with you will be like.

If users are easily able to navigate through your web pages and find the information they need without getting bogged down by hefty verbiage and confusing concepts, then they will most likely feel more confident in your company.

In February – after several months of working alongside Bon's Eye Marketing – we launched our redesigned website. Our vision for the website was best described by needing to be clean, clear and connecting for users.

A clean and appealing design is key. Users will engage with a site that is aesthetically pleasing and not loaded with unnecessary elements and verbiage.

Being clear with messaging in terms of what we do, who we serve, and why we are relevant to the visiting user allows us to qualify ourselves quickly. This allows users to know whether to continue engaging the site within a matter of seconds.

We also strived to connect with users by offering open lines of communication through contact forms, clear calls to action, and easy access to individual branch contact information.

Our new website has proven invaluable and continues to open new doors for growing our business and strengthening communication with our current customers. Our first impression now is one we feel confident reflects who we are and who we serve. We would love for you to visit us at copiers-plus.com and let us know what you think!

### To what extent has social media changed how you reach customers and/or clients?

**HOLDEN:** Social media platforms allow us to connect more with our customers than ever before and having a social media presence is an expectation that customers have of us.

At ATMC, we have been able to engage our customers and community on more of a personal level. Of course, we share what products and services we have to offer, but it also allows us to show the ways we are supporting our community, post job openings, brag on our employees, and much more.

It gives us a voice that speaks to individual customers, and it allows individual customers a convenient way to reach out to us.

**SMITH:** Social media today is a vessel we have used to help show the human side of our business and helpful insights that our community of influence can utilize.

We want to make sure that we are being helpful and seen as experts in our field. Without adding value and insight, this is not achievable.

In the same token, we are not robots. We are a collective of unique individuals that work together for the common purpose of serving our customers and community well.

Social media allows us to offer

glimpses of our team's personalities and pertinent updates regarding our company, such as weather-related closings or new hires.

Additionally, we use the reach and reaction our audiences have to our updates to review what is relevant to them and what falls flat. By continually evaluating how our content is received, we learn more about what our customers care about and how we can better serve them in regard to the social arena and other aspects of our business.

Before social media, newsletters were the overwhelming communication method to share with your audience regarding any social aspects of your company. Newsletters were costly to create and distribute, quickly dated, and relied on accurate information of individuals for delivery.

Now, with social media, you can reach a specific audience in a matter of minutes with up-to-date information and for a fraction of the cost. In addition to the ease of distribution, applications and software allow for easily editable templates for social graphics. This helps users create impressionable posts that don't rely on a wealth of design knowledge or hours of tinkering.

**EXLINE:** Social media has given us another avenue to communicate with customers, promote our business, share our projects, and show customers what we are currently working on.

**DEFREITAS:** At Greene, we have three customers: our internal employees, candidates and clients. Social media plays a vital part in reaching these three customers.

For example, we share industry-related content – such as the N.C. TECH monthly IT jobs trend report, videos highlighting open positions and our philanthropic involvement in the local community – on social sites. Content is often segmented based on the audience to ensure relevancy.

Additionally, social media management platforms allow for a more efficient means of distributing content to many social channels at once. This enables us to efficiently and effectively reach our subscriber base. 