

IT Strategy Brief

ISSUE 6 | VOL 7 | June 2021

INTEGRATE SEAMLESSLY



SWK

MANAGED CLOUD SERVICES

“Useful Technology News and Ideas for Your Business”

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COLONIAL PIPELINE HACK REDEFINES

On Saturday, May 8, 2021, Colonial Pipeline – which supplies as much as 45% of the US East Coast’s petroleum needs – announced to the country that it was the victim of a cyber attack which involved a ransomware infection. By now, the news has disseminated across the nation and sparked concerns about gas shortages that led to now-infamous reports of unprecedented hoarding, yet the real story did not end with leaky plastic bags. In fact, it has evolved substantially since then and has prompted significant response from so many of the parties involved, from federal law enforcement to cybersecurity professionals and experts to cryptocurrency investors, to even the hackers themselves.



Below is a breakdown of Colonial Pipeline incident and a few ways it has redefined the ransomware landscape:

THE EVOLUTION OF THE COLONIAL PIPELINE STORY AND ITS FALLOUT

The way what happened to Colonial has been reported seems to have had nearly as much of an impact across the globe as the facts of the story itself, with every new detail fueling more observation, speculation and eventually real-world consequences. There have been a few predictable revelations and actions taken in response to the very public cyber attack by the Russian group [DarkSide](#), but these are being overshadowed by many seemingly unprecedented surprises and the fallout they have generated. Underneath the ripples of shock, however, are many important lessons for businesses and institutions everywhere about [the cybercriminal ecosystem](#) and persistent cybersecurity.

COMPROMISED PASSWORD TO A LEGACY VPN THAT LACKED MFA

After discovering the breach, Colonial Pipeline contracted FireEye Mandiant (you may recognize the first part of the name from the SolarWinds hack) and other firms to help investigate and resolve the incident. They uncovered that the company had been exposed through an employee’s old password to a legacy VPN previously used, and which access from should have ostensibly been removed. As the system lacked MFA (multi-factor authentication) all the hackers had to do was capture leaked credentials to find a way in – a common scenario with victims of phishing attacks.

CEO ADMITS TO LAWMAKERS \$4.4 MILLION RANSOM PAID

Colonial’s CEO, Joseph Blount, would reveal that he paid the ransom demands of up to \$4.4 million (some sources claim \$4.3 million) in Bitcoin even while working with his team to restore operations. As he told US Senators at a hearing held soon after, his primary concern was the long-reaching impact the pipeline shutdown had on over a dozen states and finding a way to resolve it as quickly as possible. However, investigators that reviewed the decryption keys DarkSide provided for the payment found little evidence they were even effective in successfully unlocking files and the company had to use its own restored files to recover.

FBI TRACES AND RECOVERS \$2.3 MILLION FROM HACKERS

The one piece of good news in this incident is that Blount and Colonial immediately alerted the authorities about the situation. This information would jumpstart an operation led by the FBI and the US Justice Department that managed to traceback the ransom payment made to the digital wallet used by DarkSide and secure \$2.3 million of it. The former agency had been investigating the hacker group for some time already and was able to share intelligence with the latter’s new dedicated ransomware taskforce that led to its first asset seizure barely over a month after its creation. institutions.

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What our clients are saying:

“Help is always available at SWK Technologies when you need it. Their staff is friendly and courteous. They get back to you promptly and stay on top of your issue. It’s a pleasure working with a company that cares.”

Meredee Parsons
Parts Life, Inc.



Get More Free Tips, Tools, and Services on Our Website: www.swknetworkservices.com

Two ways to WIN a gift card!

It only takes a minute and YOU could be our next winner! We've had lower than normal submissions lately, so your chances are very high for winning.

Last Month's Contest Winner:
Cindy Daley
Friendly Planet Travel

Please complete our brief survey in order to be placed in the running to win this month's gift card prize!

1. What do you like most about our services?

2. Tell us about a specific experience with us that you were happy with.

3. What are the biggest benefits you've received or experienced since hiring us?

4. What can we improve?

Email Jon Stiles (jonathan.stiles@swktech.com) with your responses

OR
 Fill out our online form:

<http://bit.ly/nwsnews-survey>
 before **June 7th** to get your name in the hat.

You could win a \$25 Gift Card!



