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How to optimize IT for remote construction offices - by Patrick Martin

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Construction companies often need to set up a remote office at a job site. It's important to keep a few key principles in mind in order for the remote office to function properly and efficiently. It's also critical for employees to have the tools they need to get the job done when they're in the field.

Make it replicable: Remote offices at construction sites are typically set up in on-site trailers. If there are trailers at more than one job site, they should be essentially identical with the same equipment and basic setup to cut down on time spent troubleshooting.

If the IT team knows exactly which printers and computers are in each office, it's much easier to fix issues remotely.

Make it plug-and-play: The remote office in the on-site trailer should be easy to unplug, move to another location on short notice, and plug back in without disrupting productivity.

Although the tech components within all the remote offices should be the same, each trailer might connect to the Internet and the main office in a slightly different way, depending on the size of the project and the individual job site.

For each site, it should be taken into consideration how many people will need to have Internet access and how long the site will be active. Is there already cable Internet at the site? If not, can employees use a MiFi device (fewer people, shorter-term projects) or something more robust, like satellite Internet or a cradlepoint device?

These answers vary according to the specifics of any given job site, so the goal is to set up trailers so that once they connect to the Internet—however they connect—everything else is the same.

Think long term and large scale: In a temporary job-site office, quick fixes have an appeal. When a printer breaks down, it's tempting to replace it with an old one that's lying around. However, this compromises that all-important consistency and makes it difficult to troubleshoot remotely. The cost of the quick fix often ends up being higher once maintenance is factored in.

A uniform approach to remote offices also eliminates the problem of trying to estimate what the technology budget should be when bidding a job. If all remote-office trailers are essentially the same, the cost is already known.

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