Top 8 Reasons SMBs Need to Monitor their Networks

If you work in IT at a small-to-medium-sized business (SMB), it’s likely that you’re a department of one. You’re the sole responder to your company’s IT emergencies, juggling everyday tasks like responding to help desk tickets and checking server logs and backups, all while maintaining a healthy, glitch-free network infrastructure. Even if you arrive at work by 5:30 a.m. and drink a whole pot of coffee by yourself, fulfilling these weighty responsibilities remains tough. Although a number of time-saving technology investments could help you do your job better, you probably have a tight IT budget and little time to spare learning a new tool.

As reliable network performance becomes more important and security threats target organizations of all sizes, there is a compelling case for small businesses to deploy diagnostic network tools. Network monitoring can optimize IT infrastructure performance with less effort, enable faster troubleshooting, and help prevent network outages. All things considered, a strategic investment in the right network monitoring tool can actually save time and costs for SMBs.

Here are the top eight reasons why SMBs should implement a network monitoring system.
1. Visually Document your Growing Network

In the process of getting the business up and running, many SMBs fail to document all of the devices in their network infrastructure. Then as the business grows, it can be easy to lose track of all the devices added to the network over time. Creating a manual diagram or Excel spreadsheet of where devices are located and how they’re connected is tedious, and as technology is upgraded and replaced, these documents quickly become out of date. That’s why it often takes months for a new IT hire to learn the ins and outs of a SMB’s network.

Contrasted with manual methods, network monitoring software performs device inventory automatically, providing you with a live network map of the IT infrastructure. That way, you always have an accurate view of your network. Training new employees becomes easier when you can show them exactly where devices are located. In addition, implementing best practice network design is more viable with a network map. If you can’t even see how the network is set up to begin with, how can you improve on it?

2. Do More with Less

IT professionals working for SMBs often serve as jacks-of-all-trades, with limited time to spare on “extras.” But network monitoring isn’t an “extra”—without it, your business is susceptible to sudden outages, poor network performance, and even security breaches. How can IT make sure the network is constantly up and running with limited resources?

Thankfully, network monitoring doesn’t require a full-time employee to manage it. Modern network monitoring software constantly pings devices in real time and updates their status on the map, only notifying you when preset thresholds are exceeded. Without needing to watch a screen for hours on end, you are freed to be more productive and rely on the software to let you know when something needs your attention.

For small IT departments, network monitoring software acts as an extension of your team, giving you more time to focus on what really matters.

3. Monitor from Anywhere

As SMBs grow, sales, marketing, and HR departments often grow before IT does, creating stress for small IT teams who are trying to do it all with less.

Network monitoring can alleviate the burden when your IT services are in high demand and time is a precious commodity. You can set thresholds for critical metrics on particular devices and choose how, and how often, you want to be alerted when those thresholds are reached or exceeded. Then, whether you’re out in the field at a satellite office or just down the hall helping a user, the ability to receive custom alerts via sound, email, or email makes it easy to prioritize when a critical network event occurs.

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Mobile web-based access to dashboards and maps also enables anytime, anywhere network monitoring. Modern network monitoring software ensures you always have access to the critical network metrics you need.

4. Troubleshoot Issues More Easily

The network is slow. You think it might be a certain router that crashes frequently, but you can’t remember which rack it’s in, or what’s connected to it. As the minutes tick by, you’re getting more calls from users who are annoyed by the performance issues.

Network monitoring simplifies the detection and remediation of issues. Maps give at-a-glance performance statuses for devices so it’s easy to see when something is out of the ordinary. Because network maps inventory every devices and show the physical connections between them, digging in to find problem devices and understand the impact of a potential outage takes less time.

5. Plan for Future Growth

As employees and customers increase, the IT systems that support day-to-day business operations will undoubtedly become strained. Delivering consistent excellent user and customer experiences as the business scales will become extremely important in preserving the reputation and momentum that the company’s built.

Ensure that the IT infrastructure will accommodate future growth by monitoring bandwidth levels. Network monitoring can show you trends over time, revealing where additional devices or hardware updates are needed. Having metrics to show upper management can help with acquiring needed budget.

The ability to proactively plan for future bandwidth capacity is crucial. As more businesses are touched by digital transformation, SMBs will have to keep up with cultural shifts such as the Internet of Things (IoT) and bring your own device (BYOD) in order to stay competitive. Having the IT infrastructure to support this growth will be key.

6. Improve Network Security

Securing critical business data from outsiders and insiders alike is a top concern for both enterprises and SMBs. And for good reason—the average cost of a data breach, according to IBM's 2016 Ponemon Cost of Data Breach Study, is around $4 million. Hackers may target SMBs under the premise that they’re likely ill-equipped to handle a security breach. Unfortunately, this is true for many SMBs who feel they can’t justify the cost of an expensive intrusion detection system (IDS) and haven’t taken the appropriate defensive measures against cybercrime.

When an IDS isn’t feasible for your business, network monitoring software can be an affordable alternative. Network monitoring provides valuable insight into the source and nature of all traffic flowing across the network. By regularly monitoring traffic on critical devices, it’s easy to spot suspicious changes in inbound and outbound traffic. Having in-depth visibility into network activity helps you proactively identify malicious network activity and find holes to patch that could turn into larger security issues in the future.

7. Track Trends Without Hours of Data Digging

The day upper management asks you for a report on hardware performance isn’t the day to remind them, Remember, we decided not to buy software to track this data, right? Without any monitoring solution in place, you’re forced to dig from other sources to cobble together numbers, or worse, just guess.
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Reporting on data trends is a thousand times easier with network monitoring. With historic performance data at your fingertips, you’re armed with information to help diagnose network issues and take corrective measures. Knowing what “normal” looks like makes spotting anything abnormal much more clear.

8. Improve the Bottom Line

With ever-shrinking IT budgets, many SMBs forgo paid tools for free or open-source network monitoring solutions. One of the major drawbacks of free solutions is the lack of 24/7 expert support. Without support, you’re not guaranteed timely resolution of critical issues. Another is the lack of development and continual timely product enhancements. Finally, while open-source options provide sophisticated functionality, customizing them to your environment can take hours of configuration work. All things considered, free or open-source tools might not be as cost-effective in the end.

Gartner has estimated that the cost of network downtime is $5,600 per minute. While the dollar amount is alarming, just as dour is the impact outages have on customer satisfaction and your company’s reputation in the marketplace. Keeping an eye on the network 24/7 allows IT to address areas of concern before they become emergencies, take action more quickly, and ultimately fix the issue before a failure occurs. After a minimal investment, the cost of network monitoring is quickly justified by its high ROI.

Just as important, automated network monitoring gives IT peace of mind knowing you won’t miss critical network events. And, as mentioned previously, it frees up your time to be more productive elsewhere.

Explore what Network Monitoring Could Do for your SMB

Network monitoring software is an essential tool to help IT maintain a healthy network and ensure smooth operations for your SMB. When you rely on a powerful, affordable, easy-to-use solution, you set your business up for top-notch network performance today and continued growth tomorrow. Get started today with a free 30-day trial of Intermapper.