SWK NETWORK ASSURANCE - A DIFFERENT KIND OF IT



The Network Assurance program with SWK Technologies provides your business with a different kind of IT support that identifies and protects you against your biggest risks while closely managing your costs. Our Managed Cloud Services engineers monitor and protect your infrastructure around the clock, enabling fast incident response as well as the ability to provide solutions that will continuously improve your network resources. We will leverage our deep experience with managed IT, cybersecurity and business management software, as well as that gained from serving the infrastructure needs of various industries, to ensure the health and security of your mission-critical technology.

Here is what is included with SWK Network Assurance how our services and solutions deliver a different kind of IT support:

WHAT NETWORK ASSURANCE OFFERS

As an award-winning managed service provider (MSP), SWK is equipped to handle a wide range of mission-critical technology needs. We provide access to a large variety of solutions that are included in our Network Assurance core program, fulfilling roles from security to proactive maintenance to application management. Some of the solutions featured include:

- Diagnostic software monitoring your server and workstation health
- Web filtering for each workstation
- Update and patch management
- Remote workstation support
- Predictive maintenance for each server and workstation
- Antivirus and antimalware software
- And more!

See the graphic below for a full list:

Services	Network Assurance
Initial Site Survey with Asset, Risk and Network Health Reporting	✓
24/7 Preventative Server, Workstation and Backup Monitoring	✓
Centralized Antivirus Software for All Servers and Workstations	✓
Anti-Malware Software for All Workstations	✓
Web Filtering	✓
Remote User Access Service for Each Workstation	✓
Microsoft Windows Patching for All Servers and Workstations	✓
Microsoft Office Patching	✓
Real-time Hardware and Software Inventories	✓
Hardware Warranty Management	✓
Software License Management	✓
Monthly Server & Workstation Health Reports	✓
Discounted Hourly Service Rate for Projects	✓
Vendor Liaison Services	✓
Business & Technology Review and Planning Meetings	✓
Unlimited Remote Support	✓
Unlimited Onsite Support	✓
** SWK Technology Alignment Process!	✓
Travel Time Included	✓

FIRST STEPS – RISK AND COST ASSESSMENT

The beginning of any introduction to our Network Assurance program will be a comprehensive assessment of your cyber risk as well as a breakdown of costs with a budgeting exercise. Instead of simply throwing pricing at you, we will meticulously review and seek to balance the resource cost against the level of risk you face for every part of your IT infrastructure officially covered under our contract. By applying a risk-based approach that measures the danger specific to your network resources, we help you optimize your business strategy for maintaining your IT health.

TRANSPARENT PRICING

SWK's Network Assurance plan comes with transparent pricing and services that allows you to gauge the true value and ROI for your IT investment. Additionally, we eschew the traditional 3-year engagement most MSPs force you to commit to and instead offer 1-year arrangements that can be renewed at the end of every contract. At SWK, our goal is to provide you with no-surprise invoicing that gives you full transparency into your technology service costs.

BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY REVIEW AND IT GOVERNANCE

For companies that cannot afford a full enterprise-level internal IT department, SWK Technologies will act as your on-demand network service team, and we can scale our solutions to complement the in-house resources of larger organizations as required. Your Network Assurance plan will include periodically scheduled Business Technology Reviews of your infrastructure, your cyber risk and the cost of SWK's services to help you fully understand the value return on your investment. These meetings will contribute to our IT governance solutions and planning for your company, empowering you to optimize your business strategy for your technology.

WHY NETWORK ASSURANCE BY SWK TECHNOLOGIES IS DIFFERENT

Below are the key ways in which SWK Technologies provides a different kind of IT support with Network Assurance, from our unique alignment process to our product- and industry-specific knowledge gathered from years of working with various technology solutions with thousands of customers (read what a few had to say about SWK here).

THE SWK TECHNOLOGY ALIGNMENT PROCESS

The SWK Technology Alignment Process is a proprietary service offered with our Network Assurance core package and which allows us to uncover opportunities to improve your network resources. One of the most consistent problems we run into when reviewing our clients' technology stacks is that neither their applications or their processes are seamlessly integrated, creating silos of data and significantly slowing down workflows. By working to align your solutions more closely, will empower your business to make better use of your IT investments and improve technology performance.

