Connecting Inside the Office

Instant creative collaboration — securely

SITUATION WONGDOODY is a creative agency with offices in Seattle and L.A. The shop is renowned as a place where the perfect marketing idea can come from anyone. They call their approach The Democracy of Good Ideas™, and it means any of the 140 employees spread over two offices can contribute to a creative project.

Within the ever-shifting landscape of building a marketing campaign, that means everyone needs access to pretty much everything – anytime, from anywhere. That makes Pete Curry, the agency's IT manager, understandably nervous from a security standpoint. But he's created a straightforward communication network that balances strong security with easy access.

It's based on a WiFi network that's within the office — but outside the company firewall. "That lets visitors use the Internet in our offices, but if an unauthorized user breaches our WiFi they still can't get to our interior network," Curry explains. To access the secure network, WONGDOODY uses a virtual private network (VPN) – Curry calls it "a tunnel into the system" that can be accessed only by employees, anywhere they have Internet access.

RESULT With the WiFi network and project management software housed on a central server, WONGDOODY workers can access the latest iterations of an ad campaign or update a project schedule from their desks, during a creative meeting or at an airport on the way to a presentation. "The VPN creates an extra step," Curry says, "but we don't have to worry about WiFi security."

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The connected small-business office

Small businesses today can take advantage of increasingly simple and exceptionally productive ways to connect people, information and systems. Take a look at how a typical small business might operate using today's connection technology — and imagine the same advantages for your business:

Free to roam: Workers are no longer chained to their desks to be productive — they can connect to vital information, and communicate with customers and each other, from anywhere within the business.

Shared resources: No more isolated information or digging through file drawers — every worker has instant access to the information he or she needs to do the job.

Connected customers: Information and communication are no longer available only to employees wired into it — clients or visitors can use the same network of information and communication, quickly and securely.

Ready for change: Moving, expanding or reorganizing is no longer a nightmare — as the business grows or the office is reconfigured, the wireless network can be changed with a few keystrokes instead of a wiring overhaul.

Making the connection to improved productivity

In today's highly competitive business landscape, success for a small business like yours comes down to efficiency and productivity. It doesn't matter what you make, serve or deliver — if you can do it faster, using fewer resources more effectively, you've gained the advantage. And one of the most time- and cost-efficient ways to become more productive is to make it easier for people to access and share information. That's what connecting inside your office does.

Know your connectivity options

There are two basic choices for connecting a small-business office network: wired and wireless.

Wired networks

Many small businesses today have some kind of wired network, often referred to as a LAN (local area network). This can be as basic as a peer-to-peer network, where two or more computers are connected by cables that plug into network adapters on the computers, allowing network users to share resources such as printers, common drives and files. This type of network is relatively inexpensive, but requires a lot of manual configuration and may need to be re-wired each time the network grows or changes.

A slightly more sophisticated approach is a client-server network setup, in which a central computer holds data files for all the network users. This allows users to share applications such as databases, and they can be connected to a central printing resource. Each connected computer is a separate workstation with the ability to access the central server and all connected devices using cables attached to a network router or switch. Client-server networks cost more to build and maintain than peer-to-peer networks, but they offer more flexibility in their configuration and typically deliver faster rates for sending and receiving information through the network.

Fact: **Having a wireless network can improve productivity and mobility around the office.**

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Wireless networks

Wires have been the traditional way to connect office networks, but they aren't the most efficient medium. Wires have limits in how far they can carry a signal, and they have to be physically moved and rearranged if you need to change your network configuration. Plus, a maze of wires running through your office can detract from its appearance — for employees as well as customers and visitors.

For these and other reasons, wireless networks are becoming the standard for businesses of all sizes. They are increasingly simpler, more affordable and more effective, providing the same connection benefits of a wired network but with more flexibility and no cumbersome wires. And because they don't require as much labor or materials, they're often cheaper to set up than a wired system.

A wireless network is referred to as a WLAN (wireless local area network). Wireless networks use Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) technology, where all the computers in the network broadcast information to each other using radio signals. This makes network arrangement and setup much easier than wired networks, especially if you have laptops, PDAs, notebooks, desktop computers, printers and other devices distributed across multiple locations within your office.

The combined approach

There is one other option worth considering. If you have a wired LAN in place, a WLAN can start off as an extension of your current, wired network. Then you can phase wireless networking in until your business is completely wire-free. This approach is worth considering if you've invested in a strong LAN and want to explore the advantages of wireless connectivity, without taking on all of the cost at one time.

The three main benefits of a connected office

Whether you're working with wired or wireless technology, the increased productivity and efficiency a connected office delivers can be summed up in three categories.

Mobility

Using a wireless network adds a layer of mobility and efficiency to your business. Employees have anytime, anywhere access to important data, whether it's in colleagues' offices, on different floors or in separated areas of the office. For example, a group of employees can meet in a conference room and have access to up-to-the-second communications, current versions of documents and printers, the Internet and other resources. They can address action items right in the meeting rather than everyone having to go back to their desks to work.

Networking

With a connected network, employees can freely share company data and their collective knowledge, instead of having to look for it in multiple places. Having that ability to easily share information encourages employees to collaborate. They can also find what they need to know right away, and respond more quickly to customer requests. Especially with wireless networks, you can connect all the parts of your business, even challenging spots like warehouses or production facilities. With streamlined communication and information access, you may even need fewer support staff.

Convenience

With your own office network, you can provide secure access to guests such as customers or business partners — an added value they'll appreciate. And if it's a wireless network, you can add users quickly and easily, and expand or reconfigure your office with a minimum of hassle and cost.

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Optimizing a connected office

Adding connectivity to your business deserves careful consideration. If you decide to add or improve on a network, here are some things to keep in mind for its long-term success:

- Have clear goals for what will improve as a result of connectivity. Include both measurable and intangible results.

- Be sure to solicit your employees' input as you plan improvements, and do all you can to get them excited about the potential for improved productivity.

- Allot time and resources to ensuring employees are using the new capabilities to their fullest potential. This can include group training or one-on-one consulting.

- Remember that adding and making the most of connectivity is an ongoing process. Set timelines to assess how well the network is working, how much employees are getting out of it, and what improvements may be worthwhile going forward.

> **Based on information gathered by In-Stat, as far back as 2005, 91 percent of companies were using wireless data equipment somewhere in their business.**
>
> *—instat.com*

Before you get started

Use this checklist to help you assess your current networking situation and plan for the future:

1. **Resources**
   - Identify and list the number and type of workers, computers, printers and other devices your business currently has.

2. **Processes**
   - Identify the places where your employees do their work — would a network enable them to be more productive away from their desks?
   - Consider workflow. Would shared access to information improve productivity?

3. **Existing connections**
   - Identify your current level of networking.
   - Assess your current network's scalability. Can it be expanded at a reasonable cost?

4. **Possibilities:**
   - Picture how your business could operate differently if you added or improved your connectivity. What benefits do you see?

5. **Wires, wireless or a combination?**
   - List the pros and cons of moving to a wireless or combined (wireless and wired) solution.
   - Assess the cost and hassles of moving to a wireless or combined solution.

Related guides

Connecting outside the office

Maximizing your Internet connection

Harnessing Internet-based computing

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Your community representative is always happy to help. You can count on them as a resource for compliance solutions to consider that fit your specific business needs, budget and level of expertise, as well as advice and resources on a range of small business technology issues.

Visit **http://centurylink.com/smb-resources** to contact your community representative, and learn more about how technology can boost your business. You'll find information sheets, videos, case studies and more.

For more detailed information about connecting inside the office, please refer to the white paper.

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