Business continuity and IT management

Part 1 of a two-part article on keeping your computer network running 24/7

By Lorne Lavine, DMD

As many dental offices know, no matter what you spend for IT support for your computers, it’s usually nothing compared to what it costs if your network goes down for two or three days.

Business continuity involves two steps: monitoring the network 24/7 and having a great backup protocol in place should something go wrong.

Your computers are the machinery that runs your business. Every minute of down time costs you money. Just as dental offices do preventative maintenance to keep their patients’ oral health at a high level, your computer network also needs regular maintenance to keep it running smoothly.

If you are not in the business of IT support, then it makes no sense for you to self-manage your network.

Using on-call consultants for basic maintenance has also become a costly proposition for most offices. Add to that the delays between the time you notice a problem and it actually getting fixed. All this extra downtime is costing you money.

Electronic IT management

New monitoring systems provide electronic management technology that has changed the way companies can maintain and manage their IT systems.

No longer do you have to wait for things to break before your network gets attention. With these systems watching over your network, many problems can be seen and corrected before they impact your staff.

Modern automation technology alerts technicians whenever specified events occur on your network. This allows us to directly focus on areas that need attention. Without this automation, a technician would waste valuable time hunting around for possible problems. These systems show us exactly where to look.

Remote access

Thanks to secure remote-access capabilities, most problems can be fixed remotely over the Internet.

For the dental practitioner, this means problem resolution in minutes, not hours! In addition, your network security is not compromised. This is an important factor for organizations in regulated industries, such as dentistry, that have HIPAA regulations.

Software updates

Patches and updates are released regularly for your operating systems and key applications. These fix problems with security and make them run better.

Without these updates applied, your software is vulnerable to threaten that can damage your systems, or worse, make them available to attackers.

Tracking installed software

Most of these software programs contain a sophisticated asset inventory system that tracks every piece of software installed on your computers. The software can automatically identify those that need updates.

Every week your management mode will download these updates once and then apply them to all the machines on your network that need the updates.

This is far more efficient than you downloading and updating each workstation and server individually. In most cases, it makes sense to schedule these updates to run after hours so your staff is not interrupted by the installation process.

‘Reactive’ IT support

The old way of providing network support relied upon you calling a technician when something broke. Then you wait for someone to come find your problem. There was no telling how long it would take the technician to find and fix the problem.

With this outdated “reactive” support model, you pay when things go wrong, so your IT consultant gets paid when things break down. In short, there is no incentive for your consultant to make your network as reliable and efficient as possible.

‘Active’ IT support

How much will it cost this month? Many dentists we’ve worked with in the past commonly agree that unknown support costs are one of their most aggravating management issues.

Most of the new support systems are a subscription-based service. There is no hardware or software to buy. No staff to hire. You pay a monthly fee based upon the number of servers, workstations and network devices. All monitoring, notification, and remote support is done for you.

The only extra charges you might pay are for consulting, implementation of new equipment or software, or services that are not part of maintaining your existing IT infrastructure.

Part 2 of this article will be published in the next edition of Dental Tribune.

What is the total cost to your practice if your network goes down for two or three days?

About the author

Dr. Lorne Lavine, founder and president of Dental Technology Consultants (DTC), has more than 20 years invested in the dental and dental technology fields. A graduate of USC, he earned his DMD from Boston University and completed his residency at the Eastman Dental Center in Rochester, N.Y.

He received his specialty training at the University of Washington and went into private practice in Vermont until moving to California in 2002 to establish DTC, a company that focuses on the specialized technological needs of the dental community.