THE 2020 PROBLEM IS NOW JUST FOUR MONTHS AWAY
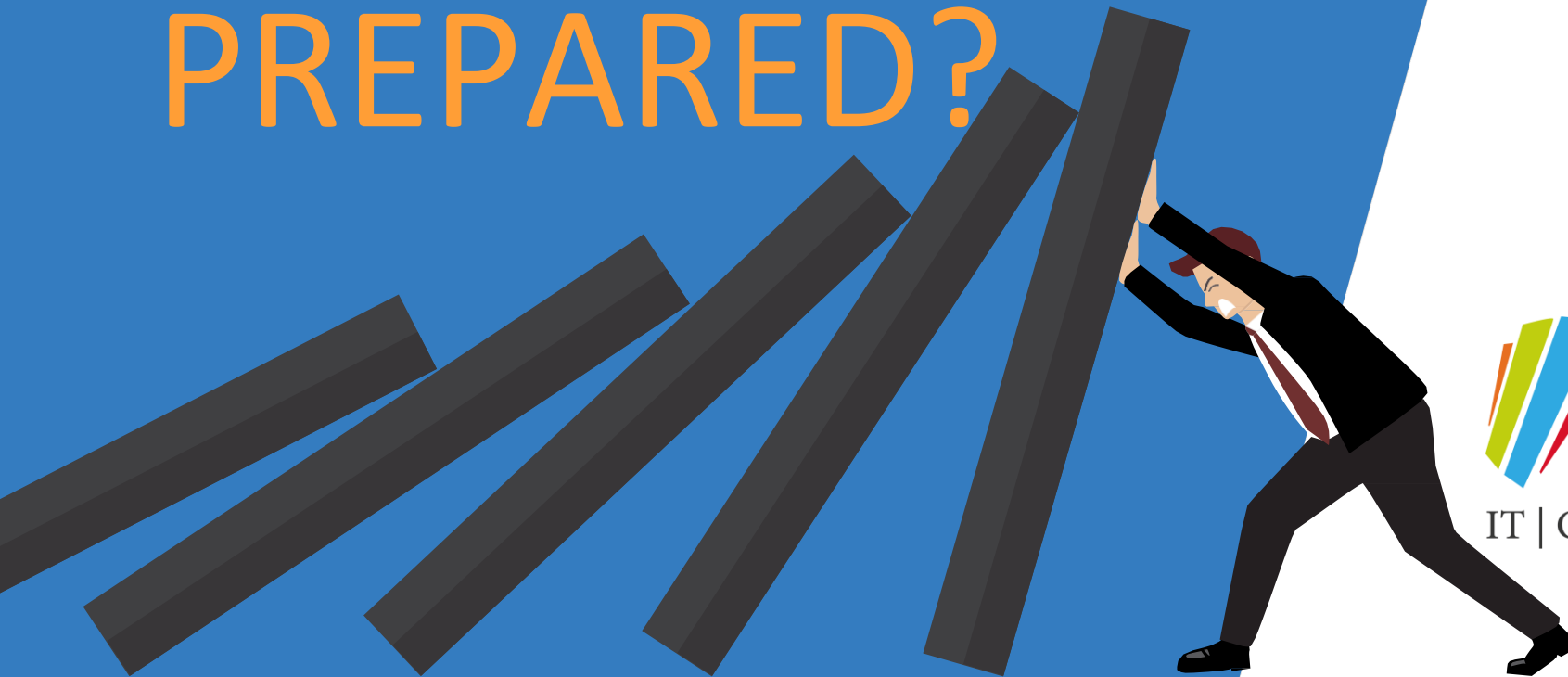
ARE YOU PREPARED?

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As fans of Game of Thrones will know, the phrase "Winter is Coming" struck fear into even the hardiest of warriors. It served as a constant reminder that in order to survive, we should always be prepared for the darkest times.

Winter is coming closer every day. And when it does, it's bringing with it a major software issue that's going to affect around half of all UK businesses.

It's known as the 2020 problem. And this isn't something you can ignore. You'll need to take action now, in order to prevent what could be significant disruption to your business in January next year.

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE 2020 PROBLEM

In January 2020 Microsoft is ending the life of some of its most popular products, including Office 2010, Windows 7, and selected business server software. That presents businesses everywhere with several problems:

1 When outdated software breaks, it can't be fixed. Not only is Microsoft withdrawing this software, they're ending all support for it too.

2 There are no patches or updates for old software, leaving businesses still using it lagging behind their competitors.

3 Old software costs more to run. Companies that upgrade to smarter, faster, more secure operating systems and migrate to the cloud save a fortune over time, with drastically reduced capital costs.

