» **Perform routine chores, such as backing up the servers, archiving old data, and freeing up server disk space.** Much of the task of network administration involves making sure that things keep working by finding and correcting problems before users notice that something is wrong. In this sense, network administration can be a thankless job.

» **Gather, organize, and track the entire network's software inventory.** You never know when something will go haywire on the ancient Windows Vista computer that Joe in Marketing uses, and you have to reinstall that old copy of Lotus Approach. Do you have any idea where the installation disks are?

Choosing the Part-Time Administrator

The larger the network, the more technical support it needs. Most small networks — with just a dozen or so computers — can get by with a part-time network administrator. Ideally, this person should be a closet computer geek: someone who has a secret interest in computers but doesn't like to admit it. Someone who will take books home and read them over the weekend. Someone who enjoys solving computer problems just for the sake of solving them.

The job of managing a network definitely requires computer skills, but it isn't entirely a technical job. Much of the work that the network administrator does is routine housework. Basically, the network administrator dusts, vacuums, and mops the network periodically to keep it from becoming a mess.

Here are some additional ideas on picking a part-time network administrator:

» The network administrator needs to be an organized person. Conduct a surprise office inspection and place the person with the neatest desk in charge of the network. (Don't warn them in advance, or everyone may mess up their desks intentionally the night before the inspection.)

» Allow enough time for network administration. For a small network (say, no more than 20 or so computers), an hour or two each week is enough. More time is needed upfront as the network administrator settles into the job and discovers the ins and outs of the network. After an initial settling-in period, though, network administration for a small office network doesn't take more than an hour or two per week. (Of course, larger networks take more time to manage.)