

## What is a network?

A network links computers together so that they can access shared resources like Internet connections, files, faxes and printers. Network links are made using wires that are similar to phone cables but increasingly businesses use wireless networks which use radio links instead of physical connections.

Sometimes businesses set up an ad-hoc network without a server, sometimes called a peer-to-peer network. This can work very well when there are only a couple of PCs to connect, but it does not offer the flexibility, ease of management, reliability or security of a server-based network.

A server computer running a network operating system like SBS 2008 sits in the heart of a network and makes it all tick. Without a server, a network is a bit like a motorway system that doesn't go to any cities.

## Ten signs you need a server

1. You spend lots of time searching for files or copying them from one machine to another.
2. Your computers are already networked in some way (perhaps using an ad-hoc 'peer-to-peer' system) but files are scattered across different machines and the whole thing runs slowly.
3. You want to restrict access to confidential files – you are worried that a nosy employee might find sensitive files on your network.
4. You want to accommodate flexible or home-working for your staff – your staff are asking to work from home but you don't know where to start.
5. You would like to centralise key business data like diaries, customer records, accounts, orders etc.
6. You want to be more responsive to your customers.
7. You want your own e-mail address (@yourcompany.co.uk) rather than one available through an Internet provider.
8. You keep buying printers, faxes and Internet accounts as you add new people.
9. You have lots of IT hassle – viruses, network problems etc.
10. You're suffering from paperwork overload.

