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Eliminate network bandwidth hogs

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COLUMBIA, Mo. – Nothing brings productivity in the office to a near standstill quite like a slow Internet connection. This problem is often exacerbated when company employees frequently browse Web sites and run applications not related to work during office hours. Establishing a cut and dry policy on employee Internet usage is a useful first step, but sometimes this isn't enough. Fortunately, there are several options for proactive owners and IT managers to improve the performance of their network and get the most bandwidth for their money.

According to a Burstek Industry Internet User Survey, 21 percent of corporate bandwidth costs can be attributed to personal usage by employees. Internet video and audio content delivery are the main culprits. Peer-to-peer file-sharing applications such as BitTorrent account for 44 percent of all bandwidth used in North America and streaming technology accounts for 14.8 percent.

"Delivery of audio and video content by streaming technology places an unnecessary strain on the company's network," said Adam Barratt, network engineer at Socket, a Missouri-based phone and Internet provider. "In a worst-case scenario this could crash the office router and bring productivity to a halt since most employees are so computer dependent."

An even more alarming statistic suggests that 19 percent of personal Internet use at work poses serious security risks to a network. Most employees do so unknowingly. In fact, it was recently discovered that the number of compromised

legitimate Web sites outnumber the amount of artificial Web sites created by hackers.

"Simply shutting down your computer at the end of the day is an easy way to reduce vulnerability to spyware and

worms," said Barratt. "Be sure the option for automatic security updates is turned on for all programs."

Several services and tools are available for network managers to monitor and control how bandwidth is being distributed. You can even gather a rough estimate on how much casual Internet surfing is costing your organization by running the Web Filtering Cost Savings Calculator available at <http://www.websense.com/global/en/ResourceCenter/CostSavingsCalc/>. If in doubt, a complete network audit can be very helpful in maximizing network performance and security.

"If nothing else seems to work, it might be time to upgrade your connection," said Barratt. "More bandwidth will mean better speeds for everyone in the company, and upgrading to a new Internet technology could even result in better reliability and redundancy."

As trends in Internet usage continue to evolve, network operators and IT managers will have to become more adaptive and resourceful in order to identify these bandwidth hogs and proactively correct them. Fortunately, there is technology and services available to put Internet usage in the office in perspective. All a company needs is the will to implement a clear policy and stick to it. Doing so will save time and avoid unnecessary harm to crucial data





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