

**October 2007**[PDF Version](#) [Email to a Friend](#)

Give Your Servers All the Attention

As we start off this new school year, I thought it appropriate to reiterate my primary message to Superintendents and Business Administrators regarding your IT staff.

The message is quite simple: Your IT staff should be focusing on servers, not desktops. In order to accomplish this task, the network must be designed to reduce "critical dependencies" on desktop computers.

Let's start with a typical scenario:

You run a school that has approximately 500 desktops and laptop computers along with five file servers. These file servers run a variety of critical services and software, including programs like email, your student information system, accounting software, curriculum and backup systems. Your IT staff consists of two full time technicians who are committed to keep the network up and operational.

Now I would like to explore best and worst case scenarios for the aforementioned situation.

Worst Case Scenario

The phone rings on your desk and it is Ms. CrabTree, your English teacher, and she is complaining that she has been waiting for two weeks for her desktop to be fixed so she can grade her students' papers.

After you get an earful from Ms. CrabTree, you jump on the phone to call your technicians and inquire about the problem. They respond with the typical answer by telling you, "With 500 or so desktops in the school and only two of us, we are doing the best we can. We promise to try and get to Ms. CrabTree by the end of the week."

This is a common theme in your school and you think that the only solution is to hire more technicians.

Unfortunately this is all too often the case in a poorly designed network environment where management and support of the desktop is not considered ahead of time, leaving technicians swamped with critical issues and little time to head off major issues that may occur or continue to occur at your file servers.

In this environment the work queue will always continue to grow. Bottom line your administrative staff along with your teachers are just not happy. And you sense that it is going to be a long year.

Best Case Scenario

The phone does not ring on your desk. Ms. CrabTree smiles at you when she sees you in the hallway

and your two technicians report that the new server is installed and running just fine. There are two small issues in the work queue and they will be completed by the end of the day.

Ah...now that is the way things should run.

In this scenario, a design has been put in place to minimize the impact of issues at the desktops. The desktops do not have local data, which can cause a hard drive to crash or a virus to corrupt the system.

Instead, these desktops have server-based profiles that allow a technician to point Ms. CrabTree to any other computer in the school to access her information and the identical desktop environment she is used to navigating while her machine is being repaired. The technicians also have an exact image of her desktop – complete with Ms. CrabTree's driver and application set, which are unique to the make and model of her computer – that can be installed from the file server in minutes.

With such a design you decrease the 505 critical systems on the network to only five – the file servers – that two technicians can easily manage along with the day-to-day support of the workstation and printing environment.

One other important thing to consider: Great technology departments shrink, not grow. With all of the tools available to network support personnel these days, larger environments can be supported with fewer personnel.

Enjoy your Fall,



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