

Experts Update

Brought
to you
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If Your Business Is Still Using Peer To Peer Networking, Now Is The Time To Invest In A Server

Why You Need A File Server Right Now

If you're the owner or manager of a small- or medium-sized business that still uses peer-to-peer networking, it's time to consider upgrading your network by installing a dedicated business server.

Due to recent technology advances, particularly the availability of Microsoft Small Business Server and Windows Sharepoint Portal Services, the pros definitely outweigh the cons. In fact, the upgrade may result in some benefits you hadn't counted on.

How do you know when it's time to upgrade to a server-based network? Here's a simple checklist you can use to assess your needs, followed by a more detailed discussion.

It might be time to upgrade if:

- Your staff is moving to laptop PCs.
- Your staff is specializing and you need to start to segregate data.
- You want critical data backed up securely and automatically.
- Your office needs to use collaboration software, such as shared calendars.
- Your staff requires remote access to shared data

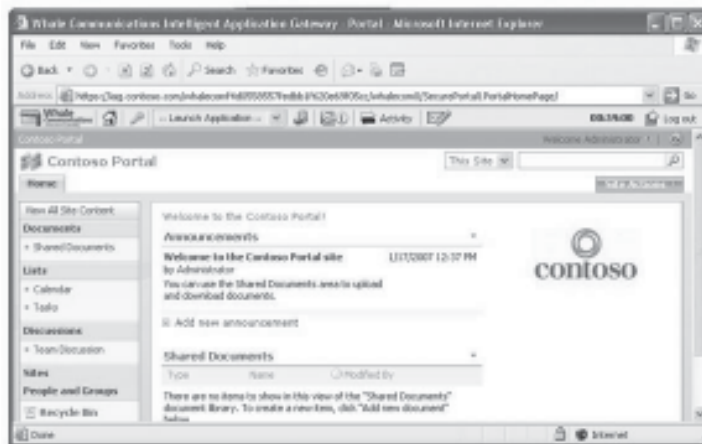
Moving to Laptops

One characteristic of a peer-to-peer network is that individual member PCs share resources, such as files, printers, and fax modems, with each other.

Unfortunately, several recent technology trends are making peer-to-peer networks difficult to use and manage.

For example, many of today's knowledge workers are switching to highly mobile laptop computers which may or may not be in the office at any given time.

When a PC is disconnected from the



network, its resources aren't available other users in the office.

Data Segregation

One of the most compelling reasons to upgrade your basic network to a server-based configuration is data security.

Even small companies have a legal responsibility to protect payroll, human resources, and other sensitive information from misuse, but the file sharing schemes used in peer-to-peer networks don't provide the high level of control offered by server operating systems.

Automatic, Secure Backups

Along with access, backup is also an important part of any data security scheme. Regular and dependable backups are difficult to manage when data is stored on multiple desktop PCs because even the most sophisticated backup software can't back up a PC that's been turned off.

Once you move your critical data to a file server, regular automated backups can be scheduled to take place during off hours. Since the office staff doesn't typically have access to the server's operating system, it's unlikely that

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Detect Hard Disk Failure Before It Happens

Roughly 60% of all disk drive failures are mechanical in nature - from spindle-bearing wear to read/write heads banging into delicate disk platters - and now technology built into the drives can report anticipated and specific failures to give you a chance to rectify the situation, hopefully before it is too late to retrieve your data.

In addition to monitoring a variety of parameters related to mechanical events (disk platter RPM, time to spin up, motor current, head seek failures, and sudden shock to the drive chassis), S.M.A.R.T. (Self-Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Technology) can report read and write retry attempts necessary due to defective areas on the disk or head failure or drive temperature.

Many S.M.A.R.T.-enabled drives can also report how many times they have been turned on and off and the number of hours the drive has been on.

