

Keeping computer setup after numerous changes

My computer consulting business has definitely changed over the past six months since the economy started tanking last fall.

Not only have things slowed down, but the type of work has migrated from 60 percent configuring new hardware and software compared to 40 percent fixing existing infrastructure to only 20 percent new stuff and 80 percent fixing existing computer hardware and software.

People want to make their existing systems last longer and that is why I wrote the column "Saving on Your Computer Costs" back on Feb. 1 of this year, which is available at www.DeansConsulting.com.

With the latest round of layoffs at multiple companies in the county, one other activity I have been involved in is moves, adds and changes of the computers, printers and other peripherals.

This is due to the remaining employees having to wear additional hats with new responsibilities and decreased activity making necessary the change of their physical locations at the office. In other words, after personnel shake-ups, people are going to get moved around and their computers usually follow them.

Fifteen years ago back in my large



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enterprise computer management days, we would have to plan for weeks to play musical offices with hundreds of people at a time.

Back in 1992 we worked for six months putting a strategic plan together at British Petroleum to move 800 people over the Thanksgiving weekend from the old office at Sage in Houston out to

the new office at Westlake near I-10 and Highway 6.

In just a four-day period my team disconnected and reconnected, tested and verified, ran and cursed, finally migrating 800 Apple Macintosh's along with dozens of servers and hundreds of printers.

Working 16 hour days that four-day weekend, we had everyone up and operational by Monday at 8 a.m. and then my team crashed out for drinks and much needed rest.

Moves on that scale are history for me now, but they have been increasing on a smaller level over the past few months. For businesses around Brenham there are some technical things that you need to address before, during and after the moves which can help make the transition smoother.

Planning is the key to a successful move and preparations should be made days before migrations rather than just

hours or minutes. First make sure there are similar network connections at the target locations to accommodate the incoming computers.

If you are combining offices and putting multiple people into one location, then have your computer cabling vendor run new CAT5 UTP wiring to the side of the room where the addition desk is going.

Try to avoid throwing down Ethernet switches and especially older hubs to have multiple network connections in a single office. This is because it is always better to have one computer on a single CAT5 run so you can better troubleshoot network problems with intelligent Ethernet switches.

Things can get confusing when one port on a SNMP enabled Ethernet switch has numerous computers downstream of it.

Though it may be tempting to just move the person and not their computer with them, try NOT to do this. You will be surprised how computers and their applications can be customized over time to an employee's work needs.

Trying to save time by just sitting a person at a new desk with a different computer to save the system move operation can be a disaster.

It can be disrupting enough moving employees around but change their computer the same day and you are asking for trouble. With small companies ask-

ing the workers to do more just to stay employed, they end up having numerous applications, printers connections, and specific settings that they rely on to get all their daily tasks completed.

If new computers are involved it is better to get the move done separately from the new computer. Either upgrade them before or well after the move since doing both the same day creates too many problems.

Also, move their printer that is connected via USB or parallel cables with the computer rather than trying to adapt and reconfigure printers already existing at the new location. Dealing with printing problems and hunting down drivers on move day is no fun.

This goes double with label or specialty printers like the ones attached to computers running the UPS World Ship application. The last thing you want to do is shutdown the company's shipping person on a Friday afternoon just after a move.

Keep the same keyboards, mice, monitors, readers, external hard drives, Web cams and anything else that is physically connected to the computer that is being moved. This even includes the mouse pad and any other ergonomic pads. People can be very picky on keeping their human interface devices.

What I have done in the past is to take a digital picture of the workstation's physical layout with a digital camera

just before I take everything apart. Since most cell phones have this capability it is very quick and easy to take a digital snapshot of how and where the computer and everything attached to the computer is laid out and connected.

You do not want to have to re-move monitors, shift printers and re-run keyboards after the move due to a fussy user that insists she cannot work with the monitor on the left rather than the right.

By the way, you may even be jumped on for losing any post-it notes lightly stuck to their computer. This can include those stupid fuzzy creatures sitting on the monitor.

Basically you want to keep everything connected to the to-be-moved computer with the computer so all the components can easily be reconnected at the destination location. For big number moves use large boxes labeled with the person's name and their target office number.

Bottom line: Computer moves can be disrupting but you can avoid numerous problems by keeping the original computer setup together as much as possible so your employees can keep their act together.

Next week's column: MS Project.

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