



## Fred J. Toroni & Company

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

Are you Tech Savvy?

### 1. Does your computer have more than one microcomputer processor (CPU)?

*Why this matters:* Newer computers use multiple processors to make them faster. In the same way that a small leak can waste many gallons of water each week, a slow computer can waste many hours.

### 2. Does your computer have 3 or more gigabytes of RAM?

*Why this matters:* Today's new operating systems (such as Microsoft Windows Vista) should have 3 GBs or more of RAM to operate fast and without glitches.

### 3. Are you using Windows Vista 64-bit or another 64-bit operating system?

*Why this matters:* For more than 15 years personal computers have provided 64-bit architecture, yet only recently have 64-bit operating systems emerged to take full advantage of that power. By today's standards, using a computer with a 32-bit operating system is like driving a sports car with a lawn mower engine.

### 4. Does your computer have two or more monitors?

*Why this matters:* You need to try it to fully appreciate it, but having two monitors allows you to simultaneously view multiple applications (such as your accounting system on one monitor and Excel on the other). With two monitors, it is much easier to copy or refer to data on one screen while creating, editing or pasting data on the other screen.

### 5. Do you have a printer that duplexes?

*Why this matters:* You can significantly cut your paper costs by printing on both sides of the page. This reduces storage costs. If you ship manuals or booklets, it reduces your shipping costs as well.

### 6. Does your e-mail address include your domain name?

*Why this matters:* It takes only a few minutes and costs less than \$30 a year to purchase and set up a dozen personalized e-mail addresses using your domain name. This allows you to avoid using generic e-mail accounts that end in AOL, Gmail, or Hotmail as your primary e-mail addresses, which can be viewed as an indication that you work for a small-time operation.

### 7. Have you created an e-mail group?

*Why this matters:* You probably have at least one, if not several, groups of people that you communicate with frequently. A list of employees, friends, members, colleagues, etc., can be set up as a single group in Outlook. Then you can e-mail the entire group without inserting individual e-mail addresses.

### 8. Do you leave your e-mail up and running all the time?

*Why this matters:* Your computer should wait on you, not the other way around. If you leave your computer on all the time, your e-mail reader (such as Outlook) will retrieve your messages constantly. The result is that your e-mail will be instantly ready when you are ready to read it. However, be sure to use a password-protected screen saver when you leave the office so that no one can access your e-mail or other sensitive files and applications.

### 9. Do you have more than one e-mail address?

*Why this matters:* Everybody needs to maintain a professional e-mail address, but it is also a good idea to have a free e-mail address (from Google, Yahoo or Microsoft) for personal correspondence or signing up for casual Web sites. This helps keep your professional e-mail from becoming a spam target. If your personal e-mail becomes a spam target, you can delete it and get a new one.

### 10. Do you typically leave your computer on overnight?

*Why this matters:* It takes about four to six minutes to boot up a computer, launch the applications you were running the previous day, and open the data files. Likewise it takes two to four minutes to close applications and power down at the end of a day. Rebooting could cost you up to 40 hours of wasted time each year. Instead, keep your computer running all the time. Be sure to use a password-protected screen saver to protect your data, and configure your monitors and printer to shut down automatically after 15 minutes of inactivity. This will make you more productive, and it will allow virus checks, spam checks, software updates, and backups to run in the wee hours of the night. (A computer uses about the same amount of electricity as a 40-watt light bulb.)

### 11. Have you logged into your computer remotely?

*Why this matters:* Remote access solutions (such as GoToMyPC, LogMeIn, and Windows Remote Desktop) allow secure access to your computer from any Internet connection—be it from home, a client's office, or on a cruise ship halfway around the world. There are even applications that allow access via an iPhone and other handheld devices. With this technology you can check e-mail, use your applications, and access all of your data files. This also works well for remote training, troubleshooting, or for providing access to satellite locations.

### 12. Have you copied and paste-linked data between two applications?

*Why this matters:* You already know that it is easy to copy data and paste it into another application. It is just as easy to “paste-link” that same data so that when the original data changes, the destination data is updated automatically. Using the “paste-link” option can save you time and help you avoid errors as data changes.

### 13. Have you performed a mail merge to e-mail in Word?

*Why this matters:* There are numerous reasons for using mail merge. Maybe you'd like to send a personalized letter to all of your clients, produce custom contracts or reports, or prepare an address booklet from a list or database. Word's mail merge tool can extract data from a database, Outlook, Excel or other sources on a field-by-field basis to produce documents, letters or even personalized e-mails that are ready to send.

### 14. Have you created a PivotTable in Excel?

*Why this matters:* One of Excel's more powerful features is the PivotTable—a tool that can instantly convert detailed transactional data into drillable reports that can be easily modified. Why spend hours churning and manipulating data into readable reports by sorting, moving data around, and inserting formulas when the PivotTable command can perform this same feat in a few seconds? (*Hint:* To fully appreciate the power of PivotTables, practice with a large volume of data containing numerous columns.)

### 15. Does your computer read to you?

*Why this matters:* In some cases it may be more productive to have your computer read a document or e-mail aloud using the “Text to Speech” tool provided in applications such as Microsoft Excel and operating systems such as Windows Vista so that you can multitask while listening.

### 16. Have you created and sent an electronic survey?

*Why this matters:* When was the last time you asked your clients (or employees) how well you are doing, or how you could improve? Not only is feedback important, it has been shown that the act of asking for feedback has value, whether or not you actually receive feedback. There are many survey tools (such as Microsoft InfoPath and Zoomerang) that help you create, send and automatically tabulate survey results.

