

Practical Tips

- WordPerfect 6.0 for Windows ships with a macro called ALLFONTS.WCM, which creates a document that shows samples of every font on your system. The ALLFONTS.WCM macro is found in the default WordPerfect macro directory. To create the installed fonts document, select TOOLS*MACRO*PLAY, then press <F4> to display the list of macro files. Choose the ALLFONTS.WCM file and click OK and then PLAY. It will take a few minutes for WordPerfect to create the font sample document.

- To protect your WordPerfect 5.1 for DOS setup, back up the file WP{WP}.SET, which is located in the application's program directory. This file houses changes that you made in the WordPerfect Setup menu (accessed by <SHIFT><F1>); if you ever lose or damage it, you can restore a copy from the backup you made to bring back your settings. You can also copy this file to another computer if you want to customize that system's settings quickly.

—Ronald E. Kaplan

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Applied Technology:

A Checklist to Make Sure That Your LAN Is Working Properly

By Ronald E. Kaplan

FRIDAY MORNING, filing deadlines are approaching, and your LAN crashes. People are in a panic. The LAN administrator's phone is ringing off the hook. Familiar?

Law firms have so embraced LAN technology that work virtually halts when the system is unavailable. Some firms are left with no access to programs or documents, while others have workable, although suboptimal, access to their work product and programs. The length of time until recovery from this disaster rides on several components: difficulty in

isolating the cause, availability of replacement parts, the time for your technician to arrive on-site and the quality of documentation of your system. Your exposure to this nightmare is minimized by safety-checking your LAN.

You read about safety checklists for your car. Every professional tune-up includes a safety check of critical parts and systems of your car in order to review components of the car that wear over time. While some worn parts may only cause suboptimal performance, others could result in

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Product Review:

The Right Case Management System Won't Keep You on PINS & Needles

By Steve Bowden

FOUR YEARS AGO, my law firm was struggling to keep up with 200 to 300 open cases. I was working every night to give my staff something to do the next day. The firm was losing cases because prospective clients had the impression we couldn't handle the caseload. Things have changed, however. Now, the firm effectively handles more than 500 open cases, and I no longer have to work nights to prepare instructions for my staff. The dramatic turnaround was the result of two smart decisions: hiring my wife, Carlyn, as office manager, and purchasing PINS, a computerized

case management system from Chesapeake Interlink, Ltd.

During her first month as office manager, Carlyn watched as I juggled several hundred open cases. She spent most of her own time looking for lost files. When clients called in to discuss cases, I was usually the only one who could talk to them since no one else knew what was going on. Most frustrating, however, was the fact that Carlyn and other staff members could not proceed with the cases until I told them what to do.

It was at this point that I suggested we investigate acquiring a computer-

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How to Ensure That Your LAN Is Working Properly

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expensive repairs or an accident. What about your LAN? Has it ever had a safety check?

Why Maintain Your LAN?

Like your car, a LAN changes dynamically. In addition to parts wearing and aging, over time software comes and goes from the LAN and the user count changes, as do security requirements, and most

everything else which defined the original configuration. Moreover, your LAN differs from a car in a fundamental way: it was not assembled with the critical quality control characteristic of automobile manufacturing.

LANs are actually assembled on-site by a variety of system integrators with varying levels of skill. The components choices at the time may have been a function of the best value, the integrators' prejudices or simply availability, as well as being dictated by aspects of the environment (e.g., cabling) which were in place before the integrator got involved. Furthermore, someone unaware of the design criteria may have been maintaining the LAN subsequent to installation by the original integrator.

So your LAN probably never had a quality control check. It has been up and running for several years and many changes have taken place in your business — people have come and gone, software preferences have migrated and expanded, and profits and expenses now come from a different mix of activities. The LAN is a critical component in your organization's operations — are its current configuration and components appropriate for today's activities, much less your growth path? The consequences of a wrong or outdated configuration or components can vary widely: poor performance, system crashes, weak system security, user dissatisfaction and corrupt data files. As your business changes and the technology advances even as prices plummet, you need to make sure your LAN keeps pace.

The systems audit performed by an accounting firm should not be confused with the safety check suggested

in this article. The auditors are focused on whether your system produces reliable financial data. The LAN safety check is far broader in scope and outside the skill set of an auditor.

Who Should Conduct a Checkup?

Who should do the checkup? Clearly, not the people who set up your system or those responsible for its maintenance. A fresh, independent perspective is critical for this review to be truly valuable. You don't want retrospective justification or a self-interested position to skew the results. Just as when you get a checkup from your doctor, the familiarity with current developments and technology of the consultant performing the check up greatly enhances its value. The consultant should have a business perspective (not be just a technician), with knowledge of your specific line of business being even better. In other words, the greater the experience with LANs, the better, but an appreciation for the dynamics of your business is equally important.

