

2021 SYSADMIN REPORT

WHEN THE SKY FALLS, THEY HOLD IT UP





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2020 ushered in an era of deep disruption and adaptation. As the sky fell, sysadmins were the ones battling to hold it up. To celebrate Sysadmin Day 2021, we surveyed 732 sysadmins from a variety of organizations worldwide to learn how the exceptionally weird year affected them and their organizations. We also asked about their most precious desires and dreams. This special report details what we discovered and celebrates the power and resistance of sysadmins, the very heart of the IT force!

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS INCLUDE:

Increased risk of cybersecurity attacks and increased workload are the top challenges sysadmins face due to remote work; both were named **by over 60%** of respondents.

59%

report that the amount of **time they spend working increased since last year**, and 62% of them work more than 40 hours a week.

51%

say that the **average salary** for sysadmins in the UK and US is **lower than expected**.

29%

say that they are **more focused on cybersecurity than they were pre-pandemic**.

73%

say their life would be easier if users would stop **clicking on suspicious links** or attachments, and 42% would beg users to quit **putting their passwords on sticky notes** on their computers.

40%

of sysadmins who are concerned about rapidly evolving cyber threats admit that **remote work diverted their attention away from security tasks**.

37%

of IT admins say that spending time with their family is **the best vacation** for them, while 14% insist that the ideal vacation would be network-free, so users can't reach them.



I convert caffeine into problem-solving.

– IT admin at a communications company, describing his super power

CHAPTER 1

Hard Times, Home Times: The Effects of Remote Work on Sysadmins

TOP REMOTE WORK CHALLENGES

When we asked sysadmins to list the top three challenges they faced due to the shift to remote work, they focused on increased risk of cybersecurity attacks (68%) and increased workload (66%). Next on the list but well behind was lack of tools to support remote work (38%).

Top challenges sysadmins faced due to remote work

Increased risk of cybersecurity attacks	68%
Increased workload	66%
Lack of tools to support remote work	38%
Reduced budget	33%
Reduced IT staff	30%
Lack of IT skills to support remote work	22%
Other	5%



IT security is only as effective as the weakest end user. Users who click every link and download all files are like Kryptonite for security.

– IT admin at an educational institution

In fact, the top challenges were largely the same, regardless of factors such as organization size. However, 85% of sysadmins from organizations with at least five sysadmins chose increased workload, not security, as their top challenge; this was the only group to do so. Most likely, this difference is due to the fact that most of these sysadmins work in midsize (101–1,000 employees) and enterprise (1,001–5,000) organizations — the more remote employees the organization has, the harder it is to support all of them.

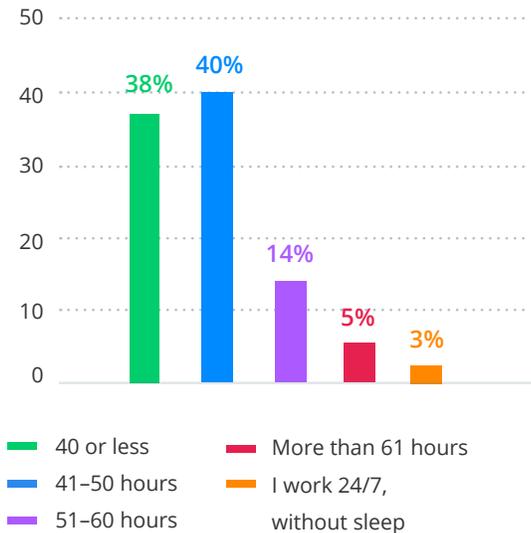
42%

of sysadmins in the educational sector suffered budget cuts since the pandemic, the most among the 25+ verticals surveyed.

WORKING MORE THAN BEFORE

Another challenge for sysadmins since the abrupt shift to remote work is the time they spend working: 59% reported that it increased and 62% of them work more than 40 hours a week.

