



Top 8 Considerations for Selecting SMB Network Monitoring Software

WHITE PAPER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Small-to-medium size businesses (SMB's) have limited IT staff and budgets, yet they still require a monitoring solution for cost-effective equipment diagnosis to maintain a healthy network. Use the following checklist to evaluate software vendors.

WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER?

- Is it an integrated product or must multiple add-ons be installed?
- Can it be easily configured?
- Does it have all the functionality you require?
- Can alerts reach you in real-time?
- Can one person manage the system?
- Is special hardware required?
- Will the vendor's customer service be there for you?
- Is it affordable?



As with larger enterprises, SMB's depend on a stable and efficient IT infrastructure to maintain business operations. Maximizing up-time through monitoring and mapping of network devices, as well as providing alerts to potential and actual disruptions, is a mission critical imperative. There are many solutions available in the marketplace to perform this function, but SMB's must find the best products that are appropriate to their needs and constraints. The following 8 considerations are the top criteria SMB IT professionals should evaluate when researching network monitoring software.

Integrated vs. Add-ons

An off-the-shelf, all-in-one solution will make the purchase decision safer, the install less painful and avoid surprising add-on costs. Some network monitoring vendors promote a base product with an associated menu of add-on modules to allow the end user to create customized capabilities, while other vendors have a more unified, all-inclusive product. The SMB IT professional should opt for the integrated product to insure that the product can do what you need it to do now and in the future, avoid the hassle of multiple installs and prevent unforeseen cost escalations.

Configurable

Once the monitoring application is installed, the IT professional will need to generate a map of the devices to be monitored. There should be a user-friendly graphical interface that does not require editing text files. Be sure that the vendor you select supports a robust auto-discovery tool that will scan your network and quickly and accurately find all the connected hardware and software you want to monitor. Some manual work may be required, but the heavy lifting of identifying the major connected equipment should not entail a huge time commitment.

Functionality

Basic data regarding up-time, packet loss, response times and error rates are widely available in most solutions. If you are concerned about bandwidth hogs at your organization look for monitoring software that can analyze packet flow information (NetFlow, sFlow, etc.). Flexibility to monitor any hardware, software or traffic is vital. You will want an at-a-glance view of your network with mapping and monitoring on the same screen to quickly highlight trouble spots. A diverse array of alerting/notification options to keep you in touch when you are not in the office is a great feature. One-click charting and built-in reporting will minimize the time you need to invest in analysis.

Real-time Alerting

If a device you are monitoring is malfunctioning or has gone down, you want to know as soon as possible, to minimize end user impact. The software should be able to poll your network every 30 seconds. Be sure there are user-friendly, customizable notification options to set up an alerting protocol. With a limited number of personnel on your team, it is essential that the alerting mechanism enable you to choose from multiple alerting mechanisms (e-mail, text message, etc.), easily escalate alerts from one person to another, or quickly change scheduling as a result of other commitments.



Staffing Requirements

Consultants should not be needed for the deployment of these tools. Beware of certain shareware solutions which may require extensive time and effort to set-up and maintain. It is common for one person to monitor a network of 100's of devices at a SMB, along with other duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, you'll want 24-hour access using a robust remote client, for out-of-hours management.

Special Hardware

The application should be able to run on an ordinary PC -- whether it's Windows, Mac, or Linux. Monitoring software should not eat up a lot of storage, RAM or require the latest processors. No need to spend your limited budget on a high powered server.

Customer Service

Make sure that the vendor has technicians available to walk you through any difficulties encountered during the initial installation and configuration. Monitoring solutions are mature technologies, so minimal customer service/support will be necessary after the installation and configuration.

Affordability

There is a highly competitive marketplace for network monitoring software. SMB's with 100 or fewer important devices should not spend more than a few thousand dollars for a license. Free shareware is available, but may lack the support, documentation and ease of install/configuration of commercial products.

Conclusion

If chosen carefully, the right network monitoring software can help the IT professional at an SMB optimize their network performance with minimal administration.



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ABOUT DARTWARE

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