

Outsourcing Network Support: The Surprising Strategy That Helps You Spend Less for Higher Uptime

*How small and medium-sized businesses
(SMBs) are outsourcing network support
to reduce spending, improve security,
and overcome IT issues faster*

By Brad Stites, CISSP

Director of Network Services

Ricoh Americas Corporation

Table of Contents

- 1.0 Executive Summary
- 2.0 Defining Network Support Services
- 3.0 Outsourcing Network Support in Small and Medium-sized Businesses
- 4.0 The Case for Outsourcing Network Support
- 5.0 Evaluating Network Support Services Providers
- 6.0 Conclusion

Executive Summary

Today, network support is a fundamental aspect of every organization because network performance has a direct effect on profitability and customer service. This white paper examines why large organizations tend to outsource network support, and explains why small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) should pursue the same strategy: to gain critical advantages in cost-efficiency, end-user productivity, and network uptime.

Network support services range from one-time projects to complete management of the tools and technology required to keep a network running: hardware, software, and infrastructure. Large organizations tend to outsource these services because they are complex and expensive to deliver internally, and because outsourcing creates opportunities to maximize return on investment from technology while reducing operating costs.

In SMB environments, network support is typically assigned to a single person or a small team. During times of peak network stress, this lack of internal resources creates significant problems. Outsourcing network support in SMB environments helps alleviate this problem, and allows each organization to pay only for what it needs. Important services for SMBs to consider for outsourcing include management of hardware, document output, software, and infrastructure, as well as off-site services such as remote monitoring, remote maintenance, and managed security.

There are four ways to build a case for outsourcing network support, all of which will appeal to an executive audience: 1. Outsourcing enables organizations to reallocate resources; 2. Outsourcing helps reduce operating expenses; 3. Outsourcing delivers critical competitive advantages; and 4. Outsourcing makes it easier to take advantage of new technology.

Depending on the size of your organization, you may need a local provider, a national provider with local presence, or a big-name consultant. As you evaluate potential partners, consider the provider's experience working in SMB environments and experience in IT, as well as document management expertise, breadth and depth of capabilities, product quality, scope of coverage, service and support infrastructure, and level of accountability.

Defining Network Support Services

Network support is rapidly becoming a business fundamental, whether your organization has an entire information technology (IT) department, a smaller IT group, a single network administrator, or an employee who knows who to call if the server goes down.

The reason is simple: the vast majority of organizations depend on a network (or a connected group of networks) to function. Even the smallest independent businesses, for example, those with up to 20 employees, likely have at least one back-office server and several connected workstations. If the network is not running properly, or not running at all — even for an hour — the consequences are dire. The organization can't complete transactions. Employees can't access applications, data, or documents, rendering many if not all of them unable to do their jobs. Customer service declines almost immediately, and the organization loses a considerable amount of money, both in hard and soft costs.

In short, network uptime is vital to success, not only in the business world, but in government, education, healthcare, and many other sectors. This simple need — for a robust, reliable, dependable network — creates the demand for a wide variety of services related to building, maintaining, protecting, and repairing networks and other elements of IT infrastructure.

This white paper will examine why so many large organizations are outsourcing network support to qualified third-party providers, and makes the case for small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to consider a similar strategy. Although outsourcing works differently in SMB environments than in global corporations, SMBs stand to gain tremendous benefits in cost-efficiency, end-user productivity, and network uptime — all of which ultimately improve customer service.

What exactly does network support involve?

Network support services run the gamut from one-time projects (for example, building a new network or supervising a software upgrade) to complete management of the tools and technology required to keep a network running: hardware, software, and infrastructure.

Hardware covers servers, clients (PC workstations), data backup systems, printers, digital multifunction products (MFPs), Internet-ready fax systems, scanners, and other peripherals. Software includes the applications employees use in their jobs, the operating system these applications run on, middleware that allows dissimilar applications to exchange information, and the tools used to monitor network activity and perform repairs, if necessary. Infrastructure includes all of the network's "plumbing," or the switches, routers, and cable necessary to achieve connectivity.

The specific services required to maintain network functionality are equally diverse. They include network design, installation, and configuration; asset management; fault monitoring; security management; workflow analysis and consulting; help desk; and change management (the process of planning and executing major expansions, improvements, or repairs).

Modes of service delivery vary as well. Depending on the size and complexity of the organization and its network, support services may involve a single in-house administrator, a small IT team (up to 10 people), a large IT department, or an entire army of IT departments deployed across hundreds of global locations.

