Ben Schneider, managing director of ITGUYS, has worked in IT for over twenty years.

Microsoft certified, he has accrued a wealth of experience which has given him great insight into the IT needs and pain points of creative businesses. His company provides IT managed services that enable creatives to confidently outsource their tech, comms and IT strategy so they can focus on their business.

MAXED OUT

A CAUTIONARY TALE

BEN SCHNEIDER

URGENT IS THE ENEMY
OF IMPORTANT.*

*Originally coined by President Eisenhower, the *Eisenhower Matrix* was developed by Stephen Covey in his book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The matrix aims to assign any task to one of the four quadrants: *Urgent and Important*, *Not Urgent and Important*, *Urgent and Not Important* and finally, *Not Urgent and Not Important*. Eisenhower once said: "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important."

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CHAPTER 1

WHISKY TANGO FOXTROT

11.49PM 21ˢᵀ NOVEMBER 2018

Max's over-caffeinated eyes bored right through his 27-inch iMac. 'Connection to server lost. Try again or Ignore?' He stared at it, speechless. Had he lost the final edit he'd been working on since early, early morning? He couldn't believe it. He blinked and held his breath. *No, no, NO!*

They had a demo the next day for C4's new BlueX TV programme and not only did he need to finish the piece off, he needed to be at their office at 10am the following day to explain the technical aspects of the edit to them. Jeez, did he hate talking to clients. It was all the chitchat, all the face-time stuff that made him cringe. He hated it nearly as much as having to fix the network server. But not quite.

He knew he'd needed to replace the disk in the NAS server for a week now, but he just didn't have the time to swap it out (NAS = Network Attached Storage, a kind of clever removable hard drive). He knew he needed to make a proper backup first, then agree downtime with the rest of the team and *then* rebuild the disk array. He knew. But something else always took priority.

Max and his business partner Ramona had started a creative agency called Kumula a couple of years earlier. They met in a start-up that showed potential but didn't make it, but they saw quality in each other. Back in 2015, Ramona and Max decided to go it alone. Their journey began with just the two of them.

Max is the techie guy. He started off as a runner for a film editing company back in 2005 and his hunger for knowledge and aptitude for all things image, production

and design allowed him to grow his experience super-fast.

He is brilliant with Final Cut and Adobe Creative Suite. He loves nothing more than talking shop with other editors, discussing new techniques and solutions to technical problems. Some of his work became quite well-known in the industry and after a while, people said yes to job offers because they wanted to work with 'the legend.'

He is a perfectionist, introverted and obsessive.

Ramona is the business and sales director. She completed a business degree at Bristol University and did work experience in advertising agencies. She learned about the importance of a systemised and consistent sales process and, therefore, how to position herself and her company to deliver something unique. Because of this, she made lots of sales early on which helped her to generate contacts

that she was able to maintain and continue to work with.

Kumula, as a company, takes a very particular approach to the tender/pitch/implementation process that makes them stand out in a highly competitive market.

They got lots of feedback from happy clients, telling them how great the results were and how they worked so well together at giving a high-quality, consistent end product. They knew they had the beginnings of a successful business.

As they grew, they got more work. Ramona is a great salesperson and worked well with Max initially. With a handful of jobs coming in, they were able to talk regularly about each piece of work, review the steps in the lifecycle of the project and deliver a high-quality product, on brief and on budget.

Word got around. People noticed, and their names were dropped in higher circles. The pressure to

deliver grew to the point where they needed to expand their team, so Ramona got in a couple of freelancers who she used to work with in a previous company.

At first, they worked together well. The newbies didn't fully get the project lifecycle process that Ramona and Max had got down so brilliantly, so Max started to explain this step by step. This helped but had two outcomes. First, although the freelancers helped to manage the workload, Max had to spend more time checking their work, correcting mistakes and coaching them on how to improve. Second, it meant he had less time to focus on the higher-end tasks that only he could do.

This meant that deadlines for work were becoming perilously close to being missed. The result was that Max had to work extra-long hours to keep up. He knuckled down and delivered on time, but it put him under strain and he started to become resentful.

CHAPTER 2

THE ONLY FINITE RESOURCE IS... TIME

YOU DID REMEMBER TO BACK UP THE DATA, RIGHT?

Back to that cold Wednesday in late November, when Max got his first wake-up call. Their latest project was for BlueX, a new C4 series, and Ramona had worked incredibly hard to secure a demo to show that they were the best for the job.

And they very nearly lost it. Max was supposed to be at their office at 10am the following morning to present to the head honcho in the hope that it would seal the deal, but at nearly midnight on that cold night when he tried to consolidate the files he had been so painstakingly working on, the NAS drive he was trying to save the data to finally gave up the ghost. The data volume was not there. He logged into the NAS and, unfortunately, had his worst fears confirmed.

He broke out in a cold sweat. *How much data have I lost?* He looked at the online backup section. Back in the summer when he was bored and waiting for a delivery to arrive, Max had decided to spend some time looking at online backup options for the NAS. His mate Josh had the same model and was talking about how he had backed up his NAS online, and Max thought he'd have a tinker.

