

Experts Update

Brought
to you
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March
2007

Ten Things You Need To Look For When Choosing Your Company's Anti-Virus Solution

Antivirus programs are no longer a best practice; they're a requirement. If a system has a power supply and runs Windows, it must have a first-rate antivirus application current with the latest signatures.

Don't make it easier for attackers to compromise the systems your business relies on for day to day operations - insist on these 10 elements in any antivirus application you implement.

1: Potency

An antivirus program is useless if it fails to identify and isolate viruses, worms, and similar infections. Productivity losses quickly mount when you have to clean machines of malicious software.

Removing infections from systems supposedly protected by antivirus applications only adds insult to injury. Avoid such frustration by ensuring that the antivirus platform you deploy effectively prevents infection.

Don't let persuasive ads or name-brand recognition talk you into specific brands. Research your options thoroughly and talk to your tech expert to learn their recommendations. The insight you'll gain is invaluable.

#2: Low overhead

Some mass-market antivirus programs have been known to bring minimally configured Windows systems to a standstill. This is why we don't sell or recommend Norton's Anti-virus products any longer - they simply take up too much memory.

An effective antivirus program must constantly work behind the scenes to monitor active applications. That's understood. But protective software apps requiring (or commanding) significant system resources often do more harm than good.

When selecting an antivirus application, review the program's system requirements. Before committing to a solution, test the application on several workstations to determine the true load that the program places on real-world equipment.

#3: Centralized administration

No one enjoys having to visit every workstation within the organization. That's just what you'll have to do, though, if you standardize on an antivirus application that doesn't support centralized distribution and administration.

Make sure the antivirus solution you select works well with Windows Intellisync and other mass client-deployment technologies (or has its own native deployment features).

Although some smaller companies aren't as dependent on time-saving deployment tools, remotely managing and administering antivirus applications is still most efficient, even in businesses with just 20 employees. By eliminating the need to visit those systems to configure scans, review logs, and maintain updates, strong centralized administration features more than pay for themselves.

#4: E-mail protection

It goes without saying that any antivirus solution should guard against infectious code sent or received in e-mail.

However, not all applications provide such protection. Even if your organization maintains an e-mail server- or router-based antivirus program, seek client antivirus apps that provide secondary e-mail protection.

Client-side e-mail security offers essential protection for your organization. It also safeguards its reputation, preventing users from infecting external customers, partners, and suppliers and keeping your organization off one of many troublesome spam lists.

#5: Compatibility

In addition to confirming that an antivirus application operates well with your operating system, check that it doesn't create errors when installed alongside business applications, proprietary programs, and other software packages. Some antivirus manufacturers do a good job of warning about known conflicts, others don't.

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How To Send or Share Very Large Files

Here's a question we receive quite often in our service department: "How can I send a 50-megabyte file to a customer, since it's way too big for an e-mail attachment? Are there ways to do it other than burning a CD and using postal mail?"

For server space and bandwidth reasons, many e-mail providers limit file attachments on a message to no more than 5 or 10 megabytes in size.

This often makes it difficult to send things like high-resolution photographs or digital video files as e-mail attachments.

If burning the files to a CD and mailing them isn't a workable option, there are other methods of electronically transferring your large files.

People or companies with their own Web sites often upload large files or folders to the Web server with a file-transfer program — and send the intended recipient a user name and password to use for retrieving the files. But this may not be an option for a lot of people.

Instead, several companies offer to transfer huge files over the Internet. Instructions for

using each service vary, so be sure to read the information on the site.

Pando, for example, has free and paid versions of its software for transferring files at www.pando.com, and it works with both Windows and Macintosh systems.

You can send files up to a gigabyte in size free through Pando, and the company has paid plans starting at \$5 a month to send even larger files from machine to machine.

YouSendIt (www.yousendit.com) is another service that promises to transfer your big files. You can send files of up to 100 megabytes free with its YouSendIt Lite service — or files up to two gigabytes in size with the company's \$5-a-month service.

Some free or inexpensive online file-storage services like Xdrive (www.xdrive.com), iBackup (www.ibackup.com) and FilesAnywhere (www.filesanywhere.com) also let you mark certain files for sharing. This means customers can download a large file themselves from your online storage drive, rather than dealing with e-mail attachments that are too big to fly.

When Does VoIP Make Sense For Your Business?

The Voice over IP (VoIP) landscape has exploded in the last five years. In its early implementation, Internet-based telephony was a hassle to implement, inconvenient to use, and far less reliable than regular or traditional phone service.

Today, our cup runneth over with VoIP services and providers, with pricing and features packages appropriate for everyone from individual/home users to small/medium businesses to the very large companies.

VoIP lines can connect seamlessly to regular lines and wireless numbers; to the end user, making a VoIP call is no different from placing a call on a cell phone or landline.

VoIP advantages

Early adopters of VoIP were motivated primarily by cost; depending on their phone usage and long distance habits, they could save tremendously on phone bills because:

1) Most VoIP plans don't charge extra for domestic long distance (and some services offer free international calls to certain countries, as well).

2) VoIP services often include, at no extra charge, features for which the traditional

telephone companies impose extra fees, such as caller ID, call forwarding, three-way calling, and voicemail.

3) VoIP has not been subject to all of the taxes and government-imposed fees that make up a large portion of the typical phone bill.

The big tradeoff in the early days was a lower quality in voice transmission and occasional dropped calls—pretty much the same disadvantages that plagued cellular phone service in its early days.

