



Circus Act: Are You a Juggler or Plate Spinner?

Imagine...

It's 7:53 a.m. and you are already finishing your second cup of coffee... a customer is waiting outside the locked front door, peering in through the window, hoping you'll open up early for his urgent request. As you unlock the door, the phone rings. Knocking over the stack of papers piled on your desk as you answer it, you notice another customer walking through the front door. Waving in the first man who is becoming increasingly impatient, you try to mouth instructions while listening to the customer who called in, your shoulder pinning the phone against your ear, your version of "hands-free" as you shuffle through papers trying to find a pen and blank paper, spilling your half cup of coffee on those sticky notes with that important number you were supposed to have called back yesterday...

On second thought, likely you won't have to imagine because you have been there.

Juggling or spinning plates?

In this current economic trend, funds are being cut; grants are running out; downsizing is prevalent – yet customer demand for quick, quality service remains high. Many civil servants find themselves in a balancing act everyday, juggling more responsibilities with less resources. It feels like a Circus Act. And juggling is the appropriate analogy: keeping everything from toppling into disaster takes constant watch and skill. However, the inevitability of a brief slip of attention remains. It only takes your child being ill or a co-worker missing a day, and suddenly, all of the balls come down on top of you! Is there a better way?

In keeping with the Circus analogy, think of the Plate Spinner. You know the one who sets a stick upright, puts a plate on the top, then spins it. Then sets another, and another. While jugglers need to assert constant input to keep things going, the plate spinner sets up a situation, then only applies input where intervention is required, when momentum slows. This certainly seems like an easier way.

Finding balance with technology

Struggle does not equal accomplishment. The people who make things happen usually also make it look easy. I believe it can be. In your effort to move from juggler to plate spinner, allow technology to help you. Most tech lovers find the latest "toy" and contrive a way for it to fit into their lives. Those of us who buy a phone so we can make calls (instead of take pictures or surf the Web) may drag their feet to move into the 21st century. I confess that even as a Web programmer

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in a technology based profession, I tend to resist change, that is, unless I am the one creating it. One cannot escape that technology does improve our lives. The key to balance is knowing when to apply it, and when to use an old fashioned No. 2 pencil on a sticky note.

If you find yourself behind and overwhelmed with responsibilities, take inventory of a typical day and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Am I performing menial tasks repetitively?
2. Am I asked the same questions by different customers repeatedly?
3. Do I deal with large amounts of data?
4. Do I need quantitative answers quickly in my daily routine?
5. Do I find myself putting off tasks or decisions because I need to wait for more information?

If you answer yes to any of these, likely using some form of technology can help you save time, be more knowledgeable, and best of all, be less frustrated.



Finding the right tool

Instead of the tech lover way of finding a toy and making it useful, for most people a more effective approach is backwards, that is, finding a need, then applying an appropriate degree of technology for assistance. If you put in a little time discovering what your true needs are before you implement a new toy, you will be more happy with the solutions you choose.

For example, some potential clients call me and ask if I will build them a Web site. They are starting from the assumption that they need one. I start from the assumption they don't. So I ask them why do they think they need this technology? How do they plan to use it? If they have clear answers that make their lives easier, I know I can help them.

So, let's take those same questions posed earlier to discover if you have a need, and reformulate them to discover where your needs are specifically:

1. What menial tasks am I performing repetitively? How can I cut down on the number of times I do this?

2. What are the repetitive questions by different customers that I am asked repeatedly? How can I get this information to them in a different way?
3. When and how do I deal with large amounts of data? Is it well organized? How do I have access? Can I streamline this access?
4. What quantitative answers in my daily routine do I need quickly? How can I find these answers faster?
5. Which tasks or decisions am I putting off because I need to wait for more information? How do I get that information? Is there a way to get it faster or more accurately, or bypass me altogether and forward it directly to someone who needs it? Do I have a mechanism for looking at "the big picture" from small bits of data?

How KRWA can help

Kansas Rural Water Association has tools in place ready for your use. And if you have a need not listed here, a quick call to the KRWA office may lead to more.

KRWA E-Train

www.krwa.net/etrain

The latest technology solution from KRWA debuts this month with KRWA E-Train, a possible partial solution for state-required continuing education, offered conveniently as an online school where you can study at your own pace, at your location, at times fitting for your busy schedule, all supported by KRWA's knowledgeable training team. (Read the article about it in this issue!)

Web Services

www.krwa.net/demo

KRWA sets up and hosts your Web site, but you get to edit it easily. If you know how to do a login, use MS Word to a small extent, and can upload email attachments, then you have the skill to maintain your own Web site. This unique templated content management system is geared specifically towards the needs of rural water districts and small Kansas cities. We set up for you however many pages you request, ready for you to add content. We add your logo and color scheme of your

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choice, and even give you about an hour of training to help you get started. But you aren't alone after that: tech support by email is included, but if you need additional or follow up support, it is available at a discounted quoted rate. You get all of this at an unheard of price largely due to KRWA's commitment to helping systems.

GPS Mapping www.krwa.net/gis

Even though KRWA's mapping department has been serving systems with GPS for a decade now, they are still cutting edge. With GIS services you can have your city or water district mapped by GPS with easy access on CD, plus multiple backups for your peace of mind. You can also order large prints, look up addresses with the new Address Mapping Interactive Tool, and share data if you choose.

Information

Customers expect you to be knowledgeable about issues that affect them directly, be it on a local, state, or

"SO, WHY DO YOU NEED A WEB SITE?"

- a) Because everyone else has one.
- b) We need a place to list our phone number.
- c) We have an old site that hasn't been updated forever.
- d) We want to be top of the list on the search engines.
- e) To post frequently asked questions, so I can spend less time on the phone repeating myself!

Only e) is a valid answer here.

national scale. Keeping up with the latest is as easy as going to KRWA's Web site and choosing what information you need:

- ◆ In the News www.krwa.net/news - Sampling of current news from national news organizations and state government entities
- ◆ Legislative news www.krwa.net/legnews - Summary of bills in the current Kansas

Legislative session that affect water and wastewater systems

- ◆ Conference
www.krwa.net/conference - THE place to go for fun and training to keep up on what's current in the industry
- ◆ Directory of Systems
www.krwa.net/directory - Any and every phone number you might need
- ◆ Membership
www.krwa.net/membership - Current listings of members and Associates.

No doubt busy civil servants will always feel part of a circus act, but using available and appropriate technology can shift the juggling towards plate spinning instead!

Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in Web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions.



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See Mock Site here – <http://demo.krwa.net>

Contact us if you would like to schedule a short 10 minute demonstration on the phone with a remote computer session where you can see how easy it is to edit your site.

"What exactly do I get? How much does it cost?"

Complete development and first full year for only \$500, to include:

- A Web site geared specifically towards the needs of your Rural Water District or smaller city.
- Unlimited number of pages, ready for you to add content.
- Your logo and a color scheme of your choice.
- One hour of training to help you get started.
- Email tech support follow-up, limited per month. If you need additional support, it is available at a discounted quoted rate.
- Functional premium features not found at this price anywhere! Additional features available at a discounted quoted rate.
- Free help getting a domain name.
- Non-live development site so if you already have a Web site, the transition to your new site is seamless.

Subsequent years cost only \$100 per year!

Typical Site Features can include:

- Calendar
- Photo Gallery
- News Articles
- Newsletter Subscription for Users
- Tie-in for Customers to Pay Bill Online
- Consumer Confidence Reports Online

New!

Web Services from KRWA

