

## The Value of Good Documentation

By Dan Bendell, President  
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Do you know who to call if your phones stop working? Can you quickly access your Internet Service Account Number? When does the service contract on your file server expire? If you have taken the time to perform an audit and document your technology systems you should be able to look in one place to quickly get these answers.

A systems audit is certainly not a glamorous project but the time and expense invested to perform one will be well worth it in the long run. Good documentation will greatly increase problem solving, speed the time to resolution, aid in the process of transitioning between support personnel, and function as an invaluable tool for improving process and control activities.

In fact, one of the greatest benefits of performing an audit is that the

process of collecting the relevant information will almost always reveal a number of deficiencies in the system that would normally go unnoticed.

### Guest Column

The basic information in any systems document should include the make and model, serial number, and configuration of key central resources such as servers, printers, and network equipment, but make sure you take the time to identify things like the status of service contracts and vendor contact and account information at the same time. To make the process easier, keep in mind that some systems are self-documenting; many devices such as routers and firewalls can dump their configuration to a text file that can be easily inserted into the document.

At the same time, be careful of trying to document too much. One of the

keys to building a document with the most value is knowing not only what information to collect but what information is not going to be really useful. Some aspects of your system (disk space, performance statistics, etc.) will be far too dynamic to try and keep current. Establish separate procedures to track this information. Try to reduce the total amount of information by eliminating redundancy. If all of the workstations are pretty similar, note that information once, then just identify and highlight the key differences.

Above all, the best documentation is not static; it is a living document that needs to be maintained over time. Identify those events that will trigger a required update to the document. You can make the document easy to use by taking advantage of simple formatting options in Word to build a self-generating index to key areas.

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