The relative importance of the items on the above list directly relates to the priorities and critical function of your business.

A valid approach to summarizing the results of this checkup is a report card. Each item is assigned a weighing (may be unique for each company), developed with the expertise of the consultant, coupled with appropriate company personnel. The review produces a grade for each item with explanatory notes as appropriate. With this approach, the company can track its progress over the life of the system and this information will be valuable in migrating to a new system when that is appropriate.

When Should It Be Done?

This checkup should not be a one-time event. Depending on the rate of change in your company, it should be

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Ronald E. Kaplan is a management consultant with System Integration Consultants in Los Angeles, where he specializes in office automation of law firms. Telephone: (310) 551-0505, extension 527; fax: (310) 556-8115; E-mail: Rkaplan @ MCIMAIL.COM (592-6105).

A Checklist for Safety Checking Your Lan

Unplug your UPS. UPS batteries have a useful life of only two years. Isn't it a good idea to be sure that your UPS acts as more than an extension cord?

Autoloading files on your server. On Novell 3.11, it is the STARTUP.NCF and the AUTOEXEC.NCF. Are they complete so that, if the server is rebooted or power goes off longer than the UPS battery life, the server comes up properly, unattended? Are the files executed the current version? Do you understand each statement in each file?

Does your UPS communicate a power outage to the file server (and users), so the server can take the system down in an orderly way? Any current UPS has this function; using it can save you from corrupted files when the server comes back up after an extended power failure.

Unattended backup. Is your backup system triggered automati-

cally? Is the capacity of each tape sufficient to store the results of a backup session without a tape change? Do you have a plan for maintaining multiple generations of backup with some off-site?

File server capacity cushion. Network operating systems require disk space for ongoing activities, like printing and maintaining a list of file locations. If your server runs out of disk space while in operation, the potential loss is unpredictable.

Memory management on the workstations. Are your AUTOEXEC.BAT and CONFIG.SYS files consistent on all workstations? Do you take advantage of the advances in memory management so your applications are able to function as efficiently as possible? Are the files' contents documented?

System and user log-in scripts. Centralized administration of log-in scripts is desirable. Have your user

log-in scripts grown?

Search drives and drive mappings. Are your search drives dynamically created?

Current LAN and disk drivers.

Current versions of application programs. Current print drivers. Support phone numbers.

Documentation of system parameters and components.

Documentation of user procedures.

Documentation of system administration procedures (i.e., file restoration, communications server, downing the server).

Critical applications on local hard disks.

Cross-training of critical administration functions.

File server-based backup device.

Backup devices and software can be located on a workstation or file server. Until about a year ago, it made sense under certain circumstances to have the backup device attached to a workstation. Software and hardware changes have made it so that there are significant advantages to attaching the backup device to the file server.

Application training. What is the level of application training of your users?

Time restrictions for user log-in.

Forced password changes.

Documentation of workstation configurations.

Error log.

Backup validation log.

Virus scanning.

Write protected critical files and disks (e.g., CONFIG.SYS, AUTOEXEC. BAT).

Backup copies of critical floppy (e.g., file server boot floppy, workstation boot floppy).

Disaster recovery plan.

Documentation of the wiring layout. Is it complete, up-to-date? Are custom-configured cables documented?

Warranty and service information properly filed.

The list of items to check expands when you add your own business considerations or professional obligations. —Ronald E. Kaplan

Ensuring Your LAN Is Working

Continued from preceding page
done at least annually. It helps the company maintain its independence from outside vendors and inside system employees. It is a preventative tool that helps to avert problems before they happen.

How Much Will It Cost?

Expect to pay between \$3,000 and \$7,000 for a checkup, depending on the size and complexity of your LAN. Other factors that enter into the cost considerations are the technical

competence of your system personnel and their familiarity with the justifications for your current configuration. This is not the type of job to assign to a \$75-an-hour consultant or technician without the seasoning in LANs and up-to-date knowledge of technology.

The Next Steps

Does this apply to me and my law firm? Do I need a checkup? The answer lies in the degree of dependence you have on your LAN. If the survival of your company is dependent on the continuous operation of your LAN, the answers to those questions should be obvious. Hopefully, your system is well-documented, technologically up-to-date and well-maintained, and all you get from the checkup is a few pointers and the peace of mind of knowing everything is in order. Just think how much better you feel when you get a good checkup from your doctor. ■

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