

## Does the Quality of Your IT Infrastructure Really Matter?

### *Five Big "Gotchas" You Need to Avoid — And How to Avoid Them*

By Trestand Conrique

**T**oday, your IT infrastructure – the WANs, LANs, and connecting structured cable that runs throughout your building – is far more than a mere adjunct to the buildings you occupy. By keeping vital information flowing to those who need it, your IT infrastructure is a key component of your ability to create a sustainable business.

What can go wrong if you don't have a high-quality communications infrastructure? Plenty. If your goal is to be an efficient, competitive company, then here are five infrastructure problems you must avoid. Otherwise you may be singing the blues.

#### **1. Down in the Valley (or anywhere else)**

Your network is down and no one on-site can figure out where the problem is. Your customer service staff sit idle at their computers. Your salespeople con-

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gregate in a break room and wonder how they can possibly earn their commissions without a network. Chuck, the sales leader for the last five quarters, downs a Mountain Dew in one gulp and says, "I could make more money sitting on a street corner with a bell and bucket."

#### **2. Goin' Down Slow (or how slow can you go?)**

Your network doesn't go down often. It's just chronically slow. Potential customers have to wait 20 seconds for your Web site to download, then end up clicking to somewhere else before ever reaching your site. Your customer support staff is forced to chit-chat for a minute or two while customer account information is accessed over congested lines – and the customer hold time is stretching from a few minutes to 15 minutes or 25 minutes.

#### **3. You Gonna Miss Me (when I'm dead and gone)**

Great news! It's been a terrific couple of quarters. You've turned the corner on the economic downturn and there's growth in your future. You've got three new customers coming online over the next month and you've got to expand both your sales support and customer support teams. There's just one problem – your IT director has just told you there's absolutely no way to add all the workstations you've requested without seriously degrading network performance. And upgrading your IT infrastructure will take several months and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

#### **4. Don't Do Me Wrong (because it really hurts)**

It was necessary, so you did it. You paid a lot of money for a highly reliable, high-bandwidth IT infrastructure, and when it came online there were oohs and ahhs galore. Every department reaped the benefits of greater throughput and consistent uptime. That was six months ago. But now all the old complaints are back. It's slow. It goes down. You clarify with your team that your infrastructure was specified to handle far more than

you're currently throwing at it. So what's the problem? You call the service provider that performed the installation and when they finally arrive (see Item 5 below), they find several locations where new cables have been improperly connected. Then there's the line of cable that was taped down across a high-traffic aisle. When asked who performed these "moves, adds, and changes," you feel the hair on the back of your neck stand up.

#### **5. Help Me Make It Through the Night (please!)**

It's late Friday evening and your whole network has imploded. Your IT staff responds valiantly, but the problem is clearly not with a server or router. Saturday and Sunday are major sales days, so you call your structured cable service provider. But they don't work weekends. Their response time (and to your dismay, you confirm this in their service-level agreement) is by the end of the next business day. So it may be Monday evening before you're even able to find out just how bad the problem is.

#### **It's Getting Better All the Time**

What do you get if you don't have a quality IT infrastructure? A lot of low productivity and lost opportunities – today and in the future. Fortunately, a quality IT infrastructure is not difficult to obtain. Here are four simple steps to avoiding the five big gotchas:

##### **1. Plan for Today**

No matter what your current needs are, you want to get full utilization of the network you've paid for. Unfortunately, many people believe that a network infrastructure can be easily created using interchangeable "open-standards" components. Not true. To ensure consistent and reliable throughput, make sure all the components of your infra-

structure have been certified by the manufacturers to work together.

## **2. Plan for Tomorrow**

Understand that a little upfront expense now can save a great deal of expense — and time — later. Do your best to estimate your growth and bandwidth requirements for as long as you plan to occupy your buildings. If your requirements are constantly evolving, such as in research facilities where the number and location of researchers often change, factor this into your planning. Also include disaster response into your design.

## **3. Find a Quality Service Provider**

Choose a service provider that can help you understand all your planning requirements and create a high-quality, certified infrastructure design that will work for you — short term and long. Try to find a provider that offers a broad range of services, including voice and data cabling, and hardware installations and upgrades. Make sure the provider is qualified to work with all the infrastructure compo-

nents, has a track record of quality installations, and will create comprehensive documentation of the installation, so you'll always know exactly what you have and where. Finally, make sure your service provider will support you 24/7, responding immediately with a team that already knows your network and can track down and resolve issues quickly.

## **4. Never let Unqualified Staff Perform Moves, Adds, and Changes**

Even the most carefully designed network can be quickly and seriously degraded by poor workmanship or by mixing the wrong components. Only fully qualified staff or an authorized service provider should ever plan and implement changes to your network.

## **Everything I Have Is Yours**

Rancho Santa Fe Technology is a leader in mission-critical network communication services offering distributed network services for wide area networks (WANs) and local area networks (LANs), including the implementation of voice/

data structured cabling, the rollout of new enterprise-wide data equipment technology, and maintenance and repair contracts.

Rancho Santa Fe Technology can ensure you adopt the right strategy and the right technology for your specific needs. Then, with expert project management, excellent customer service and best practices, Rancho Santa Fe Technology will complete your projects on time and cost-effectively.

Technical excellence, dedicated customer service, best practices, and a commitment to client success. These are the values — and the deliverables — that have made Rancho Santa Fe Technology a leader in mission-critical network communication services.

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