

System Administrator for a small LAN

One of the biggest problems companies have is finding the right person to manage their LAN(s). All too often, company managers underestimate the amount of work needed to keep even a small LAN operational. Although small LANs must be able to do essentially the same things as large LANs, small company LANs are not managed the same way that the LANs of large facilities are managed. Typically, larger facilities hire at least one full-time LAN expert to manage the network; sometime they have a whole team.

Small company networks, on the other hand, are normally managed by someone who is already at the company performing another job full-time. And although the job is generally assigned to the person who has the most computer expertise, that person's level of computer experience can vary from years to only months.

This lack of experience can be a real problem in a small system because the LAN manager has a high task even within small networks. Regardless of system size, all LANs have a minimum number of functions that they must perform. For example, even a LAN that consists of as few as two workstations needs to be able to share data files and program files. In addition, the LAN must be kept free of computer viruses, incompatible software, and unauthorized users.

To make the LAN safe, the system administrator must be responsible for installing (and removing, as necessary), all software remains functional and all data files are backed up on a regular basis.

But file sharing is only one of the reasons that companies install LANs. LANs provide capabilities to send messages back and forth between workstations, share resources such as modems and printers, and maintain system schedules so that company meetings do not conflict with other company operations. The LAN manager must ensure that all system components are working together correctly.

Of course, the average size for a small LAN is not just two workstations; it is usually between 4 and 20 workstations. And, although most workstations today are used by only one user, generally a system with a dozen users or so will be handling one and a half to twice as many users as there are connected workstations. This is because many of the users will also have remote systems and profitable computers that are operating remotely. And although remote systems do not necessarily do things differently than local

systems, it is necessary to add a layer of additional security to the system at the remote node, since anyone could, potentially attempt to log in from outside.

Considering the amount of work required of a typical LAN administrator, it is clear those small companies which are considering installing and maintaining a small LAN should examine all the work their system is going to require before just appointing someone. And if it turns out that the small LAN is going to be doing a big job, even a small organization would benefit from getting a qualified LAN systems administrator whose primary function is to keep the LAN running.