ACCESS TO DEEP INDUSTRY AND PRODUCT EXPERIENCE

SWK Technologies provides value to thousands of customers with our software and IT solutions, delivering implementation, consulting, monitoring, maintenance and business continuity services tailored for a variety of product and vertical needs. We leverage this experience and expertise to enhance our support, enabling us to solve various pain points and customize your systems to return the best value for your circumstances. Here are some examples of the areas where we apply this knowledge.

VERTICAL KNOWLEDGE – MANUFACTURING, SERVICE AND MORE

From various professional service firms to manufacturers and distributors of all categories of product, SWK has gained decades worth of knowledge and familiarity with a wide range of industry-specific demands. We are able to help you optimize your systems for compliance with multiple regulations including HIPAA, SSAFE, FMSA, and CCPA, and with agency standards from FINRA to the FDA. Whether your needs revolve around traceability, automation, data privacy, cybersecurity, cloud migration, digital transformation or any combination of these, SWK is able to provide a solution tailored to meet your unique pain points.

MICROSOFT 365 PARTNER – GOLD LEVEL

As a Microsoft Gold Partner, SWK Technologies is able to help you manage your Microsoft 365 subscription from top to bottom, as well as educate you on how to best optimize usage of all your entire platform. Our experts will educate you on tips and tricks you may never have known before, allowing you to unlock ways to save money with the tools already on hand, or instruct you on which apps to integrate to significantly extend the capacity of your solutions to perform additional roles.

SAGE SOFTWARE CONSULTING EXPERTS

SWK is a top value-added reseller (VAR) for several Sage Group solutions, including Sage 100 (and Sage 100cloud), Sage 500, Sage X3, Sage HRMS, and more. We are also a certified cloud service provider (CSP) and primary choice for hosting Sage software in a secure cloud environment protected with our own cybersecurity services, which include the world's first "smart" SOC (security operations center).

ACUMATICA MVPS

As the consecutive Acumatica Partner of the Year 2018-2019 and with several certified Acumatica MVPs on staff, SWK is perfectly positioned to empower users of this state of the art cloud ERP to capture the best ROI on their software. Additionally, our Managed Cloud Services can directly manage your instance in a privately hosted SaaS or hybrid environment with access to Network Assurance and our cybersecurity services.

Contact us to today learn more about Network Assurance and discover exactly how our award-winning IT support will best serve you.

SHINY GADGET OF THE MONTH: YARDROID



If you're a dog owner you have probably taken your pooch with you somewhere that isn't your home. Maybe it was to the beach, for a hike, over to a friend or family member's house. One thing that can be a challenge is giving them the freedom to play or be off a leash. Like many people you fear that they could run off or worse, run into the street by accident. The Halo collar is here to put an end to all of that and give you peace of mind.

There are a lot of interesting pet gadgets out there, but few seem to be quite as unique as this one. The Halo smart collar is a single solution that brings with it a ton of features. Easily the coolest one is the smart fence. This lets you create a fence literally anywhere. At someone's house without a fence? No problem. At the beach or camping in the woods? Consider it done. You can use the Halo app or take the collar and walk the perimeter to create a fence using top of the line GPS technology and the collar will do the rest. You can also customize the feedback the collar gives for your specific dog's needs from sound, vibration, to static. You also get the ability to set a range for warnings to the fence limits and emergency range to stop them. Beyond the smart fence you have access to expert training, activity tracking, and GPS to always know where your dog is.

The tech is not even everything behind this gadget either. It was designed with Cesar Millan a renowned dog psychologist/trainer who helped develop the collar as well as training programs that go along with it. They even give you a 21-day program to follow to train your pup how to get used to and respond to the collar. To put any other fears at rest, you have tracking and notifications that work right on your phone. This way you can always know where your dog is, how active they have been, and know if any prevention measures have been taken by the collar to detect any possible problems or signs your dog is trying to leave the fence.

The only drawback really is the cost. With something so feature and tech rich it probably comes as no surprise they are not giving this away. However, you are getting a portable invisible fence that you can take with you anywhere and much more beyond that. Right now they have it listed at \$999 on their website <https://www.halocollar.com/> with financing options as well as a discount bringing it down to \$799 with a promo code. For dog owners who are excited by the possibilities of this gadget this may not be a deal breaker. What do you think?

