Sam Cattell

A SOLICITOR'S PRACTICE USES SIX STAND-ALONE COMPUTERS TO MANAGE CLIENT RECORDS, APPOINTMENTS, STAFF PAY AND ALL FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS. THE PRACTICE MANAGER IS CONSIDERING CHANGING TO A LAN. PREPARE A REPORT ADVISING THE MANAGER ON THE EQUIPMENT NEEDED, ON RELATIVE COSTS, ON THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CHANGING THE TYPE OF NETWORK YOU WOULD RECOMMEND.

Dear Sir

I am writing in answer to your previous enquiry. With a medium sized practice such as your own with six stand-alone computers, I would strongly recommend simply getting a non-hierarchical peer to peer as it simply would not be worth investing approximately £4,000 on a server. Also, the server is a large machine and you would need a large area for it to be kept, it would look a mess if in the actual practice, as all the cables would come from it. Also you would need to pay for someone to be trained as the network manager or the administrator. However there would be advantages with obtaining this, mainly the speed at which information could be transferred from computer to computer and on or around the Internet.

For the Internet consequently, I would recommend obtaining ISDN 2 for speed purposes. With six computers running off of the same line, a simple BT line would be too slow. ISDN also would be too slow, being split between six. ISDN 2 I believe would be enough for e-mails and research.

The cabling alone could cost in excess of £1000, and would also clutter up the practice. For the cabling the most common used, for cost effectiveness and speed fibre optic is the one to choose. However, with all the computers networked, this could get or look messy, not good for impressing potential clients. There are ways around the cabling problem. You could have them hidden behind a 'fake' wall, a lowered ceiling, through pillars in the building or another though slightly more expensive way, is to buy into the infra red hardware. With infra red there is no need for any cabling at all. However, computers must always have line of sight with each other for the hardware to work.

Security is an absolute must and so would strongly recommend a good piece of network software, so only users can log on, and passwords are a must for particular documents, e.g. - client records or staff wages.

I hope this aids you in your move forward in technology.

Yours Truly,

Sam Cattell

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