He had set it up, saw the backup run and that was that. He'd wondered about the ongoing status a couple of times, but never went to check. And when he did check on the NAS, the initial backup he ran in the summer had completed, but there was no ongoing schedule - it only ran that one time! Max looked at his bike lock on the floor and asked himself: *If I repeatedly bash my head in with this lock, will I feel less miserable?* He wondered if a little sob and sniffle would comfort him. Fat chance. Then, more important questions started to flood in.

How much data have I lost? How long will it take to re-do it? He was lucky; he had copied some data onto the iMac at 6pm, so that meant he had ONLY lost about six hours' work, not eighteen hours! He was going to have to put in an all-nighter to make up the six hours and then he could finalise the edit. He looked at the time again. 12.19am. *It's time to burn that midnight oil.*

When Ramona came in at 8.30am the following day, there was no sign of Max - only traces and clues of the night before. At first, she thought there had been a break-in. There was a chair in the middle of the office, some food wrappers on the floor and a computer 'box' (Ramona wasn't so au fait with technology) all open, with a hard disk flashing and giving the occasional beep. (This turned out to be the NAS that Max was desperately trying to revive but couldn't.) Hmm. Nothing seemed to be missing and there were no broken windows or other signs of a break-in.

This was all very worrying. The demo was booked in less than two hours at C4's office and her main man was AWOL. Her demo was AWOL. She called Max on his mobile. Went to voicemail. She tried him on WhatsApp. Zilch. She knew Max's partner was away so there was no point asking him.

Then, finally, on her desk she spied a disk case with 'Blexu dmo' scrawled on it in biro. It looked like a spider had just learned how to write and was practising its newly acquired handwriting skill (or should that be leg-writing?). Is that supposed to be 'BlueX demo?' She watched it and it looked great. Phew! But she still needed Max there at the demo to walk the client through.

She went into contingency mode. *I need to buy some time and file my fury under a capital F for 'Where the F is Max?'*

When Max resurfaced, it was mid-afternoon. He wandered into the office looking like a zombie. Let's

face it, anyone would resemble a zombie after the pitifully small amount of sleep Max had had.

Ramona went ballistic and immediately challenged Max. "What happened? BlueX? Demo?? Why do you have to be such a nightmare? I bigged up how great we were to the boss, James, who asked why you weren't there. I had to bullshit all the way to Horseferry Road and back to put him off. Let's hope it isn't a deal breaker and he's happy in the end, but this is not good enough."

Max went quiet, frowned and then his slow-burning anger started to bubble and froth. "Not good enough? Let me tell you something. Monday, I worked a twelve-hour day – with a thirty-minute break. I spent most of that day fixing stuff that was nothing to do with me, but you said it was important.

"Yesterday I got in at 7am and didn't leave 'til 5am today! All to get your demo ready! What the hell do you think I am spending my time doing?

I prioritised - get the BlueX demo done first, and worry about the demo itself later. Imagine if I hadn't completed it – would that have been OK? Talk about work-life balance!"

With that Ramona stormed out, screaming inside: *I make the sales, you do the tech. If it wasn't for me there wouldn't be any work!*

Furious and resentful, both partners felt hard done by and asked themselves if this was worth the stress and work.

In fact, James at C4 was not stressed about it and when he saw the demo, he loved it. And after all the stress, Kumula got the contract the following week.

After a few days of avoiding the conversation, Max and Ramona finally gave each other a big hug and apologised. It was clear that they couldn't carry on like that and, most of the time, they had such a brilliant synergy – rare in any business. It was vital they found a

way to hear each other's complaints without holding onto grudges. That way madness lay, waiting to pounce.

The following day while enjoying a rare coffee break together, Max, who'd been giving the comment he was about to make some serious thought, said, "We need more resources here. We need some more techie designers and editors if we're going to free up my time and deliver."

"OK," said Ramona. "Let's do it."

Things improved at first. They got more people and Max's workload did go down a bit. There were no more all-night shifts and they were more or less back to normal work weeks. They moved into a bigger office and more work than ever came through their door.

They got in an office administrator, Sophie. She was brought in to help coordinate the smooth running of the office and help with the overflowing admin issues.

Sophie was brilliant at organising stuff. She created an onboarding process for new starters so they had a Mac, key and even a work email address set up before they entered the office on their first day. Result!

Ramona loved her because the annoying, slip-between-the-cracks kind of issues - easily fixed in isolation, but they never happen that way - were now being vacuumed up and the workspace felt more like an office than ever before.

However, mostly without the early blame game, the problems they faced did NOT go away. They grew more complex.

CHAPTER 3

SLOW TECH REALLY SUCKS

IS YOUR TECHNOLOGY RIGHT FOR THE JOB?

In the weekly team meetings, regular themes arose around their IT.