The advantages of outsourcing

Organizations outsource network support services for a variety of reasons, all of which are tied to either a measurable financial benefit or an intangible competitive advantage. In general, however, organizations outsource network support services because they tend to be complex and expensive.

The pace of change in today's IT environment is unprecedented, and keeping up with the multitude of new developments in hardware, software, and infrastructure can be overwhelming. This task is essentially mandatory for any IT organization, because any network issue quickly becomes more difficult and more expensive to resolve if the team is not aware of new tools, new versions of existing tools, or new problem-solving methodologies. Adding to this complexity is the fact that networks are constantly changing. Organizations frequently add new assets, remove others, or upgrade existing components. While standardization is improving, connecting, reconfiguring, and maintaining the network remain time-consuming and ongoing challenges.

Because network management services are in high demand, the positions are more expensive to fill than ever before. It is also more expensive to retain a high-quality IT staff in a competitive market, which puts many organizations in the uncomfortable position of continuously training new network administrators and other support staff.

Outsourcing network support services alleviates many of these internal pressures. Some organizations with large, experienced IT departments may outsource discrete tasks to ease the daily burden, free up existing staff to work on special projects, or quickly grow the department's available resources to oversee enterprise-level upgrades. Smaller organizations may outsource all network support services in order to increase network uptime without adding staff, with the added benefit of having a single point of contact and a single point of accountability for network operations.

Network support services are also popular targets for outsourcing because they offer fertile ground for broad-based strategic initiatives that are gaining traction in virtually every sector of the market. Namely, the relentless drive to maximize return on investment (ROI) from technology and reduce operating costs immediately and continuously. Efforts to improve ROI inevitably involve the IT department generating more productivity and accomplishing more work using the same or less infrastructure. Cost-saving initiatives frequently involve reducing technology assets and the cost of supporting them. Outsourcing helps in both situations.

For example, Wachovia Corp., one of the largest banks in the United States, announced its plans to outsource back-office application support in an effort to reduce application support costs by as much as 20%. Other large banks, including international ABN Amro, have taken a similar approach in order to increase efficiency and improve the overall quality of support. This is particularly important for large, global organizations that must support hundreds or thousands of local networks worldwide. In an article in *ComputerWorld*, one industry analyst noted that Wachovia is following a broader trend in the financial industry to outsource support for less time-critical and customer-sensitive data processing, allowing internal IT staff to focus on supporting core systems.

Section 2.0

Many organizations also outsource because they do not see network support as a core competency. By paying a provider (or multiple providers) to handle network support tasks, the organization can devote more time, energy, and resources to growing the business, increasing market share, or developing new offerings. Again, in this instance, outsourcing is less about cost savings and more about strategic growth.

Section 3.0

Outsourcing Network Support in Small and Medium-sized Businesses

Now let's take a look at outsourcing network support in small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) — a niche that Ricoh has been serving successfully for several years.

While large organizations always have appropriately large IT departments, many SMBs do not. In SMB environments, network support (when handled internally) is assigned to either a single person or at most a very small team (three to five people). The lack of resources puts these organizations at a competitive disadvantage. During times of peak network stress — due to a surge in activity, acquisition of assets, or a security breach — a smaller IT staff, especially if it is just one person, can't respond as quickly or as comprehensively as a large, experienced group of IT professionals. In Ricoh's experience, it is a crisis situation like this that finally convinces the customer that outsourcing is a smarter way to go.

Outsourcing works in SMB environments because it allows each organization to pay only for what it needs. In other words, a network administrator may require a salary in the high five figures. Yet for a significantly lower cost, SMBs can contract a network support provider to handle regular network maintenance (a weekly visit) as well as on-demand issue resolution. If and when a crisis occurs, the SMB has immediate access to the large group of dedicated IT professionals that most large organizations take for granted. This is indisputably more favorable than paying for a single full-time IT manager and paying for additional support when a crisis point requires additional outside help. Plus, with an outsourcing contract, the SMB does not have to expend any additional time or resources keeping its in-house network administrator trained and up to speed on the latest technologies.

Keep in mind, however, that outsourcing network support does not have to be an "all or nothing" proposition, and this is one of its biggest advantages. Paying only for what you need means just that. Reliable network support providers will often let customers select which services they need a la carte. Of course, if the list of services becomes large enough, a contract may make better financial sense. But in many situations, the SMB can simply purchase a block of time in advance (for example, 100 hours) and see how long it lasts. If it runs out, the customer can easily purchase another block. And if it lasts the entire year, then the customer has a verifiable benchmark for future engagements.