Hours per week that sysadmins work



The financial, retail and healthcare industries reported the most pressure: 79% of sysadmins from these verticals work more than 40 hours a week. Also, 94% of sysadmins in the retail sector say that their working hours increased since the pandemic.

“

No, I am not playing computer games all day!

– Sysadmin from a public agency in Germany, revealing what he wants users to know about his job

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF WORK FROM HOME (WFH)

We were interested in whether the shift to WFH diverted sysadmins' attention from cybersecurity to more operational and support tasks, such as troubleshooting connection issues for users. The sysadmins surveyed split into three fairly even camps: 38% admitted that security is less of a priority now, 29% said that they are more focused on cybersecurity than they were pre-pandemic, and 33% stated that the ratio between operational and security tasks hadn't changed compared to the pre-WFH era.

72%

of sysadmins working in the retail sector are less focused on cybersecurity than pre-pandemic — the highest number among the 25+ industries surveyed.

Only 17% of respondents said their organization isn't facing any significant security challenges caused by the shift to remote work. For the rest, the top concern is rapidly evolving cybersecurity threats that often target remote employees (66%), followed by lack of staff (42%), IT skills (39%) and budget (36%). Also interesting, 40% of IT admins who are concerned about rapidly evolving cyber threats admit that remote work diverted their attention away from security tasks.

Top challenges in the company's cybersecurity strategy for remote workers, according to sysadmins

Rapidly evolving security threats	66%
Our IT team does not have enough personnel	42%
Our IT team lacks the necessary security skills	39%
We can't get enough budget for the required tools	36%
We aren't facing any significant challenges to our cybersecurity strategy for remote workers	17%

The ranking is similar regardless of vertical or company size. However, we found it interesting that the education is the sector most concerned about lack of personnel — 54% say it is the top security challenge for them right now.

CHAPTER 2

Sysadmin Dreams Are Made of This

HOW CAN USERS SUPPORT SYSADMINS?

When we asked sysadmins to name one or two things they would want users to learn to lighten their workload, the majority said they would prefer users to follow basic cybersecurity rules, such as not falling for phishing techniques and not using corporate devices for shopping.

What sysadmins want users to learn

To not click on suspicious links or attachments	73%
To not put passwords on a sticky note on the computer	42%
To not respond to emails from princes offering you one million dollars	29%
To not do window shopping on their professional devices	27%
How to reset their own password	26%
To not delete or move important files	25%
How to mute and unmute themselves	13%
How to find the power button	9%



Let me do my job so you can watch cat pics on your PC securely.

– Sysadmin at an Italian tech company, musing about his daily communication with users