COLONIAL PIPELINE HACK REDEFINES RANSOMWARE LANDSCAPE

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BITCOIN VALUE DROPS AS INVESTORS QUESTION ANONYMITY

When news of the FBI tracking down the ransom funds broke, there was a [noticeable decline in the trading value of Bitcoin](#) amid a huge discussion on the role it plays in financing and facilitating cybercrime. Although the cryptocurrency had experienced previous drops from a multitude of other factors, it was clear that the public revelation (or [reminder](#)) that [transactions could be traced to recipients caused a panic sell-off](#). Despite some debate over the true impact of this disclosure, the implications are obvious as to how far the hacker ecosystem extends into the financial market.

DARKSIDE SHUTS DOWN SERVERS

[Security researchers uncovered a note in Russian](#) supposedly made by the perpetrators of the Colonial Pipeline attack, DarkSide, in which they announced they would be taking down their servers due to "pressure" from the US – and the fact that they lost access to them anyway. The exact type of pressure was applied is still in question, but the Biden administration did promise "action" against DarkSide and its affiliates, and the FBI would reveal only that they were able to [take advantage of the majority of hosting infrastructure being located within American borders](#).

UNDERSTANDING THE MALWARE ECOSYSTEM

It may seem like the pipeline hack may have ultimately turned into an overall win for US businesses vulnerable to ransomware, but really it revealed part of a bigger picture of a cybercrime network that has footholds in the stock market and national governments. The culprit's own marketing (and the fact that they even had any) reflects [just how much they thought of themselves as a legitimate institution](#), and it was its own hubris and ignorance that led to them crossing the line far enough to bring federal law enforcement down upon their operations. While many cybercriminal forums are openly shying away from ransomware after the blowback, the parties and knowledge involved in carrying out these types of cyber attacks remain.

DARKSIDE – A LOOK INSIDE RANSOMWARE AS A SERVICE

DarkSide operated what is known as Ransomware as a Service, linguistically a play on the XaaS (Anything as a Service) business model, but the loaded term ironically echoes the evolving sophistication of malware syndicates. The group operated at the center of a network that would see one side developing code and toolkits to encrypt files while affiliates rented access to then use the solutions against victims. This system netted the entire operation [at least \\$90 million worth of Bitcoin](#) (uncovered by blockchain investigators that discovered their digital wallet), 83% of which went to the affiliates while 17% went to the software developers.

JBS, REVIL, RUSSIA AND NATION-STATE CYBER ATTACKS

Although the Colonial Pipeline hack has dominated the news, [the JBS USA breach](#) was nearly as much of a driver in eliciting the prompt US response and its own story reveals many interlinked factors. Chief among them is that suspected culprits, [the infamous REvil ransomware group](#), are also thought to share members with DarkSide and to be closely tied to the Russian government. These findings and the impact of the most recent attacks have led to accusations against and renewed tensions with Russia for the part it plays in either allowing these hackers to operate or outright supporting their efforts.

CYBER INSURANCE AND RANSOM PAYMENTS

[Cyber insurance and other liability programs covering ransomware payments](#) are coming under increasing scrutiny for the role these plans may play in incentivizing the extortion cycle. [Insurers had already been reevaluating their rates and coverage](#) before these most recent incidents, and inevitably the industry will feel the ripple effects of [new regulatory actions taken in response](#).

THE EFFECT THE COLONIAL PIPELINE HACK WILL HAVE ON CYBERCRIME

If all of the above seems like a lot of unpack, then you may want to take a moment before reading this – [this may only be the beginning of a new era of cybercrime](#). It may only seem counterintuitive to everything you just read, but the truth is that ransomware gangs have shut down before only to return under a different name – indeed, both DarkSide and REvil are suspected to be repeat offenders rebranding every time there is scrutiny.

The severity of the US response caught the Russian cybercriminal ecosystem off-guard, but those hackers are still where they are with access to all the resources they had before cyber extortion became the most convenient tactic. There remain plenty of tools for amateurs to try their hands at, while more sophisticated – and less scrupulous – actors can fall back on previous brute force methods, or work more directly for a nation-state sponsor.

CONTACT SWK TECHNOLOGIES TO LEARN HOW TO FIGHT RANSOMWARE

Ransomware will not go away as there will still be those hackers for whom it provides the easiest payout, and the techniques used to deliver it can be used for other, more destructive cyber attacks. The best defense against any type of malware is still to protect yourself at the user level and back up your data as frequently as possible – reach out to SWK to uncover solutions and training that will help you achieve this as efficiently as possible.

