

What's This Server Thing I Keep Hearing About?

A server is a dedicated computer which fulfills requests from other computers. Once you add a server your network is transformed from a basic peer-to-peer network into a client/server network.

A server provides a computer-related service when asked. Servers can "serve" many different kinds of services. Large networks can have many servers all over the world. Usually a server has a primary responsibility. Those that provide file-sharing are called file servers. Those that server Web pages are called Web servers, and so on. However, in smaller networks, a single server can perform all these duties.

Servers need special operating systems which are optimized for providing services as opposed to serving a single user; so you can't let an employee use it as their workstation. The special operating systems are much more difficult to install and configure than installing Windows on a desktop.

Any server can performs several duties at the same time. Some of the most common are:

- Log On Authentication
- Internet security
- Running business databases
- Hosting a Web server
- Hosting of an e-mail server
- File sharing services
- Anti-virus management

So, What Are the Benefits of That Techno-Babble?

Small businesses solve nearly many of their problems by taking one simple action: installing a server. Yet 40% of the 3.2 million companies still don't have a server.

- Centralized data management. Everything goes on the server. Everyone makes their changes on the server. No more worrying about who's got which file.
- Handle network access in one place. Servers manage the Internet all from one location, cutting connection costs and making users' Internet accounts secure.
- You get easy automatic backups. Avoid disaster recovery nightmares. Since the data is in one place, backing it all up is simple. Servers include routines to run backups at any time you want. Set them once and you'll never have to think, "Is today a backup day?"
- Reinforce your network security. Server software makes it easy to lock down your data and your network. It also provides an additional layer of protection, for itself and for the network. Control exactly which computers can connect to your data.
- Lower support and maintenance costs. Servers can handle updates for all their PCs automatically, eliminating the time you'd otherwise have to put in to do each one.
- One server-based software license is more cost-effective than multiple individual licenses. This is always true with anti-virus software. Trend Micro sells a server-based ten (10) computer anti-virus software for \$400.ⁱ



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With all the problems it solves, it's easy to see the value of having a server for your small business. As certified professionals, R-Squared Computing engineers have installed numerous small business servers. We've learned firsthand how they reduce downtime and dramatically improve your employee's productivity.

So, What Are Some Dangers A Server Helps Me Avoid?

- Sometimes, companies install a basic router (without configuring it) to share an internet connection. If it isn't configured properly you open yourself to hackers. Plus, if the router's wireless, there's a 64% chance it's unsecured.ⁱⁱ
- File/data transfer is often done through private email accounts (AOL, Google, Yahoo, MSN, etc.) or physically moving files from PC to PC on CDs or USB flash drives. There's no management when it comes to private email or physical file transfer. And no security.
- Speaking of security, about all that's done to keep unwanted attention out is installing software firewalls on each PC, like ZoneAlarm or the Windows XP firewall. This is an okay security measure – certainly better than nothing. But without proper configuration and backups, it's not going to withstand a serious attack.
- And backups? Maybe one or two PCs – “the important ones” – get backed up to CD or a second hard drive once in a while. When the user remembers to do it. More than 60% of small businesses don't backup at all.
- In a decentralized setup like this, each PC has to have individual licensing for its software. Software licensing is the largest expense for small business IT budgets. Windows, Office, Adobe, any specialized programs...those costs add up fast.
- Finally, hardware is hard to share. If you want to print on Kathy's printer, you need to email or walk your file over to her system and ask her to print it for you.

Conclusion

If you're not running a server for your small business and you have six or more (6+) employees, you should consider a server solution. The information provided here only touches the surface of what a proper network can do for you. Options like free remote access, e-mail services and dynamic business reporting systems will also be available to you once you implement a server.

ⁱ [Trend Micro 10 User Anti-Virus Software](#)

ⁱⁱ This statistic has been gathered from R-Squared internal records.