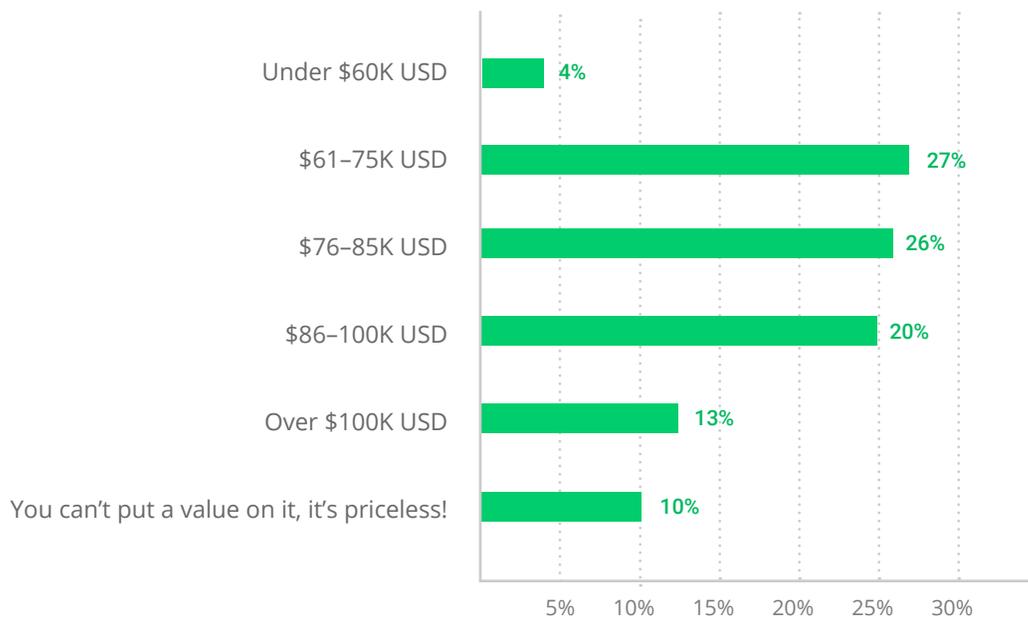
SYSADMINS' SALARY EXPECTATIONS

The average sysadmin salary in the U.S. is around \$62,979 ([Payscale](#)); in the UK, it is £47,500 (\$66,800) ([CW Jobs](#)). When we presented these figures in our survey, over half (51%) of sysadmins say the average salary is lower than expected, 35% say it is as expect-

ed and only 13% think it is higher than they expected.

When we asked respondents what the average sysadmin salary should be, just over half pegged it at \$61–85K.

The ideal average sysadmin salary, according to sysadmins



Most respondents in the manufacturing sector said that the average sysadmin salary should be \$86–100K (43%) or over \$100K (29%), the highest salary expectations among all verticals analyzed.

IDEAL VACATION

Summer is vacation time, especially this year! With that in mind, we asked sysadmins what their ideal time off would look like. The vast majority are into spending time with family, no matter the place (which is ador-

able), or visiting an island paradise. At the same time, every fifth sysadmin thinks that some time off without users asking for help would also be a nice getaway.

Ideal way to spend vacation, according to sysadmins

Spending time with the family, no matter the place	37%
Island paradise	29%
Anywhere users can't reach me	14%
A week without taking helpdesk calls would be ideal	9%
Mountain ski trip	5%
Other	6%

We also gave sysadmins the opportunity to name their own ideal vacation.
Feel free to use these responses for your summertime inspiration!



"Visiting Japan for 2 weeks; it's been my dream since before the pandemic."

"In a cabin in the woods with great TV and internet access."



"On a cruise to see the world."

"Anything outdoors (hiking, hunting, fishing)."

"A month in Bordeaux at the finest chateaux."

"Camping, dogs included."



"Spending time with friends."

"Anywhere without cell service but with lots of outdoor activities."



"Alone. Just sit back, relax, write copy, research and study."

"Video games and chilling."



"Traveling through the world to know other culture and people."

"Horseback riding."



“I HAVE PATIENCE BEYOND MY YEARS”: WHAT SYSADMINS WANT USERS TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR WORK

We are convinced that sysadmins are true IT heroes but users are generally oblivious. Indeed, users hardly ever (read: never) email them to say that everything is working great. We asked our respondents to name one thing they would love users to know about their work. Here are several items that are top of mind.

- **“Follow the FAQs and policies!!1!111!!”**

This quote stands for itself, since users can make a sysadmin’s job a total nightmare if they ignore their security training and don’t follow basic FAQs. As one sysadmin noted, “If users listened to us more, they would need us less.”

- **“I have patience beyond my years.”**

Being a sysadmin is a stressful job. Some respondents noted that they feel like they have earned a degree in psychology by learning how to safely maneuver among different stakeholders while trying to ensure zero downtime.

- **“Sysadmins actually love helping people.”**

Despite all the harsh moments, many sysadmins admit that they actually like what they do and helping users is their super power. One respondent even said, “The sysadmin job is a labor of love.” No better way to put it!

- **“The sysadmin job is as important as the company’s core business.”**

Sysadmin remains a critical role for every organization that depends on software — so, just about every single one on the planet! Sysadmins help their companies remain resilient and secure, so they deserve appreciation all the way up to the executive level.