The designers complained about how slow their Macs were. In fact, most people pointed at slow tech as a time-sink. The Macs and PCs in the office needed lots of attention, and new versions of Adobe Premiere Pro needed to be downloaded. Then they realised that, in fact, there was a compatibility issue with the very latest Adobe release and they needed to revert back to the previous version. The repeated updates to Slack, Creative Suite and even the printer software meant that sometimes these updates would put a computer out of action for a day.

Replacing a couple of the slowest Macs with better second-hand

machines worked – until they took on a new team member. Then it was back to square one. And Max hated it.

The bottom line was that Max was spending way too much time managing - or in fact, *not* managing - the IT, instead of doing what he wanted to do, liked doing and was best placed to do. Ramona was wary of challenging Max too much. They had achieved a tepid truce and she didn't want to push it – unless it was worth the fight.

She didn't need to worry or wait for it. It came up soon enough.

CHAPTER 4

WHERE'S OUR STUFF? YOU DON'T KNOW?

WHERE IS YOUR CLOUD DATA? DO YOU KNOW WHERE ALL OF IT IS?

Ramona got Sophie involved in the production workflow. Ramona had a gut feeling that there were unnecessary delays in the process of getting a project and all the files, layouts and accompanying media to completion. The projects seemed to take an age to complete *after* the work had been done. What was taking so long? What were they even doing?

"Where are the final versions of the logos of the EE rebrand, Billy?" Sophie asked. (She just made it up, but she knew Billy would be none the wiser.) "We need to check one of the logos as the client has made a change request."

Billy wasn't paying attention, an increasingly common occurrence. "Eh? Sorry, Sophie - what was that?"

Sophie's eyes were boring through Billy's short-cropped orange hair,

coiffured to within a centimetre of its life. *If only he put 30% of his brain into work mode instead of massaging his vanity, he might not be a liability*, she mused.

"EE rebrand? Final version logos?"

Billy shrugged. "I put it where I always store stuff. Dropbox."

Sophie said, "Billy, we don't use Dropbox anymore. Ramona told me that you all switched to Google Drive in May. I brought this up in the team meeting last week."

Billy replied, "Max still tells me to store stuff there."

Sophie suddenly remembered that Max did not attend that meeting. She had raised the question with the other members of the design team, and they'd all looked at each other and said they'd ask him. There had not been a response.

She started to get curious. When Billy went out to get a latte, she looked at his iMac and all the apps installed,

searching for online file sync apps. She found Google Drive, Dropbox, SugarSync and iCloud. She opened each app and to her surprise, found data on the EE job in each one. But worse still was that there was no rhyme or reason to it. Moreover, each one had its own 'Max' folder with very recent data in it.

Now she knew why the project workflows were taking so long: the production team was saving the data in different locations! Someone had to manually gather up all the bits and store it centrally on the NAS. At least the NAS had some rhyme and reason to it.

"Max, apart from the NAS drive, where do we store our data?"

"Why?" asked Max, who was trying to concentrate on finishing a production job – and struggling.

"I'm worried that the production data, as well as other data, is not being stored centrally and it's getting lost. I asked Billy where the

final version of the EE rebrand was and he said Dropbox. I was told that Kumula hasn't been using it since May. I asked about it in the team meeting."

"Yeah, well sometimes it's just easier to use it," he said flippantly.

"Billy has four different file share apps on his Mac, all of which have client data in them. It's a real mess. Ramona asked me personally to help get this stuff organised to improve workflow but looking at this properly makes me think the problem is bigger than she thought. You have the whole thing about GDPR, no? Where all the data is kept, who has access to it, what happens if-"

Max cut her off. "Yeah, I know all about GDPR – I don't need a lecture. I know Ram asked you to look at this, but I am saying back off. I'll talk to her about it."

Sophie was shocked. She felt Max didn't understand where she was

coming from and that she wanted to help Kumula become more efficient. In her previous job at an offline film editing studio, she had been put in charge of the GDPR readiness plan in May 2018. She had been through the painful process of identifying and justifying the presence for each piece of Personal Identifiable Information.

She also knew that storing data in lots of squirrel holes, which is what she suspected Max and the team of doing, would just multiply the complexity of their GDPR processes. But more crucially, she now understood why Ramona had asked her to look at production workflows: storing data this way would slow them down and probably mean they would lose data. But she also knew that having all this data in lots of jam jars would multiply their data protection headache – and Ramona didn't seem interested in that bit. Plus, Max was the techie and he was a director. He had told her to back off and she wasn't going to provoke him.

CHAPTER 5

DOWN WITH DOWNTIME

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU OUTGROW YOUR NETWORK?

As they continued to grow in popularity and win more business, the newer projects grew in complexity. As they grew, the importance of having the right team in place became key. The 'disciples of Max' loved working for him, but the lack of a proper office network caused a lot of problems and lost them a lot of time.

