

## Minimizing Distributed Workforce Downtime

There is no fixed definition of what “downtime” actually is, but a broad working definition would be “system unavailability.”<sup>1</sup> Your system is down, as far as your workforce is concerned, “if the application can’t be used, no matter what the reason.”<sup>2</sup> There are clear benefits to minimizing the amount of downtime experienced by your employees.

If your equipment is not available or requires maintenance, then your team cannot work, projects are put on hold, and customers are left waiting—with negative effects on service levels, satisfaction, and revenue. These issues are exacerbated as the modern workforce becomes increasingly distributed, spread out across the country and even across the globe.

In this article, we will look at the damage that workforce downtime can cause to an organization—and the special problems inherent in dealing with downtime with a distributed workforce. Finally, we will explain how to minimize or completely remove the issue.

### The High Cost of Downtime

Employee downtime is costly. It is essential to avoid it or minimize its impact wherever possible. In a recent report,<sup>3</sup> Dun & Bradstreet found that more than half of the companies they surveyed were experiencing an average

of around 1.6 hours of downtime per week. For a medium company of around 250 employees, that downtime can translate into up to \$22,000 in costs directly attributed to the downtime.

Although these are the direct costs, regular employee downtime will probably lead to increased overtime costs as people work longer and later to catch up on the time lost. Then there are the less tangible costs associated with probable loss of reputation and, in extreme cases, loss of revenue as clients move to more reliable businesses.

### Downtime Problems With a Distributed Workforce: Two Examples

By its very nature, a distributed workforce is spread across a wide geographic area, all relying on the same services and technology, often depending on one central server.

*For example, Hodgson Consulting worked with a client that had one central server location in one of their data centers on the East Coast—they had a warehouse and three distributed locations that depended on the server to be able to function. When that central server developed a problem, production in every other location stopped. The company’s IT team didn’t have the skill sets necessary to fix the problem quickly. By the time*

*they contacted Hodgson Consulting, they had already been down for four hours.*

*In that time, several hundred people had been unable to carry on their work. Although the issue was quickly fixed by the Hodgson Consulting team, the company had lost virtually a full day because of the unplanned downtime.*

If the system is down, communication between offices can be difficult, if not impossible. If distributed offices can't be contacted due to telephone or email crashes, then the end result is employee confusion, if not outright panic.

Employees don't know where to go or who to talk to. When systems go down or they stop working properly, it's disconcerting for employees; typically, their first step is to call the IT department. If this happens regularly, employees start seeing this kind of downtime as inevitable and unavoidable—as business as usual—and this is when it becomes especially dangerous. Employee downtime should never be normalized; the costs involved are simply too great for companies to continually absorb.

By presuming that downtime is a common and unavoidable event, companies can miss simple solutions to significant downtime events.

*For example, a client called in Hodgson Consulting to deal with an IT problem that was preventing access to a critical document management application for all employees in multiple locations. Around 40 people were locked out of the system multiple times a day for up to two hours at a time.*

*The company IT manager worked to fix the problem for two weeks before calling for help. Hodgson Consulting worked out that the wrong print driver was installed on one computer in the Accounts Payable Department—and that was enough to deny the distributed workforce access to the network. By updating the driver, the problem was solved and the company's employees were able to work without interruption.*

## **The Solution to Unplanned Distributed Workforce Downtime**

IT problems become serious workforce downtime issues due to one important factor: the people employed to deal with the IT problems don't have the experience or expertise to remedy the issues in a timely and effective manner.

In an ideal world, every company—regardless of size and market—would have an IT support expert on call at all times. This person should either be able to solve the problem within 15 minutes of being informed, or know who to call for assistance.

In the real world, of course, small and medium-sized companies often don't have the resources to staff this kind of position—and then they have an IT issue that brings the whole organization to a halt. For those businesses that cannot allocate resources to a full-time trouble-shooting position, there is an extremely effective alternative: outside expert help that can be called upon as and when it is needed.

## The Value of an Experienced Partner

The first step in building a plan to prevent unplanned downtime for your distributed workforce is to partner with an IT services vendor with extensive experience in working with technology in this context. The partner should be willing to learn about your organization and its unique requirements—and then develop a plan that

includes the issues specific to your business and the marketplace in which you operate.

If you're concerned about the effect that workforce downtime is having on your company and need a partner to support you, Hodgson Consulting should be your first choice in helping to create a viable IT solution.

1. [www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-calculate-and-convey-the-true-cost-of-downtime/](http://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-calculate-and-convey-the-true-cost-of-downtime/)
2. [www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-calculate-and-convey-the-true-cost-of-downtime/](http://www.techrepublic.com/article/how-to-calculate-and-convey-the-true-cost-of-downtime/)
3. <http://www.businesscomputingworld.co.uk/assessing-the-financial-impact-of-downtime/>