

# Evaluate Your Company's Network

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If it seems like computer technology is changing every day, you're absolutely right. You're probably wondering how you can keep up with the ongoing changes and upgrades. Well, believe it or not, there's an answer to staying ahead of the curve while maintaining your computer network's speed and reliability.

First of all, consider hiring an outside company to evaluate your current system. There are companies that are setup to conduct a network audit of your system for a nominal fee. This important step could possibly save you money and time in the long run. Upon completion, the consultant company will provide you with a document of results and a plan of action. Once you prioritize your action items, you can proceed with the confidence of knowing that you're on the right track to improving your network. Here is a list of items that should be evaluated:

## 1. Cabling

Cabling is the lifeline to your network. Old or damaged cable can affect the overall speed and reliability of your connectivity. If you're experiencing intermittent network drops, one of the first items you should inspect is cabling.

NIC Card – Network Interface Card

– this hardware is designed to allow computers to communicate over a network. Your Ethernet cable attaches directly to the NIC card on your computer. This hardware dictates how fast your computer is able to send and receive information over the network. A fast network does you no good if your computer is equipped with an out of date or slow NIC Card.

## 2. Switches & Hubs

Faulty switches and hubs can wreak havoc on a network. If not performing properly, a whole network can be negatively affected.

## 3. Computers

Out of date computers can expose your network to damaging viruses. It's important that all computers on a network remain updated and virus free. It's a fact that a simple virus on one machine can literally immobilize an entire network.

## 4. Security/Firewall

How secure is your network? Is your current firewall really protecting you? Often times, a faulty firewall can cause intermittent network connections and can lead to the destruction of your network. There are many products on the market. Research your options and pick the one that best fits your situation.

## 5. Spam Software

Controlling email spam is the first line of defense for protecting your network from hackers and malicious viruses. Each computer on your network should be running the latest anti-spam software. Often times, viruses are disguised in email attachments. Viruses are developed every day, so it's important to keep your anti-spam software updated by downloading upgrades as soon as they are available.

Establishing a technology budget is a key element in protecting your computer network. You should plan to evaluate and replace, if necessary, old equipment and software annually or as needed. Adhering to a schedule will help to avoid having to spend large sums of money to replace entire networks. Expenses are better managed when your costs are spread out over time.

If your office relies on the stability of your computer network, take the precautions to assure that you minimize the possibility of downtime. If you're spending more effort fixing your network than serving your customers – it's probably time to follow the steps outlined in this article.

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