ISSUE 039
October 2026
Independence, Missouri



FCS TECH TALK

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Leveraging AI in a Small Business Page 1
5 Ways to Spot a Phishing Email Page 2
Use Gryamail to Organize your Inbox Page 2
Cyber Security Nightmares Page 2
Microsoft 365 Subscription Perks Page 3
Trivia Question of the Month Page 3

LEVERAGING AI IN A SMALL BUSINESS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly changing how small businesses operate, offering powerful new ways to save time, reduce expenses, and improve daily productivity. What was once technology available primarily to large corporations is now accessible to businesses of nearly every size. AI can help business owners accomplish more with fewer resources.

For small businesses, the greatest advantage of AI is its ability to handle repetitive, time-consuming tasks.

Instead of spending hours organizing information, responding to routine inquiries, or preparing documents, employees can use AI-powered tools to complete these activities more efficiently and focus on serving customers and growing the business.

What Is AI and How Can Small Businesses Use It?

Artificial Intelligence refers to technology that can analyze information, recognize patterns, generate content, and perform tasks that traditionally require human intelligence. Modern AI tools can understand written instructions, summarize documents, answer questions, and assist with everyday business decisions.

Unlike traditional software that follows predefined instructions, many AI systems can interpret natural language and generate useful responses based on the information provided. Small businesses can benefit from these capabilities in several areas, including customer communication, administrative work, marketing, financial reporting, and employee productivity.

1. Email Management and Communication

Email is one of the most common responsibilities consuming valuable time throughout the workday. Business owners and employees frequently spend hours reading messages, responding to customers, and searching through lengthy conversations.

AI assistants such as Microsoft Copilot can help summarize email threads, draft responses, improve writing, and identify important information. Instead of manually reviewing every message in a lengthy conversation, employees can use AI to highlight key decisions, outstanding questions, and important deadlines.

This allows employees to communicate more efficiently while maintaining the personal attention customers expect.

2. Automating Administrative and Office Tasks

Administrative responsibilities are essential to running a business, but many involve repetitive processes that consume employee time. Tasks such as organizing documents, entering information into spreadsheets, processing invoices, and maintaining records can require significant manual effort.

AI combined with automation tools can assist with these activities by extracting information from documents, identifying important details, and transferring data between business applications.

For instance, a company receiving invoices by email can use AI-powered document processing to identify vendor information, invoice numbers, payment amounts, and due dates. This information can then be organized in a spreadsheet or accounting workflow for employee review. Businesses can also use AI to classify scanned documents, organize incoming forms, and generate reports. These capabilities are particularly valuable for organizations handling large amounts of paperwork.

3. Marketing, Advertising, and Content Creation

Maintaining a consistent marketing presence can be challenging for small businesses without dedicated marketing employees. Creating newsletters, social media posts, advertisements, and website content requires time, creativity, and planning. AI tools such as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot can help generate professional marketing materials based on simple written instructions.

Business owners can describe their products or services, identify their intended audience, and request content tailored to specific marketing campaigns.

For example, a local service company introducing a new offering could use AI to develop an email announcement, social media posts, and updated website descriptions. AI can also help brainstorm promotions, develop marketing calendars, and improve existing content.

While AI can significantly accelerate content creation, businesses should always verify important details before publishing.

4. Customer Service and Virtual Assistants

Providing timely customer support is important for maintaining satisfaction and building long-term relationships. However, many small businesses lack the staffing resources to respond immediately to every customer inquiry.

AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants can help answer common questions, provide service information, and guide customers toward appropriate resources. These systems can be integrated into websites and messaging platforms to provide assistance outside normal operating hours.

For example, a company can use an AI assistant to answer questions about business hours, available services, appointment procedures, and company policies. More complicated inquiries can be directed to employees for personal assistance.

AI can also summarize previous customer interactions, helping employees understand earlier conversations before following up.

5. Financial Reporting and Business Analysis

Small businesses generate valuable information through sales transactions, customer purchases, expenses, and financial records.

However, reviewing this information manually can be difficult and time-consuming.

For example, a retail business can analyze sales information to determine which products generate the highest revenue, identify seasonal purchasing patterns, and recognize inventory trends.

