

Multiple monitors aid efficiency, accuracy

Peter Mariahazy is so accustomed to using two computer screens, he finds himself cramped and restricted when he has to work on just one.

"When I'm working on my laptop by itself I find I run out of screen real estate very quickly," he said.

Mariahazy is director of technology and human resources for Modern Business Machines (MBM), based in Appleton. He is one of about eight employees working with a dual screen computer display.

Long the purview of accountants and graphic designers, multi-screen systems are appearing in a wide variety of businesses. The bonus screens aren't just for corner office executive-types either. Customer service departments and administrative staff are often first in line for these time-saving systems.

With dual screen setups, employees can view several applications simultaneously. That minimizes the need for scrolling, minimizing, maximizing, or printing to access necessary information.

MBM set up its first dual monitor system about two years ago and has continued to upgrade workstations according to staff demand and benefit potential.

"Mostly it is administrative people who are working in multiple areas or have to look at two different source of information to compare," Mariahazy said.

The purchasing administrator, for example, will have a vendor Web site and a purchase order open at one time. With side-by-side displays, this person can cut and paste items numbers without having to retype or toggle between screens. The service managers use their second screen to monitor service activity with a display that continually refreshes with new information from their technicians.

At Froistad and Associates, a Green Bay accounting firm, owner RC Froistad has been working with dual screens for two years and expects to equip the entire 10-station office in the near future. He implemented the system in an effort to go paperless. Instead of printing or saving hard copy of client tax returns, for example, Froistad compares previous years' documents on one screen while completing the current year on the other.

"I do think it makes me more efficient," Froistad said, "not having to flip between windows and write down or remember various things."

At Custom Design Workshop in Oshkosh, owner Tom Wollank has been working on dual monitors for about three years. He uses the two screens to hold tool palettes for graphic design work or to accommodate a spreadsheet and an AutoCad application while doing furniture design and quoting.

"When I'm using two different programs, I don't have to bounce back and forth," he said. "It definitely improves productivity and makes life a



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TECHNOLOGY

little simpler."

A 2005 press release issued by NEC Display Solutions, an Illinois-based display provider, announced that staff of Forbes.com saw a 50 percent reduction in editorial production times after deploying dual monitors. Staff also commented that they were able to increase font sizes and application windows, thereby reducing eye strain.

An earlier 2003 study conducted in partnership with NEC Display Solutions and the University of Utah showed that multi-screen users got on task quicker, worked faster, and got more done with fewer errors compared to single screen users. Study participants decreased their errors by 33 percent and increased overall productivity by 10 percent.

Users indicate the extra efficiency compensates for the extra cost.

"In my mind it's relatively inexpensive," Mariahazy said.

A 19-inch flat panel monitor costs less than \$250. You'll also need two video ports, using a dual-head video card or two compatible video cards. This should cost less than \$70. Based on his own experience, Mariahazy recommends upgrading to a dual monitors video card as opposed to adding a second card.

Beyond the affordable cost, dual monitor systems come with a low learning curve. The hardest part for users, according to Mariahazy, is recognizing that one monitor is the primary screen and the other is secondary and learning how to change between the two. But most users, he said, pick that up in just a few days.

Users should also understand how to change monitor settings so that both monitors display similar brightness to reduce eyestrain. While the ideal is two identical monitors side-by-side, companies aren't always purchasing two monitors at once.

Dual- or multi-monitor systems are most appropriate for users who constantly have to be in multiple applications at one time. Mariahazy notes that Gen X or Gen Y employees tend to be multi-taskers and may generate higher demand for the equipment.

Mariahazy also recommends that companies test their applications to be sure they work in a dual monitor setup. While mainstream applications such as Microsoft won't have a problem, sometimes specialty or custom software won't display properly.

If you have a technology issue you'd like to see discussed, or a technology news item, contact Jaime Leick at jleick@thebusinessnewsonline.com.