4 QUESTIONS SMBS MUST ANSWER TO BOOST Network Performance

Corporate networks have evolved to keep pace with our hyperconnected business world. While ubiquitous Internet makes it easier for your small or medium business (SMB) to compete with larger enterprises, you may not have the internal resources to support modern networking. To develop an effective network strategy, ask and answer these four questions:

1 Where to Start?

Today's businesses are dependent on their network connections to communicate, share info, deliver products and services and keep themselves competitive. One of the hardest steps to developing an effective network strategy is getting started. Take a look at these steps:

3 STEPS TO BUILD A NETWORK STRATEGY

1. IDENTIFY YOUR NETWORK NEEDS

Understand what you need to accomplish, what problems you need to solve, what your current network resources are, and what systems your business needs to function.

PRO TIP:

To answer these questions, you need network visibility. If you don't have it, a managed service provider (MSP) can help.

2. USE NETWORK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Using assessment tools allows you to identify existing parameters and characteristics of your business network and find options to optimize it for security and redundancy.

PRO TIP:

MSPs can help you identify shortcomings in your network and provide recommendations for optimization.

3. PLAN YOUR NETWORK FOR THE FUTURE

Build a scalable network that will serve your company's needs two years down the road to prevent your business from quickly exceeding its capacity and capabilities.

PRO TIP:

Consult an MSP for help with sizing your network infrastructure and adding next-generation technologies.

2 What Type of Network Do You Need?

When developing a network strategy, you should consider the following network types, which work in combination to meet various needs:

LOCAL AREA NETWORK (LAN)

A LAN connects devices in a limited area, enabling your team to share files, printers, one internet connection and more.

WIDE AREA NETWORK (WAN)

A WAN spans large geographic areas and connects multiple LAN connections to a central data center.

VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK (VPN)

A VPN avoids the public internet, enabling your networks to connect and send data packets securely.

SOFTWARE-DEFINED WIDE AREA NETWORK (SD-WAN)

SD-WAN leverages multiple connection types to prioritize and route traffic. SD-WAN helps your network achieve high QoS, redundancy and diversity using lower-cost broadband connections.

SECURE ACCESS SERVICE EDGE (SASE)

SASE unifies the network and security tools into a single service delivered via the cloud.

WIRELESS NETWORKS

Wi-Fi enables a wireless LAN that supports mobility within your office or campus environment. Wi-Fi 6 provides high-quality, high-density connections.

3 What Are Your Top Network Pain Points?

Setting up and maintaining your network requires substantial resources, time and expertise. Here are common pain points companies face when it comes to their networks:

- **Hiring, Retaining & Training IT Staff with Network Expertise** – SMBs may not have the IT skillsets in-house, budgets required to hire specialized experts or the workload bandwidth on their team to manage modern networks.
- **Managing Network Security** – SMB IT staff may not be network security experts.
- **Network Visibility** – SMBs often don't have the network visibility required to understand traffic behavior and ensure efficiency, security and performance.
- **Preventing & Responding to Problems** – SMB IT teams are constantly putting out fires and are challenged to proactively prevent and respond quickly to problems.
- **Network Compliance** – SMBs struggle on their own to meet industry standards and compliance regulations, such as HIPAA, PCI-DSS and CIPA.
- **Network Complexity** – Networks now have various deployment models, configurations and underlying providers to help enable redundancy and availability, all of which requires expert knowledge to navigate.
- **Network Performance** – SMBs need their networks to perform as they scale into new regions. Adding headcount and next-generation applications increases bandwidth demands. Network downtime is even more costly for SMBs as e-commerce, online sales and customer support become more prevalent.
- **Scalability & Capacity** – Just like enterprises, SMBs add and turnover staff and have to meet departments' individual network needs, which they're ill-equipped to handle.
- **Managing & Troubleshooting the Network** – Identifying issues in a complex network environment requires expertise SMBs usually don't have.

4 How Can MSPs Help Support Your Networks?

MSPs are an excellent resource for SMBs that want to outsource network management. Consider these benefits for your business:

Expertise & Resources

MSPs have access to expertise, resources and industry relationships that most SMBs do not.

Proactive Maintenance & Monitoring

MSPs have the systems and personnel to deliver 24/7/365 maintenance and reporting. They take full responsibility for ensuring network uptime, removing the burden from the SMB.

Easy Scalability

MSPs enable SMB networks to grow at their own pace. Increasing or decreasing network needs is as simple as upgrading or downgrading your plan with the MSP.

Cost Savings

By working with an MSP, SMBs can avoid the high costs of systems and experts required to manage a network in-house. Instead, they pay only a monthly managed services fee.

MSPs can help you assess your network needs, gain network visibility, design the appropriate solution, deploy the solution, manage the solution, monitor your network's performance and more. Hiring an MSP to manage your network can be a smart decision if you want to ensure your network is secure, reliable and efficient, without having to devote significant resources to manage it in-house.

Download TPx's Comprehensive Guide to Computer Network Strategy for Small & Medium Businesses

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