4 Hackers love end of life software, because it's far easier to exploit. The combination of no more security updates and lots of unpatched holes makes it a prime target for cyber criminals.

5 Organisations that fail to protect their customers' data are not compliant with GDPR. One of the main criteria of the new regulation is that you have to use up-to-date, secure software, so if yours is falling short all the hard work you did last year will have been for nothing.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

The way people do business has changed. Today's working environment is flexible and globalised, with more people working from home and other remote locations. As the world becomes more connected, customers and staff expect to be able to access all the information they need from anywhere, at any time.

The digital transformation means that we're no longer tied to desks – our offices move with us wherever we go. Microsoft has led the business software market for decades, and they're now encouraging everyone to move to their popular cloud productivity suite Office 365.

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HOW LIKELY ARE YOU TO BE AFFECTED?

If you've recently upgraded your IT infrastructure you're less likely to be affected by the 2020 problem. That said, it's always prudent to double check: even one device still running on the old software can put your entire organisation at risk.

If you're one of the thousands of UK businesses still using earlier Windows server software or Windows 7, you need to upgrade sooner rather than later.

No idea what kind of software you're using? You're not alone. Lots of business owners don't really care what tech they're using as long as it does the job.

But even if the idea of computer talk bores you to death and you don't know your BYOD* from your HDMI** it's pretty easy to find out whether you need to upgrade. Here's how:

*Bring Your Own Device, where staff use their own mobiles and tablets for work
**High Definition Multimedia Interface, aka the fancy cable into your telly

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1 Turn on your PC. If this pretty multicoloured symbol comes up at the bottom left, you're using Windows 7.

2 Log in to your Outlook emails. If the page looks golden brown, it's the old version and you need to upgrade.

3 When you go online, do you have to log on using remote Web Access in the Small Business Server? You need to upgrade.

4 Your PCs and laptops take ages to boot up. This could mean they are using old software which needs to be checked.

5 You need to physically back up files. Backups should be automatic, so your systems should be checked.

WHY NOT JUST WAIT UNTIL 2020?

Upgrading your IT infrastructure takes months to do properly, so unless you really like living life on the edge and risking your organisation's security it's important to act now. Wing it all you like outside of work, but this is one situation where you can't just take a deep breath and hope for the best.

All good business people understand the value of planning. We might not want to do it... when there's already loads to do, putting a plan together for something else is a real pain in the neck. But just like any burning issue, the sooner you deal with the 2020 problem the better.

Some applications, such as the latest version of Sage Line 50 are already impossible to install on servers running older software. And those that do make it aren't able to operate at full capacity. It might take a while for all the effects to show, but it's only a matter of time.

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How do you solve a problem like 2020?

People tend to fall into three categories when faced with problems:

1. **The head buriers.** These people find it hard to confront issues head on, hoping that by some miracle the problem will be taken out of their hands. This is rarely the case, and instead they find themselves dealing with a much more serious issue that's snowballed out of control.

2. **The finger pointers.** These people struggle to take responsibility for their own actions, so when the proverbial hits the fan they're busy finding someone else to blame.

3. **The solution seekers.** Practical and level-headed, they'll want to understand all the key points of the problem and work to a fast, safe resolution. You can expect these guys to have everything all updated and ready to go well before January 2020 rears its ugly head.

We all have our different skills. So if you're not naturally a level-headed solution seeker you can still deal with the 2020 problem without losing too much sleep.

