

Utilize computers calendar to stay on time



John Deans

What do you have planned for Monday? Do you have to check your calendar like I do?

Like many other small business people I have to perform various duties and play numerous roles to keep my things moving. Between our two businesses, Rotary, Crime Stoppers, political activism and family events our calendar is full.

There is no way I could remember all my ever-changing client site visits, business meetings, and critical appointments without having them in my MS Outlook calendar which is synced with my iPhone calendar application.

Many of those appointments have alerts configured on them to notify me usually 15 minutes before the event takes place. This has kept me from being late for client meetings, business appointments, and even my daughter's school play.

If you are constantly on the go running from event, to meeting, and over for a kid's activity your life can be kept organized by fully utilizing a calendar program. Discipline is the key here since you have to input your schedule into the calendar application and have it sync up with a smartphone like the Blackberry or iPhone.

Nearly every business computer has Microsoft Office which includes Outlook. This not only runs your email and houses your contacts, but it also has a great calendar tool. Switch over to the cal-

endar app by clicking on the bar to the left which will bring up the month view.

From there you can start adding events by either clicking on a time or by clicking on the 'New' button. Select the start and end time along with a brief description of the calendar event. Next, set a 'Reminder' that will trigger an audible alert just before the event is to start.

Since we live and work in a small town I set the reminder for 15 minutes before the event since that will give me ample time to make it most anywhere in Brenham so I won't be late. This reminder feature saves me several times a week. For long range alerts like birthdays and big meetings where I need more preparation time, I'll set the reminder alert for one day before the appointment.

If you run all over town you'll need to sync up your iPhone or Blackberry once a day so those events are mirrored between your MS Outlook and the mobile device you carry around during the day. The iPhone calendar program even has a second alert which I utilize for those really important events I absolutely cannot miss.

Syncing enables you to add, modify and delete events from either your Outlook or you smartphone and have those changes be reflected at both ends. The majority of my events are added on my iPhone and then they are copied to my Outlook calendar program in the evening when I sync.

On the corporate level having your calendar events can be even more critical. Miss a critical meeting and you may end up on the short list targeting the next layoff. Shy of having a full blown Microsoft Exchange Server that provides shared

email, contacts, notes and calendars there are other ways that are much more affordable.

A few years ago a client of mine needed to share their MS Outlook Calendar to their five employees. So we utilized a software program called Softalk Share Server from SoftalkLTD.com out of the UK for around \$275.

This provided an easy way to have a company calendar that all could see and add events within their MS Outlook. It not only shares out the calendar but also the contacts, notes and even Email messages.

The downside of Softalk Share Server is that it takes over everyone's Outlook PST file and reformats it into a proprietary format on the server. I fear the day that goes bad or the company goes out of business. It has already had backup problems and support is a problem due to the time zone difference.

When I did have support issues with Softalk my window of opportunity to get a call back from them was from 8 until 11 a.m.

Recently I had another client need the same ability to have a single company calendar that is accessible from all employees' Outlook but requires no server or costly software. Guess where I found it? Google, of course!

With Google Calendar I registered an account called myclient@gmail.com and then set up a company calendar online for them at Google.com. Next I downloaded the Sync tool located at the top

right of the Google Calendar web page.

After it installed I simply inputted the GMail account name and the password along with choosing the 1-Way Sync from Google Calendar to MS Outlook.

Next I configured the sync time to every ten minutes. I did this Google Sync installation and configuration procedure on all ten company PCs. That way only the company events are pushed down six times an hour into everyone's MS Outlook Calendar but none of their personal and individual events are viewable to anyone else.

This took all of an hour to set up with no costly hardware or software. One of the administrative personnel is in charge of keep up with the company calendar and everyone else is instantly informed of company-wide meetings and other critical events.

No more can someone say, "I never got the email about the meeting" since now the event is automatically downloaded into their MS Outlook with an alert set that pops up on their screen.

Bottom line: Stay on time with meetings by utilizing your Outlook Calendar and remember that Google as yet another free solution for your company's calendar sharing needs.

Next week's column: Managing multiple routers.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289.2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.