

ZDNet Education

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My very own little project failure

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Michael Krigsman writes a cheery little blog on IT Project Failures. Yesterday, I had one of my own. I probably shouldn't call it a failure, because the real aim of the project (to switch two schools and the superintendent's office to much higher-speed Internet connections) was accomplished. They're all running on 7Mbps cable now. It's just that most of the clients couldn't connect to it and now today will be a big ol' Day-o'-Scrambling for another tech and me.

I ran into two different problems. The first, at the super's office, occurred when our services integrator accidentally entered the wrong IP address for the firewall they installed to go with the data line. I said no problem and made a quick switch on the servers to point to a new default gateway. Shouldn't have been a problem for anyone else, right? They were all DHCP clients, I'd shut down DHCP on our server, and had everyone reboot. A few people came back up and were uber-speedy. One was incredibly slow and the others were dead in the water.

The dead in the water were actually pretty easy. They were wireless and our wireless access point was looking at the old gateway. It also happened to be the connection for a networked printer. Now what was the IP address for that thing? Guess we'll be resetting that one, eh?

Speaking of printers, none of them were DHCP. They were all pointing at the wrong gateway and had the wrong DNS settings. Ugh. Fortunately, the new firewall, an Astaro 220, has a great interface and I just switched its IP address to the correct one, switched the gateway information on the servers again, and printers and a few more clients came back up. I'm headed back there this morning as soon as I finish this post.

The two schools, on the other hand, had been migrated completely to static IPs for 60 laptops each and all teacher computers. Failing hardware and miserable bandwidth (replaced yesterday, yay!), as well as increased monitoring needs, necessitated the use of static IP. Of course, since our DNS servers changed with the new cable connections, nobody could get online. My tech sorted out one school yesterday afternoon. We'll hit the other school this morning.

All in all, these aren't huge failures. Given how unreliable access has been over the last couple of months, this is a relatively minor failure with pretty easy fixes. It does point, however, to the problems associated with rapid implementations of new projects. Sometimes, the planning component gets set aside for items that seem like easy turnkey solutions. Plug and play is great in theory, but no matter how busy we are (and us Ed Tech guys are usually not chit chatting about American Idol over the water cooler), it pays to sit down with your team and brainstorm possible hurdles and problems with any project.

Christopher Dawson is the technology director for the Athol-Royalston School District in northern Massachusetts. See his full profile and disclosure of his industry affiliations.

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