Similarly, service companies can review revenue and expense reports to better understand operating costs and business performance. AI can also assist with forecasting, identifying unusual transactions, and creating visual summaries of financial information.

How AI Is Already Being Used in Small Businesses

AI is already integrated into many applications businesses use every day. Companies may have access to useful AI capabilities without realizing it.

Microsoft 365 and Office Productivity: Microsoft Copilot helps create documents, analyze spreadsheets, build presentations, and summarize meetings, improving everyday efficiency.

Accounting and Bookkeeping: AI simplifies expense tracking, receipt processing, transaction reviews, and financial reporting.

Sales and Customer Management: AI helps organize leads, track customer interactions, and automate follow-ups to strengthen customer relationships.

IT and Cybersecurity: AI-powered security tools detect suspicious activity, identify potential threats, and help protect business systems.

Meeting Notes and Scheduling: AI can transcribe meetings, summarize discussions, and identify action items, saving employees valuable time.
tinue to advance, more everyday business applications will incorporate intelligent automation, document processing, and data analysis.

We can help leverage AI in your small business today!

TL;DR

Artificial Intelligence is changing the way small businesses operate, offering powerful tools to save time, reduce costs, and boost productivity. From automating repetitive tasks and managing emails to improving customer service, marketing, financial reporting, and cybersecurity, AI helps businesses streamline everyday operations. With AI tools becoming more accessible and affordable, small businesses can work smarter, improve efficiency, and spend less time on administrative tasks and more time focusing on customers and business growth.

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THIS MONTH'S PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

CLICK TO VIEW A SHORT VIDEO!

GRAYMAIL PROTECTION FILTER

CLEAR YOUR INBOX





NEVER MISS IMPORTANT EMAILS

ALL GRAYMAIL PUT INTO ONE PLACE





REDUCE EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS

5 WAYS TO SPOT A PHISHING EMAIL

1. Generic or Unusual Greetings

Phishing emails often begin with greetings like "Dear Customer" or "Valued User" rather than addressing you personally.

While legitimate businesses sometimes use generic greetings, unexpected or impersonal messages should encourage you to examine the sender and content more carefully.

2. Urgent or Threatening Messages

Scammers frequently create a false sense of urgency to pressure recipients into acting quickly.

Messages claiming your account will be suspended, a payment has failed, or immediate verification is required are common tactics. Always verify unexpected requests directly with the organization.

3. Suspicious Sender Email Addresses

Cybercriminals often use email addresses that closely resemble legitimate companies, sometimes changing just one letter or adding an extra character.

For example, "support@walmrt.com" instead of "support@walmart.com." Carefully inspect the sender's complete email address before trusting an unexpected message.

4. Unexpected Attachments or Suspicious Links

Be cautious when receiving attachments or links you weren't expecting.

Hover over links to preview their destinations before clicking, and watch for unfamiliar domains or unusual web addresses. When uncertain, visit the company's official website directly rather than following the email link.

5. Requests for Sensitive Information

Emails requesting passwords, verification codes, banking details, or other confidential information should raise immediate concerns.

Legitimate organizations generally do not request passwords or security codes through unsolicited emails. Verify suspicious requests using an independently confirmed contact method.

Stay Alert and Think Before You Click

Phishing attacks continue to evolve, and even professional-looking emails can be fraudulent.

When something seems suspicious, avoid clicking links, opening attachments, or sharing information until you've verified the sender. A few moments of caution can prevent costly security breaches.

DON'T LET CYBER SECURITY NIGHTMARES HAUNT YOUR BUSINESS THIS HALLOWEEN!

Halloween brings plenty of ghosts, goblins, and scary surprises, but some of the biggest threats aren't hiding in haunted houses. They're lurking inside your business technology.

Here are some cyber security nightmares every business should avoid this Halloween.

• Ghostly Phishing Emails
Not every email is what it appears to be! Cybercriminals disguise malicious messages as legitimate communications. Always verify suspicious senders and avoid clicking unexpected links or attachments.

• Zombie Computers
Outdated computers and software can become easy targets for hackers. Keep your operating systems, applications, and security software updated to prevent vulnerabilities from coming back to haunt you.

