

PLANNING A NETWORK INSTALLATION

How do I get started?

The first step in developing a plan is assessing your current network requirements and considering how your business is likely to change over time. Here are some ideas to help you start the process:

Consider Usage Requirements

Determine the number of people that will be using the network to get a rough idea of the computers and peripherals it must support. Consider how users will interact with the system to define the features you will need. For example, what sort of access is required to the network (e.g. will each user have their own computer? or will several users be sharing the same computer?) Will any users need to access the network remotely (e.g. from home or other office sites)?

Gather Input

Factor the needs of the various teams and departments within your organisation into your network plan. Start by defining the requirements of each group and determine the relative costs of incorporating the different requirements into the network plan. This may be in terms of money or time saved.

Plan for the future

Detail or factor in, to the best of your knowledge, the direction your organisation is likely to take in the near future (3-5 years). As you think about expansion, identify any plans that might affect your network needs (e.g. new staff or volunteers, office expansion, remote working, or the installation of new software packages). Doing this now will be less expensive and time-consuming than replacing an inadequate network later.

Decide who will manage the network

As your network solution becomes more defined, you will need to decide whether you have the resources in-house to install and maintain it yourself or whether you require a consultant or external company to handle it. Networking products have become easier to use and administer over the years, so small organisations are finding that internal day- to-day management of the network is becoming increasingly cost effective.

External support will also likely be required, and it is worth considering using remote network administration tools to reduce the number of on-site visits necessary to keep the network running smoothly.

Security Issues

Ensure you build security features into your network plan to protect your organisations most important asset - its information. Common network security precautions include passwords, virus protection, an external firewall and data encryption.

Other Considerations

You may enhance the foundation of your network plan by addressing other issues that may affect the integration, use and maintenance of your network. These include:

Information Management

Consider how to manage information on your server so that users can easily find what they need. Create standardised naming conventions for files on the server and establish rules for the creation of new files and folders.

Remote Access

If some staff members travel frequently or work from locations outside your office, you may want to build remote access capabilities into your network. This can be done through remote dial-in, or securely over the Internet using a VPN.

Source: <http://www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk/planningnetworkinstallation>