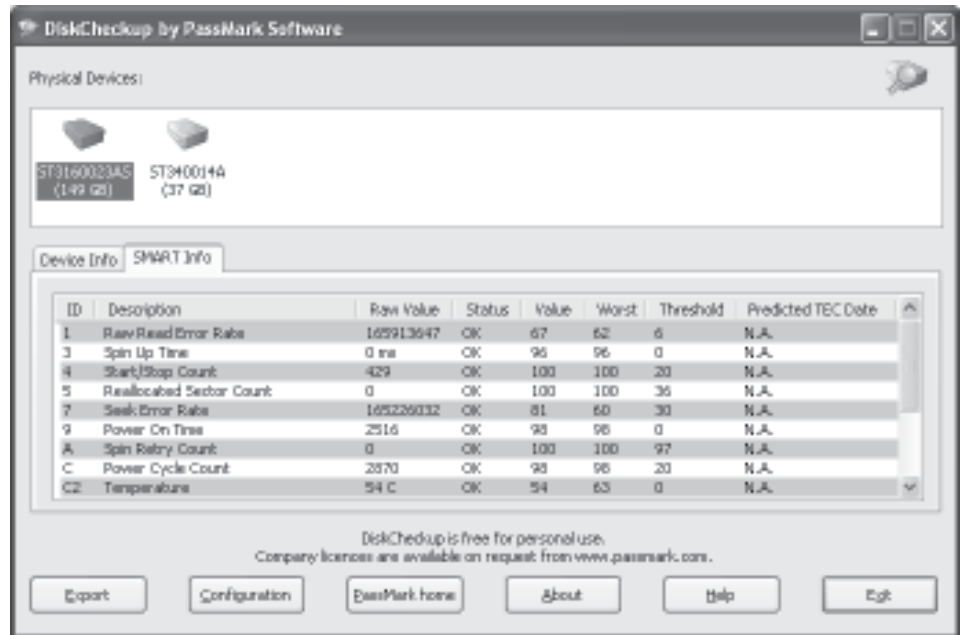
If S.M.A.R.T. is enabled in your system BIOS, the BIOS will check and report any early or permanent signs of disk failure. You can also monitor your drive's condition with a S.M.A.R.T.-aware disk monitoring program.

To view all available S.M.A.R.T. information about your drive, try the free DiskCheck utility from <http://www.passmark.com/products/diskcheckup.htm>.

DiskCheck is a nonresident utility that will show you exact drive information and all of the supported S.M.A.R.T. statuses from your drive.

There's also Ariolic Software's ActiveSMART (<http://www.ariolic.com/activesmart/>) resident monitoring tool, which provides a wealth of detail on drive status and notification of potential failures.

If you get a S.M.A.R.T. warning about a drive failing, back up your data immediately and replace the drive.



A failing disk drive is no fun. A failed disk drive is even less so. In working with our clients, we've encountered a lot of grieving "Have I lost all of my data?" looks from end users.

It is indeed a sad time. Many times, clients don't "get religion" about data backup until something catastrophic like this occurs.

A plethora of disk drive repair and data recovery tools are available to help recover your data. But, the single most effective way to ensure you won't lose your data in the event of a hardware problem is to make regular backups!

We've long since given up on the pedestrian Norton Utilities like Norton Disk Doctor because it does not do enough to spend the time running it, especially for those really cranky lost partitions, erratic mechanical problems inside the drive, and when S.M.A.R.T. says the drive is bad or going to be bad soon.

When it's time to recover partitions and data we unlock our arsenal of serious disk recovery tools, which are:

- Steve Gibson's SpinRite 6.0 (<http://www.spinrite.com>) for finding and fixing or moving bad data blocks on FAT, NTFS, Linux, Novell, Macintosh, and even TiVo volumes.
- Ontrack's Easy Data Recovery (<http://www.ontrack.com>) for digging deep inside a drive and extracting recovered data to other media.
- Symantec's GHOST (<http://www.symantec.com>) to "peel" data off a bad drive to a disk image for replacement onto another drive, or to extract individual datafiles with Ghost Explorer.

And, if our internal data recovery efforts fail, we always have the option of sending a drive out to a special data recovery service, such as Ontrack (<http://www.ontrack.com>) or Action Front (<http://www.actionfront.com>).

These services are typically very expensive - sometimes \$1000 or more - but if it is the only option to recover your data, other than re-keying everything, it may well be worth the cost.

Just remember - regular, monitored backups are your best defense against hardware failure and data loss.



Should You Be Concerned About Internet Cookies That Give Advertisers Unauthorized Access To Your Computer?

With the endless number of online hoaxes, viruses, phishing scams, and other threats, many people are suspicious of any online program that shares their personal information with the rest of the world - and rightfully so.

However, cookies aren't always the menacing tools of surveillance many people believe them to be, and in most cases, they do more good than evil.

Unlike viruses and spyware, cookies are not programs that allow unauthorized access to your computer. Rather, they are simple text files that, on their own, can't do much of anything.

Most cookies are designed to enhance web browsing. On a shopping site, for example, they can store a list of items you've selected to buy as you browse through an online catalog. They can also remember your web browsing preferences whenever you visit a particular site.

