Four questions to test the efficiency of your business network

Are you supporting or slowing innovation?

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Is your network supporting or hindering innovation and productivity within your business?

Efficient, reliable networks are the backbone of business success today. By making appropriate investments in your network, your company can help maximize effectiveness and productivity, while still maintaining a lean IT organization.

Building a better business network

To implement an efficient network — one that helps your business grow, rather than impedes its progress — ask these four questions.

1. **What is the size of your IT network staff — is it a small team or is there no IT staff at all?**
   Many midsized businesses today rely on lean IT teams to manage their business networks. Some others have no IT team at all; instead, they require other employees without IT expertise to play "jack of all trades" and manage the network. Still others have no in-house IT expertise, but depend on the services of IT vendors and consultants.

   Small IT teams may be overburdened with a range of day-to-day user, hardware, software and network maintenance issues. They often lack the time to keep up with long-term IT planning needs as they balance increasing demands by users for support of new network-centric applications with the need to maintain network reliability. In some cases, employees with other functional job responsibilities are asked to step in and manage IT functions with limited training and experience. As a result, key tasks may fall between the cracks. Finally, IT vendors and consultants can typically provide some, but not all, of the support needed to support the mounting and complex needs of the midsized business.

   Outsourcing day-to-day network management to a service provider that offers scale, expertise, infrastructure and dedicated customer service works to ensure that the expertise and assistance your business needs is always at hand. You gain 24/7/365 access to network management experts, while freeing up your internal IT budget and staff to help your company grow.

2. **Is your business network reliable enough to serve both internal and external customers?**
   Business's increased dependence on the Internet and business networks means performance management and network reliability are crucial. Inadequate bandwidth, high latency, downtime and overloaded networks can frustrate both internal and external customers. Without a reliable, fast network, employees can't get their jobs done. Without reliable, fast access to your website, customers could abandon your business for the competition — and may never return. Partnering with a managed network services provider will offer your business:

   - A secure and high-performing Internet connection backed by 24/7/365 monitoring and management to help ensure your staff remains productive and your customers enjoy rapid and reliable access to your website
   - A reliable wide-area network (WAN) to connect all company locations across a single network
   - A scalable solution that enables you to rapidly add bandwidth to support your company needs
   - An optimized network that serves both internal and external customers without draining your IT team's time and resources

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3. Is your business network adequately protected against security threats?

Data breaches, viruses and denial-of-service attacks shake customer confidence, hurt the reputation of your business, and cost your company in sales, fines and time. Even the largest discount retailers and superstores have been affected by security breaches. Keeping up to date with the latest security developments is especially challenging for midsized companies. Lean IT staffs or employees who are doing double duty as network managers often lack the time and expertise to stay abreast of the latest security updates and are unable to protect against risks in a timely manner.

Outsourcing to a provider of end-to-end network security services takes security headaches off your hands. For example, a managed unified threat management (UTM) solution is an attractive option that can integrate a range of security capabilities, including an advanced firewall, antivirus/antispam tools, intrusion prevention and detection, content filtering, virtual private networking (VPN), vulnerability management and advanced security reporting capabilities.

4. Are network maintenance issues forcing your IT staff to be reactive rather than proactive?

If your IT staff spends the majority of its time dealing with day-to-day operations and maintenance, it has little time left to focus on the kind of long-term network planning that is essential to drive innovation and competitive differentiation.

By offloading day-to day network duties to an experienced provider of managed network services, you're able to free up your in-house IT staff to work on more strategic initiatives. In return, you can also leverage the scale, expertise, infrastructure and 24/7/365 monitoring and customer service support systems that a managed services provider offers.

Creating a business network to support innovation

By asking these four crucial questions before implementing a business network and by taking advantage of the know-how an experienced provider of managed network services has to offer, your business can enjoy many benefits. You can save time and money, enhance your business network's reliability and security, and work to increase employee productivity. Ultimately, your IT staff will be able to focus on long-term strategic network initiatives that will boost the productivity of your business, enable innovation and give your company a competitive edge.

Visit our website to learn how your organization can benefit from Spectrum Enterprise Network Services.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Barlow is the Western region Ethernet Product Manager at Spectrum Enterprise. Previously, he managed all data products in the Midwest region and was a Sales Engineer supporting a variety of sales channels, including Government/Education, Healthcare, and Small and Midsized Businesses. Prior to joining Spectrum Enterprise, he was an IT field consultant.

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