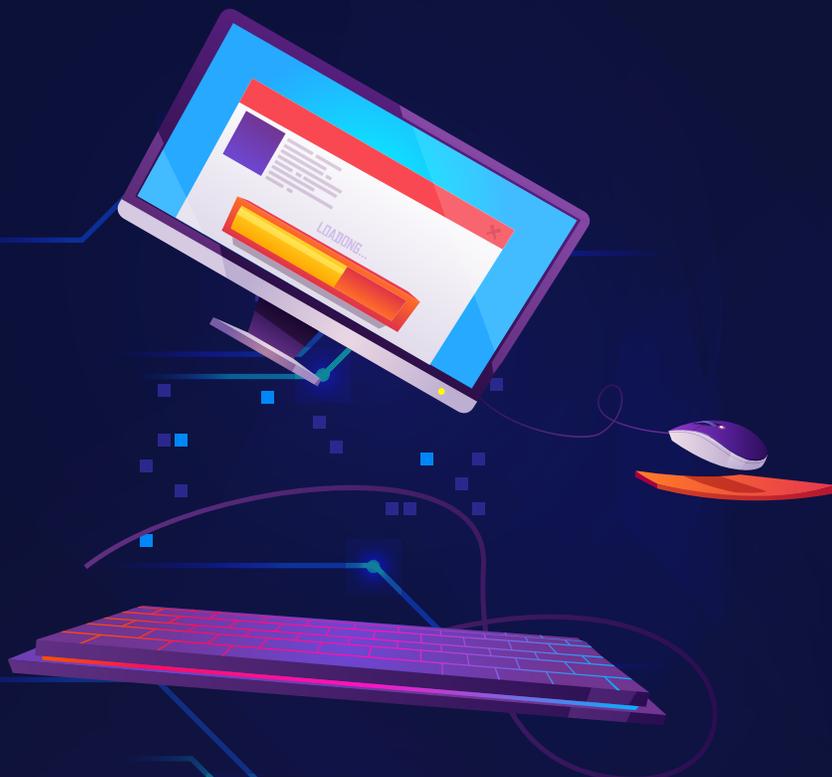
- **“This job requires constant research; what you see is just the tip of the iceberg.”**

Good system administration is often invisible. When systems are up and running, it means that sysadmins have done their job well — behind the scenes, they have properly managed the servers, network, switches, routers, firewalls, access points, biometric devices, IP phones, email gateways, cloud backups, antivirus tools and more. On top of that, they need to record and investigate incidents, as well as constantly learn and test new technologies. Sysadmins want users to know they truly do work all day.



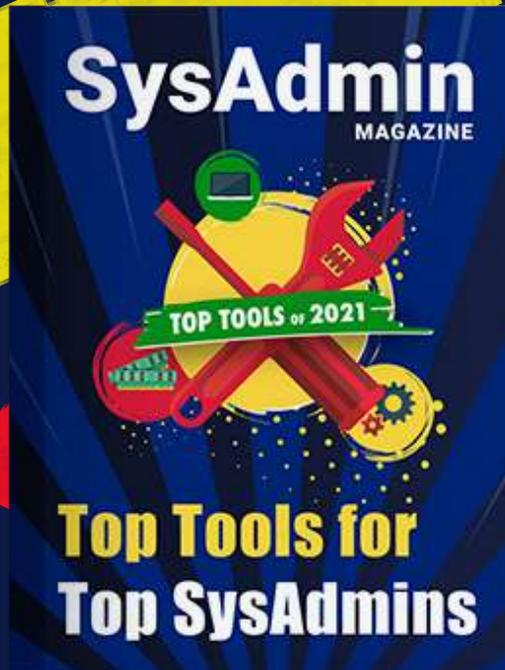
CHAPTER 3

Bonus Section – Sysadmin Wisdom!



