The LIFEBLOOD of BUSINESS PRODUCTIVITY

FACT: A corporation lives or dies by its employees' ability to access information, and its network is the vital framework that carries that information to the farthest reaches of the company. Corporate networks handle work as simple as e-mailing a file to a colleague, or as complex as connecting mission-critical applications across vast geographic distances to streamline the supply chain. When it's up and running at peak performance, the network is worth untold millions of dollars in new business opportunities and efficiencies.

But here's another fact: when the network goes down, it can cost the company millions in lost productivity.

"Network outages affect every aspect of the business, from receipt of orders to customer service," says Tony Beam, director of AMPTRAC marketing at Tyco Electronics/AMP NETCONNECT in Harrisburg, Pa. "It can severely impact a company's ability to respond to clients' needs, and that can translate into lost orders, dissatisfied customers and missed opportunities."

With so much at stake, companies should have an airtight plan to moni-

tor and manage their networks as closely as possible. But too often when network outages occur, they last longer than they should because they're mishandled.

Most IS shops react to a network outage by first looking for problems in
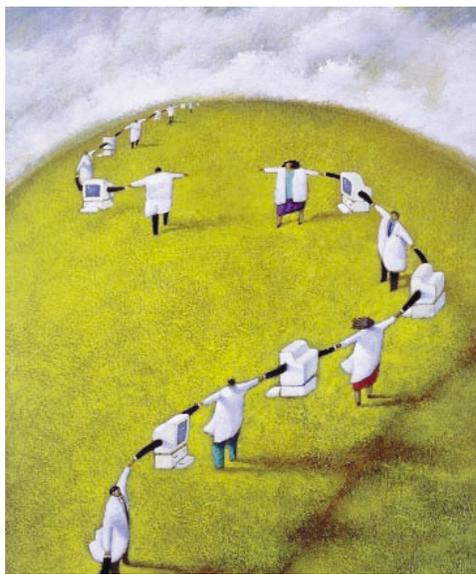
their application software, then the network software, says Richard McNees, VP/Marketing at iTRACS Corporation, a Chicago-based infrastructure management solutions company. "The trouble is, they're looking in the wrong place most of the time," McNees says.

In fact, according to recent numbers from Infonetics Research, a San Jose, Ca.-based research firm, up to 69 percent of network outages can be traced to the network's hardware—not the software.

"Most of the time the problem is in the cabling, but IS folks generally look there last," notes Bill Sewell, VP/Systems Solutions at DMJMH+N, a Los Angeles-based global network design company.

Part of the problem is that many corporate decision-makers don't give top-of-mind importance to the physical layer of the network. "The general perception of the cabling issue is, 'out of sight, out of mind,'" Sewell says. "Unfortunately, a lot of folks in a corporation don't recognize the significant impact [the network] can have on day-to-day business."

Another issue: the physical layer is often so poorly organized that even IS staffers are left troubleshooting blindly. "The typical IT network individual is accustomed to seeing the 'mushroom cloud' representing the network. He has no visibility into what's going on inside that cloud relative to physical implementation of changes in the network," says Beam.

Sewell recalls a recent experience with a regional bank in the U.S. "Their operations center was a mess," he recalls. "The cabling was so completely out of control that the company didn't have any idea what devices were connected where. They were afraid to disconnect unused services because they had no idea what they were unplugging."

The frequent moves of company employees only compound the prob-

ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID CUTLER

lem. Every time an employee shifts cubes, or a new employee comes on board, the IS staff must manually document the move to keep the topology of the network up to date. "But the trouble is, manual documentation is time-consuming and tedious and frequently doesn't get done," says McNees. "Depending on manual updates virtually guarantees that the

out the lifetime of the network and technical infrastructure," says AMP NETCONNECT's Beam. "IT executives can expect to see a return on investment anywhere from six to 18 months after purchase. AMPTRAC pays back the initial investment many times over during the lifetime of the network."

By removing the guesswork from

With AMPTRAC, IS executives can define their own business rules for any event, be it authorization procedures or connecting and disconnecting. The result: decreased network outages and increased workforce productivity. Because AMPTRAC provides real-time, accurate network documentation that pinpoints problems, troubleshoot-

INFONETICS: UP TO 69 PERCENT OF NETWORK OUTAGES CAN BE TRACED TO THE NETWORK'S HARDWARE— NOT THE SOFTWARE.

network will get out of control."

Adding fuel to the fire is the fact that network managers spend only 7 percent of their time planning for the network, according to a study by Infonetics Research. Small wonder that things get lost in the mix.

"If you want to know what's on your network, status quo methods of addressing the problem won't work," says Sewell. "Companies need to find a way to build automated network intelligence into the process."

THE SOLUTION: AMPTRAC
Connectivity Management System
AMPTRAC is a new connectivity management system that provides intelligent, automated management of the physical layer of corporate networks. Combining Tyco Electronics' AMP NETCONNECT cabling system with real-time infrastructure management software from iTRACS, the AMPTRAC system allows enterprise CIOs to minimize network downtime, reduce IT staff workload and streamline the moves, adds and changes (MACs) that compromise network uptime.

"The iTRACS time-tested software, in tandem with the AMP NETCONNECT cabling system, will help pull CIOs out of the dark when it comes to proactively managing their physical network," says iTRACS' McNees.

AMPTRAC provides long-term assurance that CIOs can manage the network cabling intelligently and with confidence. "This is an infrastructure tool that will provide benefits through-

maintaining and troubleshooting the network cabling system, AMPTRAC is able to improve:

Mapping
The AMPTRAC system's series of customizable screens maps out the existing connectivity of the network, including unused office ports or servers. IS technicians can then make changes with confidence, knowing that AMPTRAC provides an accurate representation of the physical layer.

MACs
The system automatically updates the map of the network every time a MAC is made. "By automating a lot of manual procedures that are tedious and time-consuming, AMPTRAC greatly reduces errors caused by manual updates, as well as decreasing the workload of IS staffers," says Sewell.

Mistake Avoidance
AMPTRAC helps prevent mistakes from being made in the first place. For example, say Bill in accounting is moving from the third floor to the fourth, but the technician mistakenly switches his coworker Mary's port instead. "Now you have two outages when you didn't expect to have any," says McNees. "Try to diagnose that one." AMPTRAC would eliminate the problem. "Our system would send an alert out, and the technician couldn't close out the work order on Bill until the work was finished correctly. At the same time, it would open a work order on Mary, alerting the technician to the situation."

ing the cabling system becomes a breeze. "AMPTRAC will provide 100 percent assurance that it has identified the root cause of a problem," says Beam, "so technicians can be confident that they have fixed the right thing."

The solution also enables CIOs to proactively analyze the utilization of the network. "About 40 percent of most existing networks are underutilized simply because CIOs don't have a clue as to what's out there," says Beam. AMPTRAC, with its accurate representation of the network's physical layer, helps IS executives save money by better managing existing resources.

AMPTRAC also provides stringent security protection. "If somebody disconnects a cord in the network, you'll know about it because AMPTRAC will send an alarm," says McNees.

It all adds up to a solution that is vital to the efficient management of a corporate network—by any measure, the central nervous system of any business.

By reducing downtime and increasing productivity—by providing network intelligence—AMPTRAC is a good bet toward increasing the bottom line. After all, what helps the network ultimately helps the business. •

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