Outsourcing Network Support in Small and Medium-sized Businesses

Important network support services for SMBs

Clearly, SMBs have different needs than large international banks when it comes to network support. Some of the more important services to consider as you think about outsourcing include all of the following, broken down by whether they are performed on-site or off-site.

On-site network support services include:

- **Hardware asset management.** Hardware is a major investment for any SMB, so taking care of this investment is a popular service to outsource. Asset management for hardware includes installation, configuration, scheduled maintenance, and upgrades to firmware (embedded software). Assets to manage include servers, PC workstations, and peripherals.
- **Document output asset management.** More and more, SMBs are connecting document management systems to the network. These devices include desktop and high-volume printers, digital MFPs, digital duplicators, fax systems, scanners, and production print (also known as host print) systems. They require similar management services as other hardware, and are often no less critical to the organization's productivity. Outsourcing support for these devices (in combination with network support) is a new offering in the marketplace. Traditionally, service for these devices was handled by a variety of manufacturers. Today, outsourcing providers (including Ricoh) are enabling SMBs to choose a single partner for all hardware and network support, which helps consolidate accountability and minimize finger-pointing if any asset is having trouble.
- **Software asset management.** Support for software is even more fractured than support for document management systems. Each application provider generally offers its own technical support line or Web site. More often than not, however, SMBs must perform fixes and upgrades on their own, without hands-on help. This is a complex enough task for applications that employees know well, and it becomes even more complicated when the organization needs to install, configure, or update device drivers, operating systems, and middleware. Outsourcing software support is an ideal way to improve office productivity and minimize downtime.
- **Infrastructure management.** Fixing the "plumbing" of the network is one of the most difficult tasks for SMBs to handle independently. There are very few hard and fast rules for integrating a diverse network with an organization's specific lineup of hardware, software, drivers, and operating systems. Yet if the behind-the-scenes routers, switches, cables, and backbone connectivity are not operating at peak performance, the entire network suffers. As with residential plumbing, it often pays to call a professional rather than doing it yourself.

Off-site network support services include:

- **Remote monitoring.** This involves a third-party provider monitoring the activity on your network from a remote location. This service is extremely helpful for maintaining network productivity, because it allows for proactive resolution. Most monitoring software enables providers to establish performance thresholds for various hardware assets, and then receive notification when these thresholds are exceeded. For example, if CPU activity on a server spikes for more than four minutes, this is an indication that the server will crash soon. At this point, the outsourcing provider receives an

alarm via large screen display, email, or text message and can intervene (using remote maintenance technology, see below) immediately to correct the problem before the server crashes. This approach minimizes interruptions and maximizes network uptime. Ironically, however, catching and resolving these issues often leads end-users to assume that because the network is running well, outsourced network support is not necessary. For this reason, Ricoh provides remote monitoring customers with real-time updates of network activity, events, and issue resolutions over the Web.

- **Remote maintenance.** Many network issues can be resolved remotely. (Pure hardware problems, such as bad hard drives, are the exception.) Sharing software allows a technician to take control of a server or workstation over the Web, receive an identical video signal as the end-user from a remote monitor, and interact with the computer as if sitting in front of it. The process is completely transparent to the end-user, who authorizes the remote session to ensure security. Often, a remote technician can be solving a problem in the background while an end-user continues to work in a different application. This approach saves time and money. Outsourcing providers can resolve the problem without sending out a technician, billing the customer in 10-, 15-, or 20-minute increments instead of charging a one-hour minimum for on-site support. Plus, the end-user does not have to wait for a technician to arrive, and resolution can be achieved more quickly. Remote maintenance and remote monitoring often go together in network support outsourcing arrangements. As in the example above, it is very efficient for the provider receiving the alarms to also have responsibility for addressing the issue and resolving it remotely whenever possible.

- **Managed security services.** Protecting networks from the vast and growing number of threats is one of the most popular network support services to outsource, and with good reason. Driving this trend are three facts. One, no organization that uses a network is immune to threats. Two, defending against threats requires an expensive investment in security hardware and software. Three, adequate security requires a security engineer with specialized skills, knowledge, experience, and expertise. Because very few organizations (let alone SMBs) have the internal resources to support a dedicated team of security engineers, outsourcing is the only viable way to protect the network without breaking the bank.