In April, just after the Easter break, their internet stopped working. Sophie called Virgin. After she was able to convince them that she was authorised to talk to them - yes, that took an hour on its own! - Virgin technical support stated that the connection was working and something on the network must be the issue. Sophie is not a techie and lacked the confidence to challenge the support team. She went to find

Max and asked him to help, but he just had too much on and had already left to work from home, leaving the rest in the office to fix it.

Virgin finally agreed to visit, but like most big ISPs they added the caveat that if they found out the problem was with Kumula's network equipment, they would bill them. Sophie really had no choice other than to agree, and they couldn't visit until the following day. So, the team tried to get on with their work as best they could.

Virgin took less than twenty minutes to identify the problem. No, it was not the internet connection that was at fault. It was the seven-year-old network switch connecting all the computers to the internet that Max had brought in from home. It was fried!

After much gnashing of teeth, a new switch and a wasted day and a half for the rest of the team, they got down to work.

When Ramona got wind of the lost time, she was far from impressed. When Sophie told her that Max had left them to figure it out themselves, she lost the plot. Battle-time was nigh.

"Max! What are you doing? You've left the office without a working internet connection! You're the techie!" she cried.

"Trying to get the project you have been banging on about ready. I can't do both," said Max.

"At the expense of the other eleven guys in the office - are you for real? "

The underlying office technology just about worked for a team of two, but when you added another ten computers, a NAS drive, printers and lots of phones and tablets to the system, it just couldn't cope. Max promised to look at all the tech infrastructure – when he had time.

Despite the long work days, the arguments about their tech and

the tensions between Max and Ramona, the Kumula team worked very well together. Because of the unique process and delivery system that the two partners had mastered, this really helped them win more business. Overall, this meant that they created great projects for very satisfied clients.

CHAPTER 6

HUMAN FIREWALL

IT SECURITY: YOU ARE ONLY AS STRONG AS YOUR WEAKEST LINK

Billy, the newest member of the team, was fresh out of university doing graphic design. Nice kid, lots of ideas – but all over the place. He was working on his Mac when he got an email that appeared to be from Ramona.

Ramona rarely emailed anyone as she was out of the office most of the time and used Slack to communicate with the team.

The email subject said 'Re that document, yeah?' and sure enough, there was an attached file saying 'document.pdf'. Billy had been chatting to the guys about his exploits in the bar the night before and absentmindedly opened the attachment, got distracted by a request from another designer and then went out to grab his third coffee of the day.

When he got back, the office was in meltdown. "Something has got into Gmail!" said Sophie. "We've had clients calling in asking 'Why are you sending us emails saying 'Re that document, yeah?'"

Billy went pale. "Um, I think that was me…" He had clicked on a pretty obvious phishing email that he should never have clicked on.

When Max saw the email Billy had clicked on, he asked, "Can you see when you hover over the PDF the link is dg&&654%$.youbigloser.ru?" *YOUBIGLOSER!*

Max just slumped in his chair. "Guys, what have I said about clicking on dodgy emails? Billy, what were you thinking?"

Billy got defensive, saying it was from Ramona - so why not open it? Max, and half the office, did the classic facepalm; suffice to say it was not a good day. Billy had installed the Shared Contacts for Gmail Sync Booster Chrome extension, so

he had the entire company client address book linked to his account. Ramona and some other team members spent the rest of that day, as well some of the following week, calling clients to apologise and assure them that no lasting damage had been done - but in a way it had. It had affected their name.

The weekly partner meeting went as badly as you can imagine it would. Ramona screamed, "Our reputation is on the line here! That dodgy email was sent to EVERYONE! Our entire client list! Billy should know better. Either fire him or tell him this is his final warning."

Max couldn't argue and, in fact, he got a shiver down his spine. He knew it could have been much worse. Max's brother worked in an advertising start-up in 2017. One of the senior account managers unwittingly clicked on a link that looked like a sign-in to their Office 365 portal, but was in fact a link to malware that nearly wiped out

their business. The link infected his machine with the Wannacry virus (the one that decimated Maersk's global IT network). This virus encrypted the account manager's entire PC, all the company's network drives as well as their Dropbox account. The agency ended up paying an £11,000 Bitcoin ransom in secret and got about 60% of their data back.

Max knew that he had to say something, but felt apprehensive about telling Ramona how bad it could have been. "Ramona, I do worry about our IT security. I mean, I can do the tech stuff reasonably well, but I really shouldn't be. My job is super-distracting as it is. What am I supposed to do?"

"Get a better antivirus system, then. Buy it, implement it, then set it and forget it. We can't have anything like this again."

Max made a half-shrug/nodding gesture, which could easily be interpreted as 'whatever' or 'OK.'

Ramona was so fraught, she didn't pick up on the body language that should have been challenged. So, they carried on with a better-than-nothing system which broke sometimes. Max did not have the time to look at it and didn't want to clash with Ramona about it yet again.

The next six months were intensely demanding on both partners. They struggled in most parts of the business because of a lack of resources and tight deadlines that needed to be met.