However, as VoIP has matured, transmission quality and reliability have improved to the point where they're now close to that of regular telephone service. VoIP users are also drawn by other advantages of IP-based voice services, including the ability to have VoIP phone numbers in the area code of your choosing, regardless of where you're physically located.

In effect, this gives you a low-cost way to maintain a virtual "local" presence in cities in which you do business so that customers there can call you without long distance charges, at much lower cost than alternatives such as an 800 number.



Choosing An Anti-Virus Solution, Continued

But the best bet is to install the solution (prior to a department- or organization-wide deployment) to test the antivirus software's interaction with other programs.

Pay particularly close attention if you're working with Microsoft Vista. Don't expect Windows XP-based antivirus software to work well with the newest desktop OS. In fact, in most cases, it won't.

#6: Effective reporting tools

Some antivirus solutions enable you to review reports from all configured clients via a Web interface. Others produce reports indicating threats, scans, and infections but require that an administrator visit each client to obtain that information.

Review your company's needs and determine which method will work best. Consider reporting features carefully. A program's logs and report information will prove invaluable in alerting you to problems before or as they occur.

#7: Technical support

Antivirus programs fail. It's inevitable. Sooner or later, you'll encounter strange failures, bizarre error messages, or inexplicable system freezes. Having access to the antivirus manufacturer's development staff is essential for successfully identifying a solution.

Before purchasing any software, check out the manufacturer's Web site. Find out whether the manufacturer provides a toll-free number for support, review any troubleshooting forums, and check which live assistance options exist.

#8: Certification

Just as an antivirus solution's potency is critical, so too is certification. Manufacturers can make all the promises and claims they want in marketing materials, but industry certification is hard won.

ICSA Labs, Virus Bulletin, West Coast Labs, the National Associate of Specialist Computer Retailers, and others all require antivirus programs to meet stringent requirements to receive certification.

Of course, certification isn't foolproof. But one way to know you're purchasing a trustworthy application is to confirm that the program has earned certification from these leading labs.

#9: Simplified licensing

Once you've identified an antivirus solution that's potent, compatible, and backed by quality technical support (among other elements), it's time to turn your attention to licensing.

Some manufacturers complicate licensing to the point that you can install a dedicated license on only a single machine. If that system's hard disk or motherboard fails (or the entire system goes down), under OEM terms your organization is likely required to purchase another license, even if the original term is yet to expire.

Review license requirements with care. It's often best to purchase client licenses by seat. Thus, if a workstation or server fails, migrating an existing license to the replacement system becomes a simple matter. (But expect to pay more for the privilege.)

Remember to factor in growth considerations when purchasing a specific number of seats. It's all too easy to exceed licensing limits signed six months ago. Keep detailed notes on how many systems receive antivirus software and keep the documentation current as workstations and servers are replaced or upgraded.

If you're very close to a quantity threshold (for example, you need 23 licenses), ask about purchasing a few extra licenses to take you to the next licensing level. You may very well find that the two or three additional licenses needed to move you to the next level end up costing you less than purchasing the exact amount you need. For example, the price difference between Level A and Level B may be \$3 or \$4 per seat.

#10: Reasonable cost

When purchasing fewer than 50 licenses, expect to pay approximately \$40 to \$50 per seat for an annual antivirus license. As an organization exceeds 100 licenses, costs can drop to as low as \$35 per user.

Unless an application includes firewall, anti-spyware, or antispam features, prices should fall within the above ranges. Any organization tempted to add firewall or anti-spyware tools to its antivirus application, especially for 20 or more users, might be better served pursuing a hardware-based solution (such as the ones provided by SonicWALL and other manufacturers) instead of a software-focused product.

No matter how secure you think your systems are, and how careful your employees are, anti-virus and anti-spyware solutions are critical to protecting your business. With more and more business transacted over the Internet, you must have a comprehensive protection suite installed.

Tech Experts works with several anti-virus applications, and our trained experts can help you choose the right solution for your business.





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Business VoIP Services, Continued

Another great advantage is that many VoIP services offer free voicemail services such as e-mail notification when you receive a call (along with a .WAV file of your voicemail messages sent to your e-mail address) that are either not available or cost extra with traditional telephone service packages.

VoIP disadvantages

VoIP technology still has a few disadvantages when compared with traditional phone service. Most notable is the inability to make phone calls during an electrical outage or when the Internet connection is down for any reason. In addition, some services that depend on phone lines, such as monitored alarm services, may require a landline, although there are now some alarm companies that offer service that works over a VoIP line.

Businesses that must rely on their phone service should take steps to ensure that their disaster recovery/business continuity plans cover their VoIP service. Measures might include maintaining some regular telephone lines for emergency use, backup generators, and/or redundant Internet connections with failover capability.

Finally, VoIP services are subject to the same security concerns as other Internet traffic.

Selecting VoIP services

Small businesses may be able to save a lot of money by using VoIP services primarily aimed at consumers, such as Vonage or Sunrocket. These and other consumer-level services offer small business plans with online account management and may include a separate fax line.

A good solution for a small or home-based business that only has two to five employees and needs only a couple of phone lines is to

order two VoIP boxes and plug both into a two-line base station system that supports multiple two-line handsets. Each worker can then use either line.

Larger businesses may need features that consumer level VoIP providers don't offer, such as the ability to transfer calls, put calls on hold, or create conference calls among more than three parties—although in some cases the telephone equipment you choose can allow these activities, even if the provider doesn't offer them. Larger VoIP providers generally include features like conference calling, music on hold, call queuing, scheduling and remote office features, and fax support.

Regardless of the size of your company, VoIP is now a viable option to traditional phone service, and may allow you to get more features and a wider scope of calling at a lower cost.

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