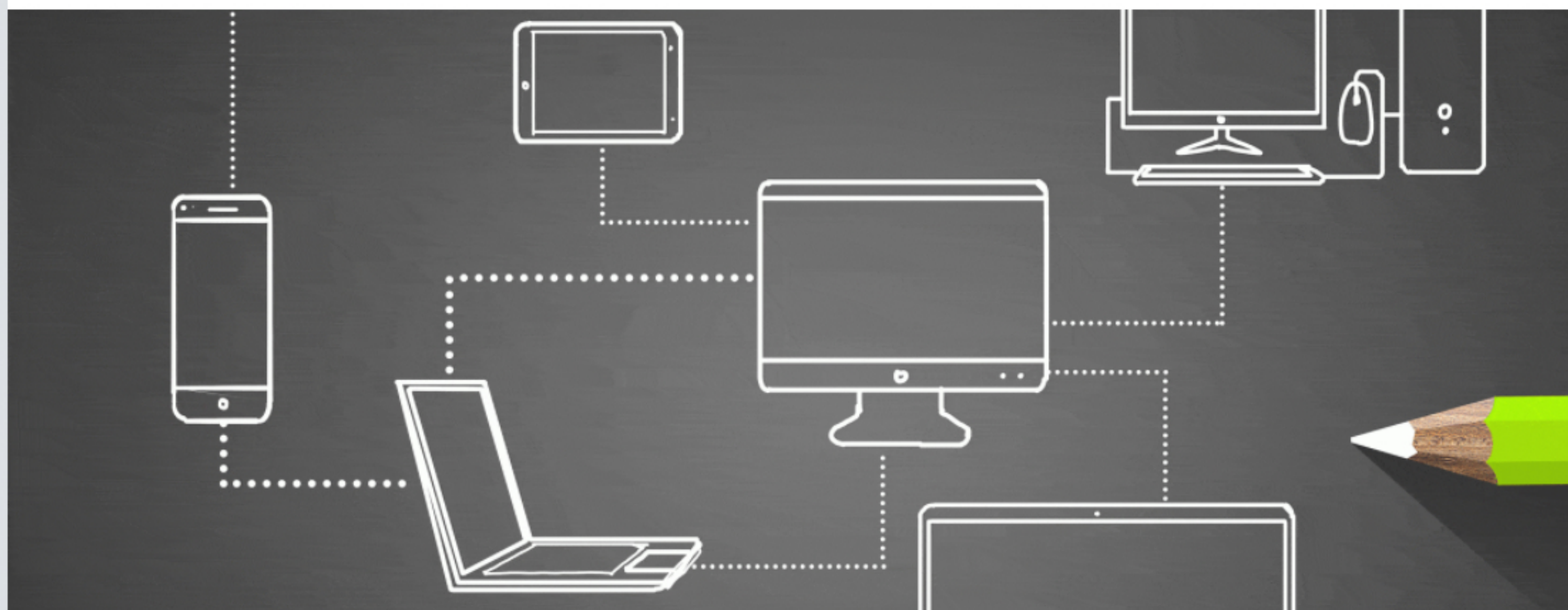# How to Create a Network Map

Thanks to the internet of things, bring-your-own-device (BYOD) strategies, cloud and virtualization challenges, and rapidly changing IT environments, networks are more complex than ever. A network map provides an easy, intuitive way to see the devices on your network and how they relate to each other. Depending on how they're created, maps can also tell you information like the IP address of specific devices, how devices are connected, or their performance statistics.

Creating a network map isn't as difficult as you might expect. Just follow these five steps:

#1. Decide What Needs to be Mapped

How simple or complex you want your map to be depends on your unique needs. Do you need the map to show your entire distributed network, just an IP address range, or a single subnet? There are a wide variety of devices your map may need to show, including servers, clients, routers, switches, printers, and more. Any network map should show the connections between these devices. If your network is large, it may be useful to create a hierarchical map that lets you view the map in varying levels of detail.

Depending on the tools you use to create your network map, it can also show you up-to-date critical information like current device statuses or bandwidth usage.

#2. Choose a Network Mapping Method

Many people use Microsoft Visio, Excel, or even hand-drawn documents to map their networks. This method can be useful for diagramming the device inventory of a relatively simple network. But it's still going to take a lot of effort and research on your part, and it's almost impossible to keep the map up-to-date. Furthermore, your static map has no way to let you know if there's a problem with a device or with your network.

The second method is to use network mapping software. Good network mapping software can autodiscover every device within an IP range, meaning your hours or weeks of diagramming can be reduced to minutes. Your map isn't just a pretty picture—it provides live performance data for proactive network maintenance.

#3. Add Devices to the Network Map

If you are mapping your network manually, this is where you'll have to really do your research. Unless you already have your entire network memorized, you'll probably have to do some digging and talking to others in the organization to discover every device that needs to be mapped.

An enterprise network mapping solution can take care of mapping your devices automatically and updating the map regularly. If you need to manually add a device or list of devices, network mapping software should make that easy as well.

See real examples of network maps created with network monitoring software

#4. Make Your Network Map Useful (And Attractive)

Do you want to see network devices laid out on floor plan? Diagrammed against a geographic map? This is the step where you capture the network view you see in your head and personalize the layout, icons, and colors exactly to your liking.

You can lay out your network however it makes the most sense to you. Then change the icons and background imagery to make it as intuitive as possible for everyone who uses the map—from your technical users to your less-technical stakeholders.

If you're choosing to create your network map with network monitoring software, invest in a solution that gives you customizable layouts, icons, and background images.

#5. Share Your Network Map

You might have a variety of team members and employees that need to see your network map. Try not to share the map as a simple document unless you want disparate, outdated versions floating around.

Ideally, you'll be able to access your mapping software and network data securely from any location. This gives your team freedom to be mobile and helps connect employees spread out over large geographic areas.

Once your map is up and running, you can use it for training, troubleshooting, and more. Many IT departments even choose to put a live network map up on the big screen.

Start Mapping Now

Try Intermapper network monitoring and mapping software free for 30 days

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