DATA PROTECTION = 80% ADMIN + 20% IT

SUPPLY-CHAIN INFORMATION ASSURANCE: DATA PROTECTION MEANS EVERYONE MUST COMPLY

The new Channel 4 commission could change the course and fortunes of the business. The value of the contract and its scope was so much more than they had done before, so both Max and Ramona had a mix of high excitement and high anxiety in equal measures. Win the bid and make a bundle. Win the bid and have an even greater workload. This would require more team members and a robust planning schedule.

Whilst they were reading through the requirements and the brief, Ramona got to a section called 'Information Assurance.'

"What's that?" she asked Max as they sat in the office late into a stormy October evening.

"Oh." Max looked down and squirmed a little. "They want to

know all about data protection, IT security, encryption stuff."

What he did not say, but Ramona discovered soon afterwards, was how very far away they were from being able to complete this section.

In fact, the whole thing started to unravel the following morning, when Ramona chatted to an old work colleague from the BBC called Gemma. Gemma worked in the media/online compliance team.

Both Ramona and Gemma slightly envied each other's jobs. Ramona wondered if the security and classic mainstreamness of the Beeb would be less stressful. Equally, Gemma wondered if she would feel less like a small fish in an enormous pond and have some real power if she worked at a company like Kumula. In reality, it was more a case of 'the grass is greener.'

"Information Assurance?" asked Gemma. "Oh, IA – yeah, yeah. That's a gimme these days, Ram. No point

in pitching to the big corps without getting out your policy documents. You'll fail at the first jump without them, let alone if you get caught out. You'll get more than a slapped wrist from the ICO. Have you done your Cyber Essentials?"

"ICO? Cyber Essentials?" asked Ramona.

"The Information Commissioner's Office. Every organisation that has any personal data to run its business must register with them, and if you get a cyber-attack where personal data has or may have been breached, you must tell them within 72 hours. And if you have been crappy with your security or passwords or the like, they can fine you. Like, lots."

"Lots?"

"Yes" Gemma said. "Up to €20 million or 4% of global turnover – whichever is higher."

"And what's Cyber Essentials?" asked Ramona wearily.

"Err, it's a government-backed certification. It's like a GCSE, or 'O' Level, in IT protection and best practice. It shows that you have done the basics with your IT and at least you have 'put your trousers on' – even done up the buttons. But like I said, it's only an 'O' Level. You probably need to go up to ISO 27001 or something like it if you want to show you're walking the walk."

Now it was Ramona's turn to go a funny colour. Max had not elaborated on what was involved and so Ramona initially thought it was a trivial process. Her gut now said otherwise.

"So, what's involved in getting this past the compliance police?"

Gemma sighed and sucked her teeth. "Ram, it's a right pain in the derriere. You'll be sick to death of it. Data protection impact assessments, encryption policies, removable storage asset registers, firewalls, acceptable use policies. But you've done all this already, no?"

Well… not really. She had chatted to Sophie about writing a social media policy document – guidelines on what was OK/not OK to post on Instagram or Twitter. Max had even talked about running a session on what a dodgy email would look like, and how to spot the 'red flags.'

But she really had not thought it through; that Kumula might need a security policy. That Kumula may need to have a level of administration and process to demonstrate their data protection compliance if required by this Commissioner's Office thingy. It wasn't that she didn't know it was important. The problem was that she thought it was being done by Max. MAX!

She had a sinking feeling in her stomach. This was serious and there needed to be a clear mindset change, otherwise she would prefer to walk away from Kumula for good.

Ramona wondered what on earth she could do. First, she needed

a nice cup of tea to calm down, and then she did some deep breathing exercises to focus on having a conversation rather than a conflagration with Max.

"Max, I spoke to Gemma from my old work, you remember? She's at the BBC now and works in their legal/online department, and knows a lot about data protection… I know that we talked about it last week, but I asked her about Information Assurance. She reeled off a gazillion documents we need and how much of a nightmare it is to do. Unless you have them squirrelled away somewhere, I don't think we have any IA documents, policies or anything. Have we even got time to add this to our workload?"

CHAPTER 8

THERE'S NO WAY BACK

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT

Max looked down and shook his head.

Ramona ventured on. "Were you going to tell me? What the hell? And do we have Cyber Essentials? Isn't that a good idea?"

Max sighed and rubbed his eyes. Then, he sighed again. "I'm really sorry. You're right. It is a nightmare. And I know it falls under my area of the business. I really think we need to get some help – outsource it."

"Outsource the policies and Cyber Essentials?" Ramona asked.

"No, all of it. All the IT, internet, phones, IA, antivirus, Cyber Essentials. The lot! I am bloody sick of it. I don't have the time to do the projects. I don't have time to buy new machines, patch the

machines, check the AV, make sure that it is all working. That isn't even half of it! The number of times I get interrupted because 'It's noooooot working' by Billy. This is a joke. Then we get to the IA. Which I can't even face. We need to get someone to do ALL of it. Then they can manage it and take this pain away."

"I thought you liked that stuff," said Ramona.

