Best Practice Checklist Series - Issue 11

Network Documentation

Understanding the basics: A layperson's guide and checklist for overseeing IT.

Best Practice Checklist Series
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Network Documentation

If one were to inquire of several IT professionals what constitutes network documentation, they would likely receive several answers. Some professionals include procedural documents within the scope of documentation, while others see them as an entirely separate category.

In reality, there is significant overlap between the two, however we regard the distinction as being relatively immaterial. Documentation and policies/procedures are both essential, and the key takeaway is that both merit serious consideration.

With the foregoing explanation out of the way, for this installment we have opted to focus strictly on documentation in the strictest sense, and we will address the broader topics of policies and procedural documents in a future issue.

Consequently, this may well be our shortest issue of the Best Practice Checklist Series, however that by no means diminishes its importance.

Documentation is in many ways analogous to a blueprint. If one were to be tasked with maintaining a large facility, or defending it against invaders, or simply adding a new wing, it would be inconceivable to undertake any of the aforementioned without some form of blueprint.

For all intents and purposes, IT documentation is no different. It plays a key role in the identification of maintenance tasks, it is essential for security (especially in the event of a breach), and by no means would it be wise to consider altering or augmenting any network environment without a clear blueprint of what already exists.

If your network isn't suitably documented, we strongly encourage making the relatively insignificant investment required to create and maintain a "blueprint" for your digital home.

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Network Documentation

Network Diagram

Does the organization maintain and routinely update a diagrammatical representation of the network architecture?

Diagrams provide a high-level overview of the environment and illustrate the relationships between various network components. Clear and accurate representations promote better management and facilitate the efficient diagnosis of network issues.

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Equipment/Rack Elevations

Does the organization maintain and routinely update rack elevations or other documentation visually depicting the placement of key networking components in deployment?

The foregoing information plays a key role in facilitating the support of systems from remote locations, particularly when it is necessary for technical professionals to quickly identify equipment and virtually "walk" on-site personnel through physical troubleshooting steps.

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Inventory

Does the organization maintain an up-to-date inventory of equipment, software licensing and agreements with Cloud providers and other third-party vendors?

Since section 179 of the IRS tax code took effect allowing businesses to deduct the full purchase price of equipment and/or software during the year of purchase, many organizations accustomed to budgeting for the replacement of assets based on depreciation schedules lost sight of upcoming (and often very material) expenditures that would be necessitated as equipment lifecycles ended. While inventory of technical assets has long been a dual responsibility of IT and finance, maintaining accurate and detailed equipment inventories is now more important than ever.

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