All hail the Server!
Master of the network

John Gleeson
Director, iThink Technology
Email: info@ithink.ie

Your small business has many ongoing needs: to better organize and protect business information, to communicate effectively and professionally with customers and suppliers, and to make the most of your existing computers and office equipment. Introducing the right technology into your business can help you accomplish these goals and save you time and money, keeping you focused on your business, not on technology. The foundation of an effective technology solution starts with a network.

As discussed in a previous article a network is a means of connecting computers, printers scanners etc together, using either wiring or a wireless solution, to enable resources, data and information to be shared among all the users. The most essential item in a business network is the server. This type of network is called a Client /Server network.

Introduction:
In a client/server network, a single computer (the server hardware) is used to store and manage information and resources in a central location. That computer is loaded with server software that is designed to perform specific tasks and provide specific services such as file sharing, print processing, Internet connectivity and e-mail for each of the network's "client" computers. The clients in the client/server network can be individual computers, printers, or other remote devices (for example, Windows MobileTM–based Pocket PCs or Smartphones).

Features:
Client/server networks provide tools and services that can help your small business achieve dramatic time and cost savings, revolutionizing the way you do your work. For example, with a client/server network you can use fewer printers and distribute faxes electronically, which results in lower hardware costs and increased productivity. The server can back up information, which can save you time and prevent data loss. Also, because the server acts as a single access point, your Internet connection can be monitored and controlled, which enhances your network security.

The computers in your business may show markedly improved performance in a client/server network because they don't have to perform functions for other computers, such as storing large amounts of data or running heavy software applications; the server takes on all this heavy lifting. With one centralized access point for information and resources, users are not dependent on information housed on each other's computers, as they are in a peer-to-peer network. In addition, servers can enhance the security of your business data by providing controlled access to files and data such as financial information, documents, and business presentations.

Server software:
Most server operating systems control security and allow you to decide the specific users, computers, or devices that can access server resources, as well as how they can use those resources. Server operating systems also allow other server-specific programs, or server applications, to run. For example, a server can run a line-of-business application—such as accounting software—that client computers can access.

Applications are the software instructions that execute a task or a specific set of tasks. Personal computer applications perform tasks for the user of the application. Server computer applications can perform volumes of tasks simultaneously for many users.

The Small Business Network Solution:
At one time, only large companies could afford servers because of the cost and complexity of buying, maintaining, and administering them. This is no longer the case. New technologies designed specifically for SMEs provide solutions at lower costs with simplified server administration and maintenance. This means that any business can take advantage of the benefits of servers and client/server networking.

Microsoft expressly designed Windows Small Business Server 2003 for small businesses looking for an affordable and complete network solution. This Microsoft server software provides essential networking and Internet connection-sharing capabilities so that you can efficiently share resources and information from a central place and across your business. Windows Small Business Server 2003 also gives you more professional ways to connect with your customers from the office or a remote location, and the tools and infrastructure you need to keep your business up and running securely—at a cost your business can afford.

That's it for this month. In the next issue I will be covering the advantages that Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 can bring to your business.

Should you require any further information or advice on any of the topics covered please do not hesitate to contact me at jgleeson@ithink.ie