"When there was just you and me it was fine. Spending an hour here or there updating stuff, it was like a break from the coding, which really helps with my process. I didn't love it, but it was different and gave me a mental break. Now I don't have enough time to do the stuff I need to do – the stuff that you want me to do and keep on complaining I don't do. If I can't focus on the work that makes us the money, then what's the point?"

Ramona stopped and thought about the logic of this. *Max is spending too*

much time away from what I want - and need - him to do. We need to get this stuff out of his hair and we need it to be done properly.

So, acknowledging that this wasn't going to go away and that Max was rapidly approaching breaking point, she asked, "Well, who can help us with that?"

CHAPTER 9

EPILOGUE

9 MONTHS LATER...

Kumula now has a team of nineteen and has moved into a great office in Shoreditch. Max and Ramona's working relationship is far smoother. Gone are the arguments about lost time due to IT issues. Max rarely stays late and never has to work into the small hours.

Sophie manages the office like a well-oiled engine. There are clear procedures for all internal IT systems and changes such as how to onboard a new starter or order a new Mac. Sophie also receives monthly reports on support tickets opened with their new IT company and ongoing issues, so she gets an overview of any recurring issues and a general 'state of play.'

As a result, Sophie has freed up a day per month of her time and is

no longer stressed out by potential day-to-day IT pain.

Now the Kumula team email their issues into the ITGUYS service desk. They get a call back and one of the ITGUYS techs solves their problem remotely. A faster fix with less hassle and disruption.

Sophie set a recurring calendar reminder each Tuesday afternoon to be sent out to everyone reminding them to leave their computer switched on that evening. This allows the weekly maintenance routine to tidy up the computers outside of office hours, scan for malware and restart, with no additional input needed.

Sophie also signed up for ITGUYS' Security Awareness Training. Part one of the training is a secret simulated phishing attack, where safe but 'dodgy' emails are sent to the whole team. Part two reviews the results of the simulated phishing attack and discusses why people clicked on the links.

The session made it super-clear what to look for in dodgy emails, web links and pop-ups. These repeatable seminars helped keep the team on the straight and narrow. Kumula also now has email-filtering in place – stopping a majority of phishing emails in their tracks.

Billy went from being the worst offender to becoming a security evangelist! He even convinced Ramona that, for an added layer of security and fraud prevention, they should have company-wide password management software. ITGUYS were able to set this up within minutes.

Max's workload now focuses on what is most important for the growth of Kumula. The faulty NAS box and its failing disks were repaired over a weekend so there was no team downtime. Online backups with alerting for success/ failure have been configured so that ITGUYS manages any issues arising from this crucial process.

To help manage the growth demands of Kumula, their ITGUYS account manager meets with Max and Ramona once a quarter to discuss tech planning and to highlight what needs to happen for the following three months to ensure that Kumula's IT stays fit and healthy.

ITGUYS have implemented a robust onboarding and offboarding system. This ensures that when new people start at the business, they have access to all the appropriate devices and services they need – not just a computer and email address. When they leave, these physical and information assets can be removed. Simple, auditable, traceable.

As a result, Max is no longer involved with day-to-day IT issues so he can focus on projects and assignments. He is less stressed, more productive and Kumula's team spirit is the best it has been for a very long time.

Ramona knows that the business is on a far more even keel. The partner

meetings with Max are now focused on sales, marketing and project fulfilment – not fire-fighting and panic stations. ITGUYS worked with her and Sophie to implement an information assurance framework and as a result, Ramona was able to demonstrate Kumula's compliance credentials and has been pitching for more and more lucrative work.

ITGUYS

WHAT WE CAN DO FOR YOU

ITGUYS loves working with creatives and making IT work for our clients. We recognise that many creative businesses are often very technical or tech-savvy but do not have the time to manage their internal IT – nor should they!

Appropriate outsourcing frees up your company's time to focus on what's most important: growing your business.

Starting off with an IT Audit and Discovery phase allows our clients to drill down into their main areas of concern, helping to produce an in-depth IT Strategy Roadmap. This highlights the most important issues, helping ITGUYS to prioritise the way forward.

Outcome? We implement the agreed plan. You focus on what you do best,

which is obviously being awesome in your business.

We offer a range of monthly service plans with specific levels of service and coverage. All plans have unlimited remote support, and as over 90% of all issues are solved remotely this means that you can plan much of your IT budget each financial year in advance.

OPTIMISE YOUR DATA – MINIMISE DOWNTIME – PREDICT OUTAGES

We understand the challenges that creatives have working with big files, and how to blend high availability of these files with robust backup solutions. Our monitoring platform notifies us about failed online backups in real time.

Failing hardware events, such as Kumula's NAS drive woe, creates a high priority alert in our ticketing system so that we can not only inform you that there is an issue, but we can resolve it for you. You don't need to worry about it - we've got your back.

MAKE YOUR IT WORK FASTER

When you're working with tight deadlines and have a mountain of tasks to get done, downtime on your tools – in this case, underperforming IT – is less than welcome.

