



PROFESSIONAL SERVICES TECH NOTE #024

Communicating downtime to users

The Concept

Users have come to expect IT resources to be available 24 x 7 just like electricity and water (aka 'cloud or utility computing'). However, systems require periodic maintenance and sometimes things break and need immediate fixing. Notifying users about downtime and having them read the notice and remember it is one of the more difficult tasks we do. Here is a format I used as a system administrator to solve these issues:

Examples

From: Storage Network Team@acme.com
Subject: **IT Notice:** Network drive maintenance Friday evening

WHY: Required Operating System upgrade of network data storage systems

WHEN: **Friday, August 7 from 9 PM – 11 PM PST**

HOW this will affect you: Email and your home directory and group shares will be unavailable. R&D lab systems connected to the M: drive will also be affected. VPN and remote users will not be able to login.

WHAT you should do: Save all open documents, close email, and logout out of your computer before leaving.

WHO to contact for issues: Marty McFly, Director of IT, at 555-1212

What It Means To You

Notifications which are short and easy to understand are more likely to be remembered. Use a standardized format to condition users to identify critical notices, which must be read, from informational notices. One way to enhance this is to use different subject lines, formats, or color schemes (e.g, **IT Notice:** <subject line> versus **IT ALERT:** Emergency Email server maintenance!). Be sure to include every business function and application which will be affected. Avoid using application names and use names users are familiar with. For instance, do not say 'SQL servers' but instead 'Sales Reporting databases'. Repetition also increases user recall. Send out the same notice at least one week, one day, and one hour prior to maintenance.

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Send comments, corrections & suggestion to Michael Cope at mcope@netapp.com
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