

Is Your Network Ready for Mobile, Video and Big Data?

HOW TO MAKE THE CASE FOR NETWORK CAPACITY PLANNING

It's the rare enterprise that has unlimited network capacity; most organizations tend to get by — sometimes barely — with what they think they need due to budget constraints or unenlightened management. But as bandwidth-intensive emerging technologies such as social media, mobile traffic, and video invade the workplace, network capacity must keep up.

If an enterprise's network can't handle the burden, there will be a negative impact on the business. Employee productivity will be impaired because data files load more slowly, applications perform more sluggishly (or not at all), and collaboration becomes more difficult and sometimes impossible. Further, customer service and even customer sales could suffer as people lose patience over network and transaction delays.

While those adverse outcomes affect the bottom line, that connection isn't always obvious to enterprise business decision makers. Thus, it's vital that IT leaders communicate the business case for effective network capacity planning.

A recent IDG QuickPulse research report underscores the network capacity challenges facing IT professionals, as well as the opportunities created through network capacity planning. The report is based on an online survey conducted in March 2015 of IT and business

leaders, of which the vast majority are heavily involved in network capacity planning within their organizations.

Bottlenecks and outages

The survey results highlight a real disconnect between enterprise belief and practice regarding network capacity planning. Though 84 percent of respondents agree that aligning IT operations with the needs of the business is the most important potential benefit of proactive network capacity planning, only one-quarter (27 percent) say they consistently “anticipate and proactively manage capacity needs.”

Not surprisingly, this disconnect impacts the enterprise. Six in 10 of survey respondents (61 percent) report performance issues with either internal applications or customer-facing and transactional applications. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of respondents report downtime for internal applications over the past year, while 20 percent say customer-facing and transactional applications failed in the past 12 months due to network capacity constraints.

Again, these performance issues can impact revenue, efficiency, productivity, morale, and even employee turnover. After all, younger employees who have grown up in the broadband age have no more tolerance for poor network performance than they do for being forced to use ancient company-issued devices; both of which impact their ability to do their jobs easily.

Capacity planning roadblocks

The disconnect between the perceived value of proactive network capacity planning and its implementation in the real world is the result of a number of factors, but lack of effort on the part of most IT leaders isn't one of them. The survey shows that more than half (53 percent) of respondents say they “make the business case” for network capacity planning to non-IT stakeholders.

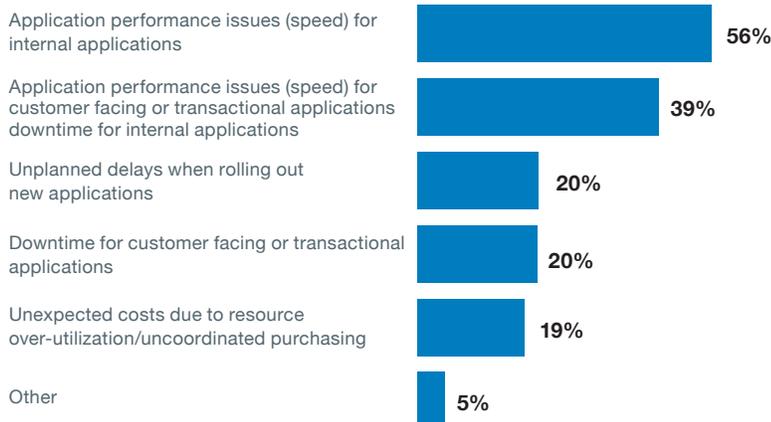
However, numerous obstacles stand in their way. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of respondents cite budget limitations as the “greatest barrier to network capacity planning.” While tight budgets typically are the



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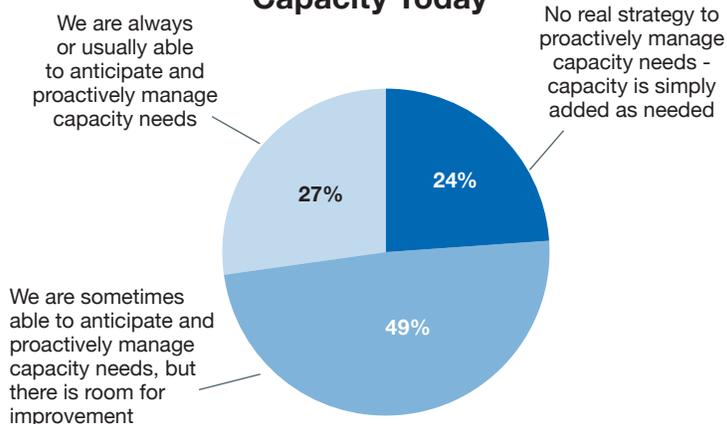


Issues Experienced in the Past 12 Months Due to Insufficient Network Capacity



SOURCE: IDG Research Services, March 2015

Strategy for Managing Network Capacity Today



SOURCE: IDG Research Services, May 2015

first reason given for why IT can't spend money, the survey indicates that a lack of awareness among business decision makers regarding the impact of poor network capacity planning actually may be fueling those budget constraints.

Nearly half (42 percent) of survey respondents said "limited understanding on the part of the business" regarding the impact of poor capacity planning is a major barrier. This myopia trickles down to enterprise business users, with nearly four in 10 (39 percent) having limited understanding of bandwidth requirements, survey respondents say.

IT leaders trying to convince business decision makers about the importance of network capacity planning often lack the tools to make their case, the survey shows. More than one-third (37 percent) say they don't have monitoring software that would enable them to "gather, analyze and present network data to business decision makers."

Making the case

This presents a real Catch-22: If you don't have the tools to collect data that could support a decision to invest in network capacity planning, it's going to be hard to persuade business decision makers to approve any type of investment.

That may be hard, but not impossible. Susan Tran, a senior marketing manager for CA Technologies Unified Infrastructure Management product line, says it's important to link network capacity with the ability of enterprises to leverage emerging technologies

available to them (and their competitors).

"Capacity planning is very necessary in the age of mobility, BYOD, big data, cloud computing, video and social media, all of which have a tremendous impact on the enterprise network," she says. Since many business leaders easily grasp the importance of these tools, as well as big data and analytics, tying their performance to network capacity can be a persuasive argument, Tran says.

Another selling point for network capacity planning is that it not only ensures an enterprise has enough bandwidth when needed, it helps save money by preventing overprovisioning, a common and often costly network management strategy. In fact, 57% of respondents said that reducing costs through tactics like minimizing the number of servers is an important benefit of proactive network capacity planning.

Once IT leaders can convince business decision makers that proactive network capacity planning can improve the efficiency of the enterprise and save money, the next step is to make a case for network monitoring tools that can analyze traffic and offer transparency.

"Is your bandwidth being consumed with March Madness games or business-critical traffic?" Tran asks. "If you're not able to answer that, it's important to have the right solution in place to be able to."

The right solution, she says, must provide complete visibility into the network. "That means 100 percent of network traffic, including host conversations, capacity of consumption, traffic patterns, quality of service policies, and anomaly detection," Tran says. "Until you understand the type of traffic that goes across your network, there's really not enough information to do appropriate capacity and consumption planning."

Network capacity planning really is about the satisfaction of the end-user, whether it's an employee, a business partner, or a customer. "It's the experience you want your customer or your end user to walk away with and remember when they leverage the services you provide," she says.

"Network capacity management may not be the most glamorous practice," Tran says, "but it is key in enabling your business to offer the services that could be business critical or differentiating for your organization." ■

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