Most web browsers allow cookies to be read only by the web site to which they belong. This prevents other sites from tracking your online activities. However, some advertisers will put cookies on your computer as a way to recognize your computer at other web sites associated with that advertiser. These are called "third-party-cookies" and

they allow advertisers to track your online activities across multiple and different sites.

These are the type of cookies that are good to block. Fortunately, blocking third-party cookies is easy. In Internet Explorer, click the "Tools" menu, and then choose "Internet Options."

Then click the "Privacy" tab and then the "Advanced" button. Make sure the checkbox "Override automatic cookie handling" is checked. You'll see options for first-party and third-party cookies. In the third-party cookie options, click "Block." Then, click "Ok."

Of course, you should always use a firewall, an up-to-date anti-virus program, and anti-spyware software to protect yourself from real online threats.



Why Your Business Needs A Server, Continued

anything will "interfere" with backup, and even if the network is down, a file server can faithfully back itself up to tape as long as it has power.

Collaboration

Although shared calendars and other collaboration tools are available from a number of Internet-based sources (Yahoo, Google, and others), your data is much more secure when it's stored on your own file server.

You'll also find that the selection of privately hosted collaboration software is broader and the applications are more customizable than those apps available online.

Remote Access

The increased use of laptop computers mentioned above eventually results in the need for remote access to company data. While this can be accomplished with products such as Symantec's pcAnywhere, Citrix's GoToMyPC, and even Windows XP's built-in Remote Desktop Connection, secure remote access is built into most file server operating systems and remote users are subject to the same access restrictions and privileges as locally connected users.

In the past, one of the main deterrents to server-based networking has been the complexity of server operating

systems, but this is rapidly changing. Once installed and properly configured, Windows Small Business Server (SBS) 2003 requires about the same day-to-day technical expertise as Windows XP or Windows Vista.

And later this year Microsoft will release a "server appliance" product called Windows Home Server (WHS) that will provide many file server features with almost no human interaction. In fact, the device won't even require a keyboard, mouse, or monitor -- just plug it in and you'll have an instant file server!

Another traditional objection has been the cost of dedicated file servers, which often out-weighed the budget - and the benefits for many small offices. Fortunately, technology advances are making low-cost, easy-to-operate servers available to offices that wouldn't have considered them just a few months ago. Server equipment from IBM and HP, combined with Microsoft's Small Business Server software, is now more affordable than ever for small companies.

In summary, if you're still using a basic peer to peer network, you've probably outgrown it! Consider adding a dedicated file server to your suite of office tools to improve data access, security, and usability.



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New, Noteworthy Or Need To Know

‘Surge’ In Hijacked PC Networks

The number of computers hijacked by malicious hackers to send out spam and viruses has grown almost 30% in the last year, according to a survey.

More than six million computers world wide are now part of a “bot network,” reported security firm Symantec.

Computer users typically do not know that their PC has been hijacked.

More than a third of all computer attacks in the second half of 2006 originated from PCs in the United States, the threat report said.

While the total number of bot-net PCs rose, the number of servers controlling them dropped by about 25% to 4,700, the twice-yearly report said.

Symantec researchers said the decrease showed that bot network owners were consolidating to expand their networks, creating a more centralised structure for launching attacks.

Ollie Whitehouse, senior consulting services director at Symantec, said: “This rise in the number of infected computers can certainly be attributed to the rise in the online population of countries like China and Spain, in Europe.”

Whitehouse continued: “There is almost an educational curve that the users and service providers have to go through. Unfortunately when certain countries go through rapid increases in connectivity and availability of technology that curve is not always kept up.”

Alfred Huger, vice president of Symantec Security Response, said online criminals appeared to be adopting more sophisticated means of “self-policing.”

He added: “They’re launching denial-of-service attacks on rivals’ servers and posting pictures online of competitors’ faces.”

Huger concluded: “It’s ruthless, highly organised and highly evolved.”

The best defense against attacks? Never click on an unknown link, regardless of who sent it, and always run up to date anti-virus and anti-spyware software.

Need a Large Monitor?

We have several large-sized CRT monitors, ranging from 19 to 21 inches, that came in from a client on a recent upgrade.

Normally, we dispose of old equipment for our clients by listing it on E-Bay.

Unfortunately, with the size and weight of these screens, it doesn’t make economic sense to try and ship them.

So, if you need a large sized screen, and would be interested in a “gently used” model, give us a call - we can make you a great deal!

Spring time is the best time for your computer checkup!

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