### **17. Have you searched your computer using Google Desktop or Vista Instant Search?**

*Why this matters:* Windows XP and older PCs take forever to search your computer, but the Windows Vista operating system can find all of the files on your computer containing the word “budget” in less than two seconds, even if there are hundreds of them. Google Desktop is a free utility that does the same job and works on many platforms, including XP. With these tools, finding the files you want is quick and easy.

### **18. Do you produce and print your business and personal checks using a computer?**

*Why this matters:* Are you still writing checks manually? There are many tools (including free tools like Microsoft Office Accounting Express 2009 and QuickBooks Simple Start 2009) that can produce checks much faster and update your general ledger and income statements at the same time.

### **19. Do you use at least one social network?**

*Why this matters:* Who you know matters, right? Social networks (such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Plaxo) help you maintain your relationships, whether business, personal or casual. LinkedIn is geared more for business relationships whereas Facebook is more of a social tool that helps you maintain personal relationships. Both could help you keep track of people who might enrich your life professionally or personally.

### **20. Have you made a Skype phone call or Skype video call?**

*Why this matters:* VoIP is more than 20 years old and is better than ever. You can call any computer in the world for free, or call any cell phone or landline in the world for a couple of pennies per minute. If you have computer cameras, you can see one another, too. This type of technology is helping bolster the “virtual office/work from home” phenomenon, which is dramatically changing the workplace throughout the world.

### **21. Do you have a substantial Web site loaded with useful content?**

*Why this matters:* The Internet reaches more than a billion people, and having a presence there costs practically nothing. It is a great equalizer that enables small businesses to compete head-to-head with larger organizations. The use of specific keywords and meta tags can prompt search engines to rank your Web pages higher than similar pages provided by much larger organizations. The key to success is to provide detailed valuable content—merely re-publishing your simple four-panel brochure on the Web accomplishes almost nothing.

### **22. Do you keep your contacts, calendar and to-do list electronically?**

*Why this matters:* The three most important things to CPAs are their contacts, calendar and to-do lists. Maintaining these items electronically has many advantages. Calendars can be updated automatically when you accept meeting requests via email. Calendars can be shared with others and overlaid atop other calendars to identify mutually available time slots. Contacts can be automatically updated via Plaxo. To-do line items and calendar appointments can be linked to time sheets to avoid redundancy and promote accuracy. To accommodate those who can't always take their computer with them, most computer-based day planners print paper versions that fit your day planner binder.

### **23. Do you use a hand-held device or smart phone?**

*Why this matters:* Today's hand-held tools (such as a BlackBerry or Apple iPhone) enable you to receive and respond to phone calls, text messages, e-mails and Internet feeds from anywhere. These devices place your contacts, calendar and to-do lists in the palm of your hand. Texting has emerged as a popular communication tool—a quasi cross between a phone call and an e-mail that allows you to be truly mobile and reachable anytime, anywhere. Texting also creates a permanent record that voice calls do not. Be aware that security of personal and business information is an issue with hand-held devices because they can be lost or stolen. Be sure to lock your device with a password.

### **24. Do you have a cell phone earpiece or headset?**

*Why this matters:* Using a hands-free earpiece while talking on your cell phone allows you to multitask, remain more productive, and drive safely.

### **25. Have you set up encryption on your wireless router?**

*Why this matters:* Wireless technology allows you to network with other computers, printers and scanners, and surf the Internet from anywhere in your office or home. But installing a wireless router is like running a network cable out to the street so strangers can plug into your network. Setting up wireless encryption will mitigate this risk, and it takes only a couple of minutes. Simply launch a browser and type the IP address that appears on the bottom of the router. The menu allows you to turn on WPA encryption and assign a password to keep out strangers. You will then need to use this same password the first time you connect your computer; after that your computer will connect automatically.

### **26. Is your computer protected by an uninterruptible power supply (UPS) device?**

*Why this matters:* Power surges and power outages happen. A UPS device can protect your desktop computer against spikes and power surges, and can provide time to power down your computer when the electricity goes out for an extended period. Without a UPS, your computer and hard drive are more vulnerable to being dangerously zapped.

### **27. Have you password protected a Word document, Excel file or Adobe Acrobat PDF file?**

*Why this matters:* Almost every application provides the ability to password protect a file during the save process. This is recommended for all mission-critical files. Make sure to use the 128-bit encryption option because 40-bit encryption is not strong enough.

### **28. Have you encrypted your data folder or computer hard drive?**

*Why this matters:* The data on a lost or stolen computer can be easily retrieved by a hacker, even when a computer bios password or Windows password is present. To better protect data on a lost or stolen computer you must encrypt the data folder or entire hard drive. Both Windows XP Professional and Windows Vista Professional allow you to configure file, folder or entire hard drive encryption in just a few seconds. With this level of protection, your data is protected, even if the computer is lost or stolen—assuming the password you used to encrypt that file, folder or hard drive is strong.

### **29. Do you maintain regular off-site backup of your data files?**

*Why this matters:* Like insurance, you hope that all backup efforts are a complete waste of time and money, but just in case the worst happens (for example, if the building burns down), you should maintain a current backup of your data off-site.

### **30. Do you remove the hard drives before disposing of computers and devices?**

*Why this matters:* Old computers, cell phones, and hand-held devices contain hard drives that often hold data that hackers can exploit even if they have been erased. Don't take a chance. Remove the hard drives before disposal and either lock them away or smash them with a hammer. Or you could contact a computer disposal specialist.

By: J. Carlton Collins