The reality is that computers do need regular maintenance; not just security updates which are, of course, super-important, but cleaning out redundant files and optimising the computer so that it starts up faster and ultimately saves you time.

Our clients choose a maintenance window, typically out-of-hours,

which allows our scheduled tasks to run every week. This way the servicing is booked in. Every single week. Result: fewer hiccups with your tech. Less downtime. Your team are more efficient.

NO MORE 'NO INTERNET'

We know that sometimes, internet connections fail. Someone cuts a cable in the street or there is a major outage. For many companies, this can be super-costly; downtime can cost your business in lost productivity and income.

We can scope out the internet requirements you have coupled with back-up or failover internet links just in case your main connection fails, so that you are able to stay up and running while the main connection issue is resolved. No internet in the office is one of the biggest gripes we encounter, and we have a range of affordable back-up internet solutions you can select.

Organisations working with large files, such as video or CAD, often need large amounts of on-premise storage as well as cloud access. Our scoping process focuses on how you work today and offers solutions to optimise your workflows – which results in the best possible access for your team so that they can work to their best abilities.

KEEPING YOUR IT SYSTEMS SAFE FROM CYBER-ATTACK

Good quality IT security should be viewed as a layered approach, putting as many barriers between your core data and the internet as necessary. For example, an email filter will prevent most suspect emails from getting to the inbox, whilst allowing a review of those quarantined emails so you whitelist/blacklist as appropriate. Also, industry-standard monitored firewalls help to protect pernicious access to your core data.

Crucially, the people working for a business can be its biggest risk. A company's security is only as strong as its weakest link.

We run security awareness training courses to increase the 'cyber-readiness' of your whole team. We also generate harmless spoof phishing campaigns and run workshops on how to tell if an email or weblink is suspicious and what to do in the event of an IT security incident. All of this helps to educate your team – and most importantly, keeps your systems safe!

DEMONSTRATE YOUR DATA AND INFORMATION COMPLIANCE CREDENTIALS

We are here to help businesses navigate the rigorous information assurance requirements that many organisations insist on before considering working with you.

We can prepare you to pass Cyber Essentials certification, which is

one of the building block of a solid IT security strategy.

First, we build a project plan with a list of all the processes and policies that are required. Second, we run through and explain them to you in plain, non-jargon English. Third, we help you to put each one of the processes and policies into place. This way you know what you need to have in place, and we can be certain that you have them.

BOOK A CONSULTATION

Book your free, no-commitment consultation with Ben Schneider to discuss your needs.

Visit itguys.com/ben

ABOUT BEN SCHNEIDER

MEET BEN, FOUNDER AND MD OF ITGUYS

Ben Schneider, managing director of ITGUYS, has been working in the IT industry for over twenty years.

For his sins, though not his silverware, he's also been a season ticket holder at Arsenal Football Club for nearly as long, and both himself and his rather gorgeous Rickenbacker Amber Fireglo bass guitar growled their way through several punk bands in the 80s and 90s.
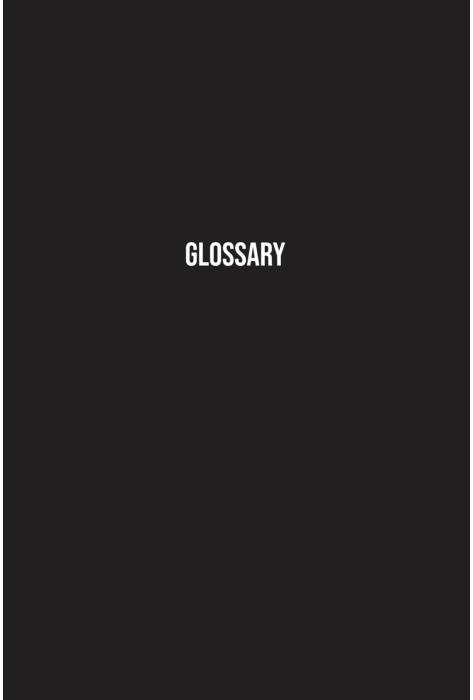
Ben is also a passionate and prolific cook who ran a pop-up restaurant called Salt of The Earth and organised (and cooked for!) The London Asparagus Festival for ten years on the trot.

As ITGUYS went from strength to strength, work priorities won out.

Nevertheless, in his relatively rare time off, Ben still spends his holidays

either cooking for enthusiasts around Europe or researching the world of food and wine. Ask him one question about the contents of his well-stocked wine fridge, or how best to cook poached sea trout with beurre blanc, then book yourself off for one hell of an answer - with samples.

He currently lives in north London with his wife and his idiosyncratic cat Marvin.

GLOSSARY

TECHNICAL TERMS USED IN THIS BOOK

Cyber Essentials (Plus): A basic-level certification that includes an assurance framework and a simple set of security controls to protect information from threats coming from the internet.

Data Protection Act 2018: See GDPR.