• Password Monsters
Weak or reused passwords are a hacker's favorite treat! Use strong, unique passwords and enable multifactor authentication to keep unwanted visitors out of your accounts.

• Haunted Wi-Fi Networks
Unsecured wireless networks can invite frightening security risks. Protect your business Wi-Fi with strong encryption, secure passwords, and separate guest access.

• Ransomware Nightmares
Ransomware can lock away important business files and demand payment. Maintain secure, regularly tested backups and reliable endpoint protection to minimize potential damage.

Don't let cybersecurity threats haunt your business! Stay protected, stay updated, and have a safe Halloween!

USE GRAYMAIL TO ORGANIZE YOUR INBOX

Between important communications, promotional offers, newsletters, and automated notifications, inboxes can quickly become overwhelmed with messages that compete for your attention.

Many of these emails fall into a category known as graymail. While these messages aren't necessarily spam or malicious, they can create unnecessary clutter and make it difficult to identify emails that truly matter. So, what exactly is graymail, and how can your business keep it from taking over your inbox?

Graymail consists of legitimate emails that you may have previously subscribed to or agreed to receive but no longer consider important. These messages often include marketing promotions, newsletters, product announcements, and routine notifications. Unlike spam, graymail generally comes from legitimate senders. However, receiving too many of these messages can distract employees, reduce productivity, and make managing daily communications more challenging.

Common Types of Graymail

Newsletters: Emails from companies or organizations you previously subscribed to but rarely read anymore. While the information may occasionally be useful, these messages often accumulate without being opened.

Promotional Emails: Sales announcements, special offers, and marketing campaigns from businesses you've interacted with. Although some promotions may interest you, most simply add unnecessary volume to your inbox.

Notifications: Automated updates from social media platforms, online purchases, and other services. While certain notifications provide useful information, many are routinely ignored or quickly deleted.

Why Graymail Is a Problem

Graymail may seem harmless, but a cluttered inbox can have a noticeable impact on workplace productivity. Employees often spend valuable time sorting through promotional messages, searching for important conversations, and deleting unnecessary emails.

More importantly, critical communications from customers, coworkers, or business partners can become buried beneath messages that require little or no attention. Fortunately, there's a simple solution that can help businesses regain control of their inboxes.

How Graymail Protection Filtering Helps

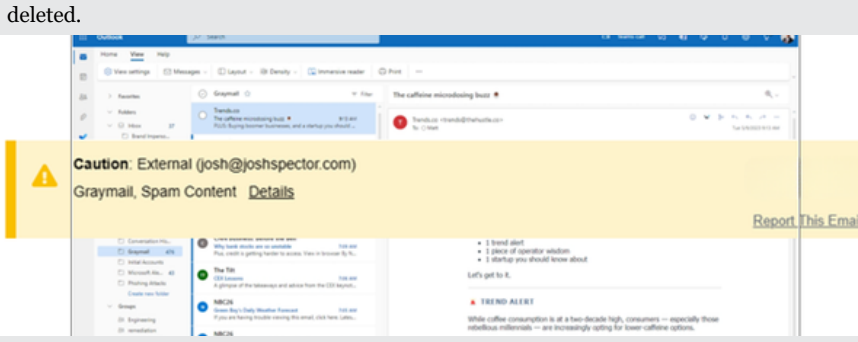
A Graymail Protection Filter automatically identifies and separates low-priority emails from important business communications. Rather than allowing promotional messages and newsletters to overwhelm your inbox, the filtering system analyzes incoming emails and directs messages identified as graymail into a designated folder.

This keeps your primary inbox focused on important conversations while allowing you to access newsletters, promotions, and other filtered messages whenever it's convenient.

Businesses using graymail filtering can benefit from improved organization, fewer distractions, and less time spent managing unnecessary emails. Employees can concentrate on important communications without constantly sorting through messages that don't require immediate attention.

A Cleaner Inbox Means a More Productive Workday

An organized inbox can make a meaningful difference in how efficiently you work. Graymail Protection Filtering helps reduce email clutter without permanently removing messages you may want to review later.



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ARE YOU GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR MICROSOFT 365 SUBSCRIPTION?