[Contact SWK Technologies today](#) to learn more about what you can do to fight back against ransomware and cybersecure your business from all threats.

[Download our ebook here](#) to learn more about the new cybersecurity crisis and how to protect your business with the help of SWK Technologies.

EASY WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR POWERPOINT SKILLS

PATCH & UPDATE MANAGEMENT WITH CLOUD SYSTEMS

You may have noticed a trend with some of the Microsoft official migration paths, or maybe you already ran into the marketing pitch when seeking guidance on upgrading your servers, email system or OS. While Microsoft's documentation can seem one-dimensional in promoting Azure, the truth is that [cloud-hosted update and patch management](#) significantly streamlines delivery and mitigates a lot of traditional pain points. Microsoft can take most of the legacy systems listed above and load them in a new digital instance, and your Microsoft 365 plan grants access to Exchange Online with [web-hosted email servers](#).

However, if security for your data or compatibility with your customizations is a concern, then SWK's Managed Cloud Services division will help you build a better path to migrate your technology stack fully to the cloud or to a hybrid environment. With real-time IT support tailored to your solutions and proactive cybersecurity monitoring, you will be better able to take advantage of existing resources while capturing more of the benefits of the cloud.

UPGRADING YOUR LEGACY HARDWARE & SOFTWARE

If you elect to remain on-premise or want to adopt a slower migration journey to hybrid cloud, then SWK will still be able to leverage our deep managed service and software expertise to help replace out of date resources. We will help you replace your aging hardware and software with more modern systems and revitalize legacy infrastructure so that your systems will be as up to date as needed. Additionally, [we will also monitor the health and security of your servers](#) deployed onsite and provide proactive support to empower you to better maintain network integrity and limit downtime.

AVOID THE DANGERS OF OUT OF DATE SOFTWARE AND UPDATE NOW

Relying on out of date software and OS puts your business at extreme risk, and you must update any systems past EOL (or EOS) ASAP to avoid the dangers posed by hackers seeking to exploit unpatched vulnerabilities. Whether you want to move your critical functions to Microsoft's cloud, SWK's Secure Cloud with cybersecurity, or keep everything on-premise, SWK will support whichever upgrade path you choose with our award-winning managed services.

[Contact SWK Technologies today](#) to take advantage of our support services for your Microsoft, Sage or other out of date and discover how we can make upgrading your EOL systems less painful.

Gift Card Trivia!

This month's question is:

What was the ransom paid in the pipeline attack? (Hint: The answer is in this newsletter.)

- \$50,000
- \$1,000,000
- \$450,000
- \$4,400,000

Please email Jon Stiles (jonathan.stiles@swktech.com) with your answer by **June 7th**, in order to be placed in the running for this month's gift card prize!

We can help you with:

- Cybersecurity
- IaaS
- Complete network management and support
- Troubleshooting and problem solving on all PCs and Macs
- Cloud services and virtualization
- Hardware installation and support
- Virus / spyware removal and protection
- Security solutions
- Employee awareness training
- VPN (Virtual Private Networks)
- Remote access / Mobile computing
- Server installations and upgrades
- Spam filtering
- Hosted email
- Web content filtering
- System backups, on-site and off-site
- Help desk

Contact us

Give us a call for more information about our services and products.

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WHAT EXACTLY IS APPLICATION HOSTING? HOW TO TELL THE

What exactly is [application hosting](#), and how can you tell the difference between what you are looking for and all the various marketing terminologies and definitions that you scrolled past on Google? This article will seek to provide [a more understandable, high-level answer](#) that will enable you to uncover the best way to migrate your business software to the cloud, without having to go through link after link of web hosting services gaming SEO for your views. The type of resources needed to power a [website server](#) are well below what is needed to handle a system like an ERP or CRM, so finding the right partner is integral for a successful migration.

SWK Technologies has been consulting software users for decades on maximizing their ROI on their technology, and we have enabled many of our customers [to successfully migrate to the cloud](#). There are many benefits and a few pitfalls to note when moving your solutions and infrastructure to a digital environment, but education is as critical as choosing the right service provider to host you. The information below will help you better understand what to expect when hosting your mission-critical systems and how to choose a vendor that keep your data secure against all cyber threats.