Managed security services typically involves a highly specialized brand of remote monitoring where a security team monitors the customer's networks and firewalls, identifying and resolving any security breaches. Within this sphere, there are many other services to choose from, including:

- Virus scanning and protection, which involves proactively scanning network infrastructure to achieve real-time detection of viruses, worms, spyware, and other varieties of malicious code.
- Network intrusion detection and prevention, which includes 24x7 real-time security monitoring of network traffic. This service detects any potential security breach, alerting an engineer to assess the situation. Prevention services may also include ongoing threat assessments, automated updates, and system upgrades and maintenance.
- Content filtering and blocking, which gives a business owner or network administrator the ability to prevent access to inappropriate Web sites.

- Management of virtual private networks (VPNs), which allows users to enjoy the advantages of remote access to corporate networks while defending the points of weakness created by shared infrastructure.
- Vulnerability testing, which proactively identifies points where hackers could potentially gain access to your network.
- Patch management, which takes care of installing, activating, and testing the numerous security patches issued for repairing bugs in software and operating systems.
- Security risk assessment, a consulting service designed to establish a framework for continuously evaluating network security, identifying areas for improvement, and planning and executing the improvements.

The Case for Outsourcing Network Support

Considering how network support tasks are handled in SMB environments, it is easy to see why outsourcing makes a great deal of sense. Frequently, the biggest challenge is convincing a key decision-maker (the owner of the business or leader of the organization) that the rewards are worth the cost. Here are four ways to frame this concept for an upper management audience and create a compelling case for outsourcing network support.

1. Outsourcing enables you to reallocate resources.

Although outsourcing network support services provides a number of measurable advantages, one of the most important overall benefits is an intangible: the reallocation of resources.

In SMB environments, even more than in large corporations, it is critical to maximize the value of resources. Expending time, energy, money, and person-hours on non-core activities — especially activities that are as time-consuming and complex as network support — necessarily diverts resources that would otherwise be used to serve customers, meet strategic objectives, or develop new offerings.

In other words, worrying about the network puts your organization at a competitive disadvantage. Conversely, placing this responsibility in the hands of professionals gives your organization an edge. It also relieves a tremendous daily burden from staff, especially if you only employ a single person to manage the network. And it clarifies and accelerates the response in the event of a network outage or other critical issue, because the response is always the same — call the provider.

Overall, reallocating the resources once required to maintain the network should be framed as a strategy for driving growth. Of course, it may also be seen by skeptics as an additional expense that the organization can't afford. As we'll see in the next section, this is plainly untrue.

2. Outsourcing helps reduce operating expenses.

Outsourcing network support services is a proven way to reduce spending, both in the short-term and over time. If we recall the consequences of network downtime — lost sales, lower productivity, unhappy customers — it is easy to see why this is true. Consider two competing small businesses, one that outsources its network support and one that maintains the network internally. If the same virus hits both at exactly the same time, one will have this virus detected by its managed security services team, and the other will not. The first company will feel no negative effect — the item will appear on a daily report of network activity. The second company will almost certainly lose critical data, lose productivity, and lose time spent eradicating the virus — which will inevitably take longer to accomplish than if the company had an outsourcing partner.

With the right outsourcing partner, cost itself should not be an issue. Again, recall that hiring a single IT professional to monitor your network will require an investment in the mid-to-high five figures, and if your organization encounters a problem that falls outside the realm of this person's experience, you will be paying for additional help as well. Hiring an outsourcing provider, however, may cost less than a thousand dollars per month. Flexible pricing should be available, enabling you to get the services you need at a price that suits your organization's budget. You may also buy a block of time and parcel it out over the course of a year.

Other cost advantages are equally clear. In a contract situation, your organization can call upon all the resources of an entire IT department at any time — without making a huge capital investment in seasoned experts or expensive technology. The provider upgrades its own solutions, trains and retains its own experts, and stays aware of the latest IT developments. Because the provider can spread these costs over a number of different clients, the impact on your individual pricing is negligible.

In terms of specific cost-saving services, managed security tops the list. If your organization experiences a serious security breach — for example, if your main server is hacked — you can quickly discover the source of the breach and details about the event, including who the intruder was and what files were accessed. In a worst case scenario, if private customer information is stolen from the network, a company without managed security services may not realize the extent or nature of the loss until it is too late to take action. The potential impact on customer relationships and the organization's reputation would be devastating.