Microsoft 365 (M365) offers much more than email, Word, and Excel. It's a powerful collection of business applications designed to improve productivity, simplify communication, and strengthen cybersecurity.

However, many businesses only use a fraction of the features available through their subscriptions, missing opportunities to save time and reduce expenses.

By exploring Microsoft 365's built-in capabilities, your business can streamline everyday tasks, improve collaboration, and get more value from technology you're already paying for.

1. Take Control of Your Inbox with Outlook

Prioritize Important Emails: Outlook's Focused Inbox automatically separates important conversations from lower-priority messages, helping employees concentrate on communications that require attention rather than sorting through unnecessary clutter.

Automate Email Organization: Outlook Rules can automatically organize incoming messages into folders, flag important emails, or sort messages based on specific senders.

This reduces manual inbox management and keeps essential information accessible.

2. Improve Team Communication with Microsoft Teams

Organize Conversations with Channels: Create dedicated Teams channels for departments, projects, or specific topics. This keeps discussions organized and makes it easier for employees to locate conversations, shared documents, and updates.

Reduce Unnecessary Notifications: Customize notification preferences to limit interruptions throughout the workday.

Keep Resources Together: Teams allows users to add tabs for frequently accessed documents, websites, and business applications, reducing the need to constantly switch between programs.

3. Simplify Document Management with SharePoint

Centralize Business Files: SharePoint document libraries provide an organized location for storing and sharing company documents. Businesses can organize information by department, customer, or project while controlling access to sensitive files.

Create Consistent Workspaces: SharePoint site templates make it easier to establish standardized collaboration spaces for departments or projects, helping employees access shared resources without unnecessary setup.

4. Work More Efficiently with OneDrive
Access Files Anywhere

OneDrive allows employees to securely access business documents across devices. Files can also be made available offline, allowing employees to continue working without an internet connection.

Recover Previous File Versions: Accidentally overwrite an important document? OneDrive's version history allows users to restore earlier versions of supported files, providing additional protection against accidental changes.

5. Unlock Automation and Advanced Productivity Tools

Reduce Repetitive Work with Power Automate: Microsoft Power Automate streamlines everyday processes by automating notifications, approval requests, and information transfers between applications. Some advanced workflows require additional licensing.

Make Better Decisions with Power BI: Power BI transforms business information into interactive dashboards and reports, helping companies analyze performance, identify trends, and make informed decisions.

Work Smarter with Microsoft 365 Copilot: Copilot integrates artificial intelligence into applications such as Word, Excel, Outlook, and Teams.

Why Microsoft 365 Can Save Your Business Money

Beyond improving productivity, Microsoft 365 offers businesses an opportunity to reduce technology expenses by consolidating multiple services into one connected platform.

Many organizations pay separately for email hosting, cloud storage, video conferencing, file sharing, and collaboration software. These subscriptions can quickly add up as businesses grow.

Microsoft 365 combines many of these capabilities through Outlook, Teams, OneDrive, SharePoint, Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. Additional services, including Power BI and Copilot, can extend functionality depending on licensing.

Businesses paying for separate video conferencing or file-sharing platforms may discover that Teams and OneDrive already provide the features they need. Eliminating overlapping subscriptions can reduce monthly expenses while simplifying software management.

Make the Most of Your Microsoft 365 Investment

Microsoft 365 is more than a collection of office applications. When properly configured, it becomes a central platform for communication, collaboration, automation, and security.

WE LOVE REFERRALS

The greatest gift anyone can give us is a referral to another business in need of IT services. Referrals help us keep costs down so we can pass the savings to our clients.

If your referral ends up becoming a client - we'll gift them their first month of service at no charge AND we'll gift you a $500 Amazon Gift Voucher.

Simply introduce me via email to stan@fcskc.com and I'll take it from there. I personally promise we'll look after your referral's business with a high level of care and attention (just like we do with all our clients).
-Stan



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Leave a Google Review Leave a Facebook Review

TECHNOLOGY TRIVIA TIME

Technology Trivia Question of the Month! Send the correct answer to winner@fcskc.com to be entered to win a $50 gift card to Amazon.

Here is October's question of the month:

What is one way a small business can leverage AI?