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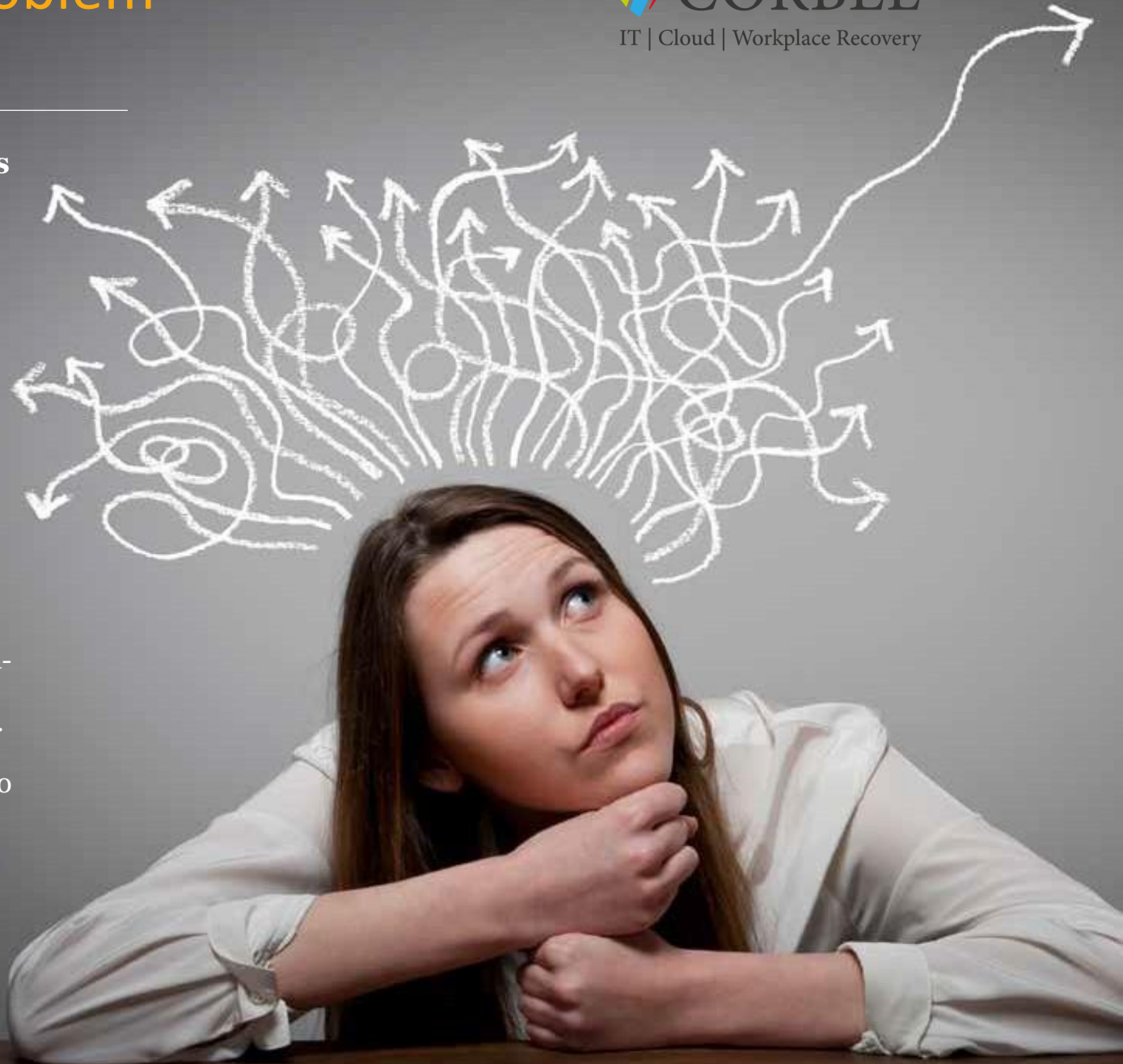
Here are the five steps to problem solving the 2020 problem in your business. Of course, we can do all of this for you, so you don't have to.

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1. Identify and understand the problem

- Learn as much as you can about what's going to happen in January 2020
- Undertake a thorough inventory of all your IT systems, devices and software

3. Consider how it will affect people, not just the organisation

- Think about how your organisation will be affected, both in terms of production and staff morale
- Communicate what's happening to everyone and ask for their input
- Organise training and practical support where needed

5. Get in the experts

- Enlist an expert who can manage the process for you

step 1

step 3

step 5

2. Evaluate your options

- Draw up a good old-fashioned pros and cons list to help you make an informed choice. Consider budget, timescales and organisational structure.

step 2

4. Document the process with a detailed plan

- Build in timescales, KPIs and contingencies. Be prepared for bumps in the road and think about how you will deal with them along the way.
- Identify key personnel and actions

step 4

LIKE ANY BIG PROJECT, AN IT UPGRADE CAN QUICKLY BECOME A BIT OF A NIGHTMARE WITHOUT THE RIGHT SUPPORT.
IF IT ISN'T YOUR STRONG POINT, YOU'LL ALMOST CERTAINLY FIND IT EASIER AND A LOT LESS STRESSFUL TO FIND SOMEONE ELSE TO MANAGE THE WHOLE PROCESS ON YOUR BEHALF.

Outsourcing your IT upgrade makes good business sense, for the following reasons:

- It's more cost effective. Outsourcing saves time, money and – when you choose the right provider – gives you access to the best deals
- Experts do a better job, because this is what they do day in day out. Tasks will be completed to a higher standard, faster, without any of the hassle
- You'll be able to access extra staff as and when you need them, rather than having to recruit in house
- Your IT partner will deal with everything from procurement to project planning to risk management – helping you sleep better at night

The 2020 problem is a very real issue that no business owner should ignore.
Contact us today for free, no obligation advice about how to solve it.

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