We are convinced that our readers deserve to get some wisdom from sysadmins. We asked our respondents to name one “golden rule” they would want everyone to learn about their life online. Free of charge, this checklist will help everyone who wants to make their digital life more secure and less toxic.

- Don't post anything online that you wouldn't wear on a T-shirt when the CEO is doing office visits.
- Keep your antivirus up to date and use VPN when working on the corporate network.
- Don't visit dodgy websites at your work!
- Protect your work-life balance and take your time for your real life.
- Count to 10 before you press Send.
- Don't fall for suspicious emails — if it seems too good to be true, it is a scam.
- Don't Reply All to group emails.
- Nobody will ask your credit card info to show you cat pictures.
- Read what the dialog box says; never just assume.
- Use different passwords for everything.
- Spread love and memes!



SysAdmin Magazine is a free source of knowledge for IT Pros who are eager to keep a tight grip on network security and do the job faster. [Check out](#) new issue with the rating of top tools for top sysadmins!

APPENDIX 1:

REGIONAL FINDINGS



UNITED KINGDOM

- The top three concerns for sysadmins in the UK are increased workload (82%), increased risk of cybersecurity attacks (61%) and lack of tools to support remote work (42%).
- 56% of sysadmins in the UK are working longer hours than they did pre-pandemic. More than half (55%) work over 40 hours per week, and 15% work for more than 60 hours weekly.
- 52% admit that they are less focused on security than they were pre-pandemic.
- 39% say that lack of IT personnel and dedicated security skills puts their organization at increased security risk.
- 63% think that average annual salary for a sysadmin in the UK should be £44K–61K, which aligns with the actual average salary of £47,500



FRANCE

- 86% of French sysadmins say that rapidly increased risk of cybersecurity attacks is the top challenge for them, and 57% are struggling with an increased workload.
- 43% say that the time they spend working increased compared to pre-pandemic. 63% work for 41–50 hours per week and 13% work for more than 60 hours.
- Only 14% of sysadmins in French organizations say that remote work diverted their attention
- 61% say that rapidly evolving cyber threats are a serious issue for their cybersecurity strategy for remote workers. Other concerns include lack of budget (38%) and lack of necessary security skills (37%).

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

GEOGRAPHICAL REGION

North America **53%**



EMEA **24%**



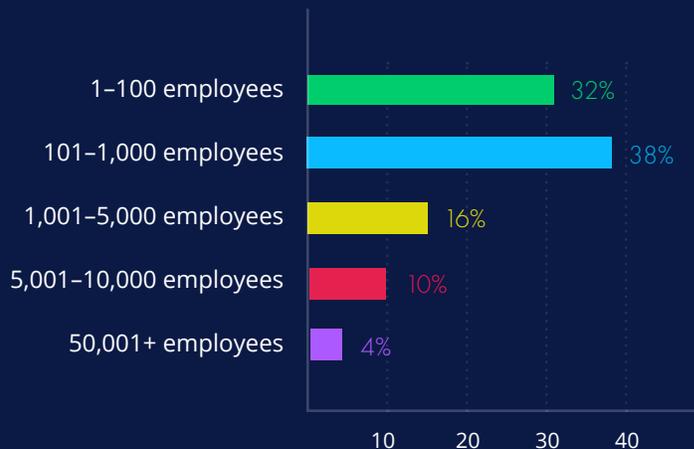
APAC **17%**



South America **6%**



ORGANIZATION SIZE



TOP VERTICALS

Technology/Managed Services	10%
Education	10%
Government	9%
Banking & Finance	8%
Technology/Software	8%
Healthcare	7%
Consulting	5%
Manufacturing	5%

Telecommunications	5%
Retail & Wholesale	4%
Technology/Hardware	4%
Construction & Engineering	3%
Service	3%
Non-Profit	3%
Energy	2%
Insurance	2%

ABOUT THE REPORT

The report is brought to you by Netwrix Research Lab, which conducts industry surveys among IT pros worldwide to discover important changes and trends. For more reports, please visit

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ABOUT NETