Managing Your Business's Growing Connectivity Needs

How You Can Benefit from Network Capacity Planning

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›› Upgrading your network can be a complex task when you have to consider how an upgrade will fit into your budget and still allow for later expansion. In this issue of Connect with Experts, PC Connection solutions architect and certified HP Networking specialist Justin Baron shares his expertise with network capacity planning and how a plan for upgrading your network today can also ensure it will fit your needs as your business grows.

Q: What are a couple of good reasons that IT departments would want to develop a capacity planning strategy?

A: I think the key is that IT needs to stay one step ahead of the business. Proper capacity planning is an enabler that helps us to shift the ratio of IT operations from reactive to proactive. Ultimately, IT's goal is to improve end-user workflows, to enable better productivity and, at the same time, improve operational efficiencies to reduce costs.

Q: What are some common challenges you hear from customers when they set out to do some of this capacity planning?

A: One of the major challenges is that it's very difficult for the business to predict how it's going to grow and change over time. Businesses are looking for increased collaboration among users, to provide the best possible experience for their clients, and to maintain a competitive advantage in their marketplace as well. At the same time, the business doesn't want to overspend when it comes to IT. So how do you determine the right size, the right tools, the right tactics, the right timing, and then ultimately what the right investment strategy is?

Q: When customers are starting to look at capacity planning, they think their data center is going to be growing, so they definitely should be looking at a cloud solution. Is a cloud solution always the best choice?

A: It really depends. The concept of cloud is very appealing in some regards. For example, you've got the promise of uptime; it's very complementary to the concept of mobility computing, the idea that you can handle spikes in workloads very cost-effectively as opposed to building for those spikes internally. But at the same time, cloud presents challenges and questions. How do you make sure that you can support SLAs across your various IT systems and workloads? How do you handle federation between your on-premise systems and the cloud systems with the cloud providers? How can we ensure that we can enforce our business security standards? How do we monitor an increasingly distributed IT environment? And ultimately, does cloud offer the level of control that IT really wants and needs and has become accustomed to?

Q: What about those individuals where it turns out maybe that cloud is not the right path? What's an alternative path that has worked for other customers of yours?

A: The key is that when designing on-premise systems, with the overall goal of not over-investing or over-spending, we often are looking at network technologies that are very, very scalable. And HP specializes in networking solutions that are flexible. This is especially important when the business grows, and the functional needs over time are somewhat uncertain. HP solutions for a network infrastructure offer scaling capacity in somewhat of a grid-like manner, for things like core switching, telephony, video systems and so forth. They also allow for scaling functionality over time by adding on software features via licensing. The overall idea is to make sure we're choosing proper platforms and deployment tactics that allow them to grow as their business needs evolve.

Q: Do you have an example how customers have succeeded, going that route?

A: I've got two that I'd like to mention, on differing ends of the spectrum. One of our clients was looking, in addition to handling an actual refresh of their network, to modernize the network itself. They also wanted to get into a solution that would allow them to failover between their two data centers, for a sort of data center level fault tolerance. We ended up choosing a solution from HP due to a

technology that they offer called IRF. This allowed us to build a distributed core network across the buildings, and it also permits grid-like scaling over time. As the data center inevitably grows, we're going to be able to add additional units to the grid.

Then, on the other hand, we have an enterprise client that had a business initiative to consolidate their core IT services to a co-location facility. They knew that they were going to have scalability needs in that facility, but they were somewhat unclear about what those needs would be. They also had somewhat of a budget constraint despite having these lofty requirements. We used a technology solution and deployed a platform that permits scaling in either an upward or an outward manner without disruption in that new data center. So for both of these examples we were able to put together a cost-effective, futureproof solution.

Q: Once an organization has a capacity plan in place, what are some of the next steps to take to implement that plan?

A: PC Connection can support our clients across all areas of IT operations, as well as infrastructure. We offer a wide variety of consulting services, assessment services, and overall guidance capabilities, in addition to our engineering services. I'd recommend that anyone interested in talking about these concepts reach out to their Account Manager and set up a time to talk about these matters with some of our subject matter experts.

To learn more about how PC Connection can help you create a network capacity plan for your growing business, contact your Account Manager today.

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If your organization is looking to upgrade or expand your network, the first step is to understand the capabilities and shortcomings of your existing network. Our Network Assessment and Network Inventory services can help you chart your network's strengths and weaknesses so you can choose where to allocate funds for maximum effectiveness.

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