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technology solutions that work

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About Us

Parallax Solutions is an information technology consulting firm located in the Waterloo/Cedar Falls area. What we are trying to bring to the table is a clear understanding of how offices can utilize hardware and software to effectively manage their electronic information.

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I hope you have enjoyed this issue of our newsletter. If you are concerned that your network isn't living up to its potential, give us a call.

Sincerely,

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Featured Products

CounterSpy Enterprise
APC UPS Systems

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Welcome to the latest edition of our technology newsletter. This month, we are covering firewalls and battery backup systems, more commonly known as the UPS. Both are vital components of any solid network. Enjoy.

Steve Bantz

Importance of Firewalls

Fortunately for us, there are a lot of options when connecting an office to the Internet. Affordable options ranging from DSL to fiber optic and beyond are all affordable means of getting your office on the information superhighway. However, you must make sure that you are protecting yourself from intrusion, which can put your entire corporate network at high risk.

A firewall is an investment that any office connected to the Internet should consider. Not only can it protect and safeguard your private network from Internet borne intrusion, it can also help filter what leaves your private network. Advanced firewalls have instrusion detection mechanisms in place to constantly monitor traffic and warn you of potential threats.

Consider the following scenario. PC's on your network become infected with spyware that sends out spam e-mail behind the scenes from each infected PC. A few days later, you realize that a lot of your outgoing business e-mail is being rejected because your domain has been blacklisted for spamming and you didn't even know it. If you had a firewall in place, you could have prevented this by configuring a rule that only allows outgoing mail from your corporate e-mail server and no other host on your network.

An additional feature a firewall can offer you is virtual private networking. By configuring the firewall to be a VPN tunnel endpoint, you can construct a secure HIPPA compliant VPN session to your office from anywhere. With the increased popularity of SSL VPN technology, you can also extend your network to authorized users with NO additional software to load on client machines.

The bottom line is, firewalls are absolutely necessary if you have a full time Internet connection. When configuring them, only open ports as necessary and make sure your configuration is correct. Hackers run port scans on random addresses daily and if they find an open door, they'll try to get right in and wreak havoc.

Battery backups

It's no secret that we are putting more of a demand on utility companies as technology continues to move forward. Even within the last five years, brownouts and blackouts have increased and they seem to happen at the most inopportune times. What does this mean to you? If you don't have a good quality uninterruptable power supply (UPS) protecting your servers, you might be more at risk that you think.

Many people think that a UPS is just there to keep the server running in the event of a power outage. The truth is, that's not all they can do if you choose your solution wisely. Fluctuating power can be the death of your equipment. Many good UPS systems have a boost/trim feature (known as AVR) which can supply the connected equipment with precise clean power at all times.

The other nice thing about a good UPS system is that it will come with software that allows your server to communicate with the UPS so that it always knows the charge status. If the battery is getting low, it can tell the server to shut itself down gracefully, avoiding an instant power loss. Instant power loss to a server is never good because it can cause data corruption to occur. Some database programs can become corrupt requiring hours of time to recover from.

How do you know which UPS to buy and why is there so much cost variance? In my opinion, they could have an all day class session on UPS systems and you still might be a little cloudy. The best thing to do is to go to a manufacturer's website, such as www.apc.com and run through their online recommendation wizards. Most manufacturers have major server vendors in their database, so you should be able to find your server and its power requirements on the UPS vendor's site. Of course, you could do it the old fashioned way and add up the power requirements of the devices you intend to attach to the UPS and then buy one with enough Volt Amps to meet your needs. Believe me, it's no easy task picking the UPS that is enough to meet your needs and not be overkill. Some of the models you see at Best Buy are rated at 1500 Volt Amps and they are attractively priced, but they may not have enough battery **capacity** to keep your system up for an extended period of time. Some of the more expensive models are also rated at 1500VA, but they have increased **CAPACITY** to keep your system up longer.

Bottom line? Get a UPS and the first time your power goes out, it might even pay for itself.