Here are the key points you need to know to be able to tell the difference between business-level application hosting and everything else:

EVERYTHING HOSTED IN THE CLOUD

Part of the confusion in precisely defining each level of service is that [the cloud has allowed nearly every segment of a traditional IT deployment to be digitized](#) and loaded in from a remote connection. Everything from the environment to develop the software to the resources to run it, to even the product itself can be managed through a datacenter located somewhere else in the world, and all of it from the same server. Coupled with the fact that network service expertise is not a monolith (there are various levels of proficiency depending on role), categorization has struggled to keep up with a technological evolution that outpaces existing definitions too quickly to record it.

APPLICATION HOSTING VS WEB HOSTING

[The broadest definition of application hosting](#) includes almost every digital asset that can be loaded through from one piece of hardware into another. On the website hosting side, however, there is no requirement to deliver anything more complex [than a HTTP/HTTPS protocol](#), and so web servers typically only have the capacity for that and to host the domain's files. While programs that would have historically been desktop apps blur the hosting lines since they are loaded in a browser, there is still a world of difference between providers that only host webpages, like [HostGator](#) and those like [Amazon Web Services \(AWS\)](#) or [Microsoft Azure](#).

SOFTWARE HOSTING VS APP HOSTING

Reiterating the above, everything that is an application can be hosted and deployed as SaaS (Software as a Service), but there are many levels between [cloud service providers \(CSP\)](#) that separate web hosting, SMB-level and enterprise-level partners. Even consumer-facing apps like Netflix that need room after room of server farms to serve their entire customer base have an entirely different degree of complexity at the user level than an ERP. More advanced systems have layers upon layers of coding, multiple modules and will often need to be integrated with external applications to perform comprehensive functions, all of which need to be managed by support resources.

ERP AND BUSINESS APPLICATIONS HOSTED IN THE CLOUD

Enterprise Resource Planning software and even smaller desktop accounting applications like [QuickBooks](#) have historically been regulated to static on-premise servers and analog connections to workstations. The cloud has allowed publishers and trusted CSPs [to be able to deliver these systems to users digitally](#), while on the latter side it also enables those that are qualified [managed service providers \(MSPs\)](#) and product experts to be able to supply IT support for the hosted environment. This is also a key point for determining what is business-level application hosting versus glorified web hosting – more complex solutions require monitoring and maintenance that only experienced partners can provide consistently.

SMALL BUSINESS HOSTING VS AWS OR AZURE

It may be tempting to treat searching for an application hosting service as you would many others by trying to track down the most affordable one, but not only does this present security dangers, there is only so much room for difference in pricing. [Cloud hosting is pay-as-you-go \(PAYG\)](#) and costs are based on resource usage levels that are scalable across the market, but where scalability becomes a challenge is support provisioning since smaller and bigger CSPs alike lack the personnel to dedicate consistently close management of your account. Finding a reliable hosting provider when you are too big for some and too small for the others can quickly become [a Goldilocks Aesop](#), but the most cost-effective choice will be the partner that can provide the best over value to your technology stack.

YOUR CLOUD-HOSTED ENVIRONMENT AND PLAN IMPACTS SERVICE

Definitions for the many variations and categories in cloud computing continue to change as functions cross lines that [blur adjectives like "public" and "private" cloud](#), opening the possibilities for hosting [Anything as a Service \(XaaS\)](#). What this means for your business as a consumer, however, is that you must do your due diligence when approaching any potential provider to ensure their version of application hosting actually fits into your strategic objectives. How they define their service can make a big difference in the value they are able to return to you (if any), and a lack of transparency – or real technical expertise – could signal much pain later.

LEARN MORE ABOUT APPLICATION HOSTING FROM SWK TECHNOLOGIES

SWK Technologies is a certified CSP for all of the ERP and other software products we host, including with QuickBooks, Sage 50, Sage 100, Sage X3, Acumatica and more, with a datacenter designed to handle the specific support requirements of these solutions. Our technical consultants and network engineers have decades of combined experience with these solutions and are able to provide real-time support and more comprehensive education on everything you want to know about application hosting.

[Contact SWK today](#) to discover more about hosting any or all of your applications in the cloud with the experts in hosted ERP environments.