Email filtering: Email filters 'wash' an email before it arrives in a user's inbox, significantly reducing spam but also removing most ransomware and virus-ridden phishing emails. A regular digest of those quarantined emails can be sent to each email account so the user can whitelist (allow) or blacklist (block) each sender moving forward.

Encryption: This has a few meanings:

1) Encrypting (and thus protecting) your devices (computers, phones etc) makes any data on them inaccessible to a potential thief.

2) Encrypting communication between, say, your web browser (when buying something online) and Amazon (look for the padlock on your browser) means that the data you transmit (e.g. credit card data) cannot be snooped on during the purchase.

3) If you are the unfortunate victim of a ransomware attack, your files can be encrypted by malware that renders them unreadable unless you have the decryption key.

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation is an EU regulation that came into force on 25th May 2018 and has been enacted into UK Law as the Data Protection Act 2018. Specifically concerned with personal identifiable information (or PII), any person or organisation that stores such information (name, address, email, phone number, address etc.) must

demonstrate that: a) the information has been legitimately collected (there are six criteria for this) and has been removed once not needed; b) is stored securely, and c) satisfies a plethora of compliance requirements. Organisations that fail to demonstrate compliance and suffer a security breach or data loss, amongst other failings, can be liable to a €20 million fine or 4% of turnover (e.g. BA were fined £183 million in 2019 for a website breach that exposed the credit card details of thousands of customers).

IA (Information Assurance): Also called supply-chain information assurance. This term collectively describes literally how information is 'assured' by writing and implementing a set of policies and procedures with rolling reviews, so that organisations can demonstrate a level or standard achieved regarding their systems. This allows partners and potential customers to work together. Examples of IA standards are ISO 27001 and IASME Gold Governance (both require an external audit to confirm

and verify that all the criteria of these standards have been attained).

IASME Gold Governance: This IA standard was developed over several years during a government-funded project to create a cybersecurity standard which would be an affordable and achievable alternative to the international standard, ISO27001. The IASME Governance standard allows the small companies in a supply chain to demonstrate their level of cybersecurity for a realistic cost and indicates that they are taking good steps to properly protect their customers' information. The IASME Governance assessment includes a Cyber Essentials assessment and GDPR requirements and is available either as a self-assessment or on-site audit.

ISO 27001: This advanced-level IA standard requires accredited organisations to:

- Systematically examine the company's information security risks, taking account of threats, vulnerabilities and impacts.

- Design and implement a coherent and comprehensive suite of information

security controls (and/or other forms of risk treatment) to address those risks that are deemed unacceptable.

- Adopt an overarching management process to ensure that the information security controls continue to meet the company's information security needs on an ongoing basis.

ISP (Internet Service Provider): These are companies that provide and support your internet connection. The two main players for standard business connectivity are BT and Virgin.

Password management software: Running on your phone, computer or web browser, these apps securely store and access all your passwords so that you don't need to remember them all. Typically, you will need to unlock the app with a hard-to-guess password before you can access any others. Again, this makes it much harder for a cybercriminal to get access to your crucial data.

Phishing emails: These emails appear to be legitimate requests to click on something or reveal some useful

information but they are, in fact, malicious. The aim of these emails is typically to gain control of your email account or access your bank with the intention of theft, fraud or ransom.

PII (Personal Identifiable Information): See GDPR.

Ransomware: A virus or malware that actively encrypts commonly used files on a computer and anything connected to it (e.g. external disk, shared drive or online file share such as Dropbox), rendering the files unreadable. The cybercriminal threatens to delete the (alleged) decryption key unless a ransom is paid in Bitcoin or electronic currency. Whether they provide a key and whether the key provided works is moot.

Security awareness training: A company's IT security is only as strong as its weakest link. Making assumptions about people's IT competence can create glaring holes in your systems, even if you have several layers of protection in place. Security training helps to a) highlight what can happen if users do not take IT security seriously, and b)

educate users about how to work online and view all electronic communication with caution.

Two-Factor Verification/ Authentication (2FA, also called 2-Step Verification): Just like when your bank sends a code to your phone in order to complete an online payment, this 'second' verification can be applied to many online services such as email, online accounting and other key systems. This significantly reduces the chances of a cybercriminal gaining access to such accounts.

This is the story about Max and Ramona, owners of the creative agency Kumula. It charts the agonies and annoyances of their IT experience as they build and grow their business.

The author highlights just how hard it can be to manage IT in-house, how much time it takes up and demonstrates what they don't know they don't know. He concludes the story by detailing how ITGUYS' approach takes ownership of key systems, services and policies that creatives need to run like clockwork – enabling them to work on what they should be working on.

Maxed Out tracks the growth of the creative company Kumula, highlighting the technical and data compliance challenges they face as they take on more work and staff while their systems and processes grow in complexity.

"Ben and his team really understand the challenges creative businesses face today. He appreciates that every company is unique and presents solutions that support your workflow and simplify your business. Having ITGUYS on board will save you time, money and grief."

Anthony Plewes,
Content Director at Futurity Media

itguys

www.itguys.com
info@itguys.com