



Havenshire Limited

Newsletter

Jan 2010 From Our Founder

Business and Technical Consulting You Can Trust

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Contact Us

www.havenshire.com

service@havenshire.com

*4 Knight Street
St. Johns
Worcester WR2 5DB
England (UK)*

*+44 (0)121 288 1440 phone
+44 (0)870 123 6161 fax*

Director: Bonnie D. Huval

Unsettled Weather (Financially Too)

We were unsure which way the wind would blow at the very first of the month, so we've waited a little to see how the new year would shape up. At Christmas, certain black swans turned up on Shropshire. Local folklore says these particular swans come over from Russia just ahead of winter weather more like Siberia than the mild winters Britain has become accustomed to over the past 50 years. In a mild winter, Shropshire never sees those swans. Lo and behold, the swans were right—and not just for us in Britain.

Weather affects everything.

Molasses in January

The expression *slow as molasses in January* can apply to an awful lot of the business world right now. If you sell cold weather gear, you've probably had a booming business. If you sell something else, you may be cursing the weather, especially if you are in Europe or North America.

Many people spent November and December saying it will all get better in January. Instead, many people have spent the first half of January coping with more snow than they know how to handle. The usual mid-January quickening of business is a slow crawl instead.

Signs of Pent Up Demand

Not all the news is bad. We see signs that a number of companies are ready to go ahead (when the weather relents enough to let people move around) with work they were holding back last year. We expect a broad surge of business for a while this year.

But we are cautioning our clients to take a conservative approach to this uplift. The factors we discussed in last month's newsletter will impede this recovery and are likely to cause a second economic dip.

The trick is to ride the wave of optimism and improvement this year without overextending. If you have the resources to start preparing new products, services or systems to take advantage of economic recovery, this is a great time to prepare. Many prices are still down and labor is still more available, on better terms, than during boom times. But in the event of a second dip in this recession, make sure you have enough contingency allowances to carry you through the second dip and into the real recovery.

Second Opinions are Not Just for Surgery

When you need serious medical care, especially surgery, you probably get a second opinion from a second doctor before you decide to go ahead with the procedure.

Second opinions are valuable in business, too, including IT. In December, we began doing some non-IT business advisory work for a small client. He thought he knew where to find his prospective customers online, and thought he was mostly asking us to confirm his information. We turned up places to find good prospects that never occurred to him. He will make more sales because of that, and that will more than recover the cost of our second opinion.

As an example in IT, several years ago a large USA telecom firm signed joint ventures with firms in two other countries. Suddenly they needed to add security features to a proprietary database so that each firm would only be able to work with records for customers in its country, and the database administrator could work with all the records. The telecom firm began making plans to develop extensive new security software for the database engine it had written.

Our USA sister firm devised a clever, unusual way to use a security feature that already existed in the operating system. Instead of a substantial complex project, it became a small simple project for one person.

As we mentioned, some pent-up demand is breaking through and some new projects are starting. If one of those projects is yours, remember the value of getting a second opinion at the right point. Doing the right project is better for your business than doing a project that will have to be reworked later.

What's In That Cloud?

Many businesses, especially small ones, have embraced cloud computing. If they weren't doing it before, they noticed it as Google began to offer such tools as easily shared business calendar coordination.

Is It Safe?

Cloud computing can be extremely useful, convenient, and cost effective. When you use cloud computing, your data resides in computers owned by the service provider. Ideally, the provider has more powerful platforms and more expertise that you could afford. The provider uses both to offer more services, more capacity, faster responsiveness and better protection for your data than you could accomplish with just your own resources.

But the providers are a tempting target for hackers. Breaking into one cloud computing provider offers access to data from many businesses, not just one.

Look at What Happened to Google

As everyone now knows, in December 2009, at least 34 organisations were targeted by a sophisticated and wide-ranging cyberattack originating in China.

Google responded most publicly, threatening to stop abiding by government-imposed censorship of its Chinese search engine. But the damage has already occurred and cannot be undone.

The attack sought data about weapons systems from defense companies (including Northrop Grumman), source code from software firms (including Symantec and Adobe), other intellectual property (from such companies as Dow Chemical), and access to Gmail accounts belonging to political dissidents.

Security is Not Optional

Look closely at security whenever your business keeps anything sensitive in the cloud. If a customer's sensitive information leaks out, the customer does not care whether it happened due to a security lapse within your building or because your cloud computing has inadequate security. It's your business. Data security is your responsibility. Use cloud computing only where you are sure the security is great.