Resolution for 2008: Get more out of the applications I am using

At the beginning of a new year, many of us make resolutions: get fit, stop smoking, quit Coke (and I have), lose weight, save more money, achieve goals, take disappointments in my stride, be polite to all, be a leader in my field, be more organised and write an article for *Balance*.

How many of the resolutions you made for 2008 relate to your use of technology? Finance, health, career, relationships - these areas all get some attention. In this technology-centric world I think we need to include our use of technology in our resolutions. It doesn't matter if you resolve to stop using your blackberry so much, or at least to stop using it when someone is talking to you. The important thing is that you consider your use of technology, and work out what you want to do more or less of, and what you want to learn about in 2008.

To help you I will volunteer to share some of my technology resolutions for 2008.

1. Backup, Backup, Backup. Not a year goes by when I haven't had some catastophe simply because I didn't Backup. Tip: make sure the option for autosave in Word is on, and it has a directory specified - especially if you are using a new or different computer!

2. Be more careful with my identity. Identity theft is on the increase and I know that I have been a little slack with my personal information in 2007. If you don't know much about the risks to your online identity, get reading and stay safe. Link: http://www.staysmartonline.gov.au

3. Learn more about the applications that I use. We all use Word, but how well do we really know the application? Do you know how to use Styles? Why does the copyright symbol always appear when I type "(", "@", ")"? The truth is the applications we use have so much potential to improve our productivity, and all we have to do is spend some quality time learning about their capabilities. This applies as much to Word as it does to your time-recording software or your favourite search engine (see below for tips that I learnt this past month, but apparently everyone seems to already know - it's OK I will assume you already knew as well).

4. Manage my email better. I don't know about you, but email for me has been a constant struggle. Being in the top three for the largest email databses is not a good sign. There are many articles online with great tips and tricks, but at the end of the day it takes discipline and commitment, every day. I am pleased to say I have only 15 emails in my inbox at present. Though I may be abusing my "new tasks" folder!

I hope by sharing my resolutions, I have encouraged you to make some of your own. You don't need the beginning of a new year to make your own, so don't wait for 2009, make some technology resolutions today. As a suggestion, you could resolve to read this column each edition.

Back to resolution 3 - learn more about the applications that I use

Google - it now has its own entry in the dictionary, and is the most used search engine in the world. But how well do we use this everyday tool. I am sure we are all familiar with the basic boolean search techniques (and, or, "",-). There are more advanced operators like "~", which if put in front of a word, returns results with related terms.

Jason Schoolmeester

Try "~fitness" - you should see results with the following words in them: sport, diet, health, muscle, weight, gym.

I have been using Google for some time, by simply asking the exact question I want answered. I didn't realise that you could use Google for very practial questions. Try these: What time is it in Brisbane?; What is 3 oz in millilitres? The answer appears as the first item in your search results. I now use this all the time!

Another interesting function is comparing items. Simply search for (in quotes) "better than [keyword]". For example, type in "better than law". Results for me included, mediation and fashion designing. Try: "better than iPod" for examples of mp3 players that people consider better than the iPod. Are you looking for some new music or some new artists? Try these simple searches: "reminds me of Pink" (check out Paramore) or "sounds like White Stripes".

I hope you find these tips useful. If you have a special trick or tip for an application you use, please let me know. Perhaps I can find some reward for the best tip which I will published in the next edition.