When discussing outsourced network support with executives, the issue should be positioned not as a line item cost, but as a service the organization can't afford to do without.

3. Outsourcing delivers critical competitive advantages.

Each of the major benefits of outsourcing network support delivers a significant, if not critical, competitive advantage for SMBs. All of these stem from the principal benefit of high network uptime, which is the objective of every network support service. Asset management ensures that hardware, software, and infrastructure are available when needed. Remote monitoring aims to solve network problems before they occur, ensuring uninterrupted performance. If a problem does occur, remote maintenance is designed to solve it as quickly as possible. And managed security helps prevent a whole host of threats, any of which could cripple your network for hours, days, or weeks.

When your network is operating efficiently and productively, your organization can work efficiently and productively. Employees can access the applications, data, and documents they need to do their jobs, and are not interrupted by warnings or notices from the system administrator. Ultimately, this allows your team to focus its energies on maximizing customer service and growing revenue. It also creates an environment that makes it easier to maintain employee satisfaction and retain the best people.

All of the benefits discussed in this section are likely to align with your own organization's strategic objectives. Make sure to enumerate the direct connections — between a cost-saving service and overarching company goals — when proposing this idea to key decision-makers.

4. Outsourcing makes it easier to take advantage of new technology.

Adding new technology and getting the most from the investment is an important objective in most industries. Whether the technology is hardware or software, it is vital for organizations to choose the best solutions for specific needs and stay at the leading edge of technology developments. Again, outsourcing network support services has a strong impact on your organization's ability to achieve this objective.

Transitioning to new technology is rarely easy, even with expert assistance. When you have a network support provider that is already familiar with your network topology and your overall business needs, the transition can be made much smoother.

An outsourcing provider serves as a source of impartial feedback when you are evaluating your technology options. The provider may even be aware of options you have not considered, as well as the potential benefits and drawbacks of the options that are already on the table. Your outsourcing provider will be able to help you plan and execute the installation and configuration of new technology and avoid the trial-and-error and growing pains that inevitably accompany a do-it-yourself approach.

Consulting with your outsourcing provider may also help you establish a customized migration path for your organization. This migration path, which should reflect your current network assets as well as future goals, serves as a touchstone for budget decisions, enabling leaders to prioritize needs and make more informed technology decisions.

In addition to encouraging good decisions, working with an outsourcing partner can prevent poor decisions. Adding network assets independently, without expert advice, increases your risk of purchasing too much (or not enough) capacity or paying for capabilities you can't use. This is yet another way outsourcing network support can deliver immediate financial benefits.

Evaluating Network Support Services Providers

If you have made a compelling case for outsourcing network support and received a green light to choose a provider, the next phase is critical. Unlike global organizations and billion-dollar companies that can issue an RFP and receive competitive offers from big-name IT consultants, SMBs have to do more legwork to find a reliable outsourcing provider. SMBs are also less able to withstand the effects of making the wrong decision.

In general, you will have three options. The first is a local provider, who may or may not be able to deliver all the services you need. The second is a national provider with local presence that caters to the needs of SMBs. The third option is a large, big-name consultant. Depending on the size of your organization, any of these options may be the right choice. What we offer here are some important criteria to consider as you evaluate potential outsourcing partners.

- **Experience working in SMB environments.** As you know, SMBs have very different needs than larger organizations. This affects every aspect of your outsourcing agreement, from the price you can afford to the services you need to the delivery model that will best match your workflow. An outsourcing provider that works with SMB customers regularly and has a long history of SMB experience will understand the difference intuitively. This common ground makes it easier to establish a strong working relationship and determine the right services for your organization. Outsourcing providers with strong SMB experience — not just a desire to target the SMB market — understand two other critical points: that SMBs have a low tolerance for up-selling, and SMBs deserve exactly the same attention as a Fortune 500 customer.
- **Experience in IT.** Understanding the SMB marketplace helps, but it will not mean much unless the provider you choose has comparable experience in IT, including network support. This is an obvious point, but determining whether your provider is truly experienced is not as obvious. Ask for a list of the certifications that each technician has, which should include Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) as well as Cisco's CCNA, Novell's CNE, and CompTIA's Net+ and A+. Ask for case studies that describe how the provider works with large organizations as well as SMB customers. Ask for marketing collateral, either printed or electronic, that describes the provider's specific areas of IT expertise. Experienced IT providers should be able to answer all of these questions easily without overwhelming you with a series of acronyms and jargon.
- **Document management expertise.** The recent convergence of document management and IT has made it necessary for network support providers to understand document management as well. Providers should be comfortable dealing with desktop printers, MFPs, IP fax machines, and other document management systems, as well as the drivers and software these systems use to exchange information and deliver output. Much of the latest software for document management utilizes local networks, email, and the Web to facilitate scan-to-email and other kinds of distributed network scanning. These applications may also require integration with other applications for content management. Providers well versed in document management will be able to help you determine whether any of these solutions is appropriate for your organization.

