

Re: upgrading frm XP Home to Pro

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Truthfully – in the beginning, you might have been better off (since these are business computers) getting Windows XP Professional – but working with what you've got, this is likely what I would have done...

A networked attached hard disk drive (Network Attached Storage or NAS) would have done your 'centralized storage' just fine. Windows XP Home – unless the software you utilize requires more – would likely work fine all around. The machines in question would access the central file repository (NAS) either using software installed upon each of them OR (in the better NAS devices) just as a shared disk drive (for example, S:\.) As for your software – depending on how it functions – it may/may not have trouble using such an area. I do not know from the information given. If it 'saves each quote' as a seperate file – it would be no problem. I don't know how much space you need (or how much space you have on that server you purchased and had installed) but something like one of these BuffaloTech products would have been ideal:

<http://www.buffalotech.com/products/network-storage/>

.... with the most expensive being right at \$2000 US dollars for 4TB (4000GB or 4,000,000MB) of space – which I cannot see a business that runs off three Windows XP Home computers using very quickly (unless you record a lot of music and deal in huge graphic images or movie files.) More reasonable would likely be the 1TB TeraStation version for about \$700 US dollars. You could even go with a different product from them (LinkStation Live) which has a built in Web Server so you can access your files from anywhere/anytime. It's between \$600 to \$700 US dollars.

That handles the centralized storage nicely – likely a bit overkill – but unused space is not wasted space – it is room for growth. ;-) As for the other thing – your remote access. I don't know much about how your office connects to the Internet, but I bet there is some sort of Cable/DSL Router (or just a router) involved that takes the one Internet line you have and allows all of the computers behind it to share that connection. Your computers communicate internally on what is called a private network and through the same box – they share the one larger line you have coming from

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the Internet itself. In that case – you don't *really* need a 'static IP address' – you just needed someone to set you up with a Dynamic DNS service and configure the router and computers in such a way to allow you to connect to them remotely.

This is how that works... You have the router that allows the computers to all share the Internet through it. It likely gives the computers connected to it IP Addresses like 192.168.x.x (private addresses) and it keeps the public (Internet) address all to itself. It probably has a way of configuring a Dynamic DNS service on it so that no matter what happens to its actual Internet address (IP) – you could always communicate with it from anywhere as long as you could remember the fully qualified domain name you would assign it using the service. An example of one of these services (FREE!) is:

<http://www.dyndns.com/services/dns/dyndns/>

So your router – the box allowing you to share the Internet amongst all the computers on the other side of it – might be configured with a name like michellejr.thruhere.net <-- which means whenever you want to connect to the router, you would connect to michellejr.thruhere.net and not some IP address that looks like 208.234.234.35 and is hard to remember and might change at random. That's the first part.

The second part would be installing something like UltraVNC (free : <http://www.ultravnc.com/>) on the three machines in the office and configuring each of them to utilize a different port for connecting and configuring the router to know which machine answers to which port and pass-thru the traffic accordingly... Then you – with a small 'viewer' program you could carry around on a floppy diskette, thumb drive, or have saved on a computer always – could type in the Dynamic DNS name (michellejr.thruhere.net) followed by the port the system you wish to connect to is assigned (michellejr.thruhere.net::5900) to connect to that machine from anyplace with an Internet connection. You then have full remote control of the machine 'at the office' and you see what is actually on the screen there and can use it just like if you were sitting in front of the machine. If you check your email on the machine at the office exclusively right now – since you are remotely using the same machine in this case – that does not change.

Now – I have had to assume a bit there. I assumed that you have some router that you control and can configure (or have configured) in the ways I mentioned. I assumed that you would not need many terabytes of space and that the application you are using to generate these quotes would be able to save to a centralized location. I assumed that the machines in your office are already on the same network with one another and could – theoretically – communicate and share files with one another if configured to do so (if they are on the same network – they can.) I assumed you have some high-speed Internet at your home (or the location you will be wanting to remote into the office from) so that the remote connection would be more than tolerable. I assumed that all of your current systems (including the one at home) are

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likely some version of Windows.

Now – can you do all of that with a Small Business Server and three Windows XP Professional machines? Sure. You'll likely end up paying your internet Service Provider a monthly fee to get a 'static IP' address for the server and then the server (with however much hard disk drive space) will either have that IP to itself and share out your internet connection with the other machines or the router that connects it and the other machines to the internal (private) network and the Internet will be configured to pass certain types of traffic through to the server before going to the other machines, etc. The Windows XP Home machines could map drive shares (as that seems to be your main use for it – file storage) on the Small Business Server with no problem – but with Windows XP Professional on all the machines and a Small Business Server – you could also centralize your logon names and such using a domain setup instead of three stand-alone computers.

It does give it more of an actual 'growing business' feel to it, and if your business is at that point where it is growing into something like that and more and more computers may be added with more and more people over time (and everyone wants that) – then yeah – I can see jumping into Windows XP Professional on all the workstations, a SBS server and a domain setup to centralize control.

However – I think you should have been informed that there *were* options that probably would not have cost as much. I am sure you are paying a decent amount for the server, the software, the installation and then the installation/configuration and troubleshooting that would be involved in the upgrading of the three Windows XP Home systems. And there will be issues that will arise in such a migration. ;-)

You'd have to pay for the NAS device, its 'installation' and configuration on the current machines, someone to configure the router and machines for the remote control capability like I said as well... I cannot see that being as much money as the other alternative (unless that SBS server was fairly inexpensive and there is little or no trouble in the migration during any upgrades to Windows XP and the connectivity to a new domain...) Some of the configurations *will* overlap – like the router config for remote capabilities... Although, you may end up with a monthly bill for a static IP where the dynamic dns option was free.

Now you may ask why I am telling you all this in such detail... Well, I think if you read it and try to understand it – and then MENTION it to those doing the work – you might give them a shock. I'm not saying with 100% certainty that they are taking advantage of your lack of knowledge – maybe they explained some of these options to you, maybe many of my assumptions are incorrect – but it does pay to know a little about something before dropping a lot of money. ;-)

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Shenan Stanley

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MS-MVP

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whoa!!! thanks HEAPS for that, Shenan. I have read it through twice and will read it again to make sure i understand it- but your assumptions were all pretty spot on.

I had thought that by getting two companies locally to quote (which both ended up too much) and then in the end purchasing thru Dell and getting a tech person to install then i would have different opinions and be more likely to get the right advice. I sooooo wish i knew a forum like this existed and i would have been much more informed.

Noone had mentioned anything like the NAS device or just networking etc. Anyway, i'll see what i can get out of all your info and if i can manage to repeat any of it in an intelligent way! LOL! And see what the response is. thanks muchly,
Michelle.

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