- **Breadth and depth of capabilities.** Because SMBs have such unique needs, it is important to select an outsourcing provider with a large portfolio of service offerings. The more you have to choose from, the more likely it will be you can arrange a package of services that fulfills all of your current requirements and leaves plenty of room to expand in the future. For example, it is important that your provider offers all three of the major off-site services — remote monitoring, remote maintenance, and managed security. Because it is likely your organization will want to use all three of these services in the near future, it helps to partner with a provider who can deliver all three. This lets you implement these services at any time, according to your needs, without the concern of contracting a second outsourcing vendor. A wide variety of on-site services is also important, as is flexibility in how services are delivered (contract vs. a la carte) and how different packages of services are priced.

- **High-quality products.** The tools and technologies network support providers use to monitor, analyze, and repair your network are extremely varied. They range from off-the-shelf offerings to fully customized solutions developed in-house. In this arena, the adage that you get what you pay for is true. Inexpensive tools will not have all of the capabilities necessary to ensure high network uptime, and this is especially true when it comes to managed security services. The provider you choose should be using best-of-breed tools developed by experts in network analysis, remote monitoring, security, and other specializations.

- **National coverage.** Although this capability is not as vital for the smallest SMBs, it is an important issue to consider for any SMB with offices in more than one city and state, as well as SMBs that plan to expand. National coverage ensures that all of your locations receive consistent, high-quality support. It also allows you to consolidate accountability for network support across the enterprise, so you do not have separate contracts with a different local provider in each city. And it makes it easier to get adequate local assistance for employees who are traveling, telecommuters, and other mobile users.

- **Service and support infrastructure.** Responsive service delivery requires a certain number of fundamental capabilities, and the provider you choose should demonstrate a reliable service and support infrastructure. Elements of this infrastructure include 24x7 help desk support with troubleshooting by phone and/or online, remote maintenance capabilities, real-time technician dispatch, and remote communications with technicians via cell phone, email, or text messaging. In general, your provider should be easy to contact and respond quickly to your needs, whether you have a simple question or are dealing with an emergency.

- **Accountability.** Giving up control is a necessary element of outsourcing any task. However, it is an element that the best outsourcing providers compensate for with transparency and accountability. Look for a network support provider that is eager to discuss the tools and technologies used to evaluate network performance, assess risk, measure progress against benchmarks, and report results. All of these activities should be a standard element of any outsourcing engagement, not special services. By maintaining a clear, open channel of communication about your network, the provider you choose will be able to keep you engaged without overwhelming you with information. It creates a collaborative relationship, enabling your organization to establish expectations, set priorities, and discuss options for technology migration. It also gives you an easy way to evaluate the provider's performance over time.

Conclusion

Outsourcing network support services is not a luxury that only the largest companies can afford. Rather, it is a smart strategy for any organization to consider, especially SMBs that lack internal IT resources. Outsourcing alleviates internal pressure to keep pace with a rapidly changing landscape of network-related technology. It also allows SMBs to devote maximum resources toward core competencies, while adding the ability to recover more quickly (and cost-effectively) from network outages or other issues.

The financial case for outsourcing network support services is not a difficult one to build, even for the most skeptical audience. In most cases, gains in productivity, profitability, and customer service will easily offset the costs. Plus, SMBs today have many more options than ever before in terms of how network support is outsourced, from length of contracted service to the variety of services to choose from to financing flexibility.

The most important choice any SMB makes will be finding an outsourcing provider that understands how to work with SMBs and is willing to help your organization find the right mix of services for your specific situation.

About the author

Brad Stites maintains responsibility for the day-to-day operations of Ricoh's Network Support Services group, as well as the strategic planning required to grow and develop this line of business. With more than 10 years of IT experience, Stites has served as a network administrator and a professional network/security consultant. He is a Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), widely considered the highest available security certification in the industry, and he holds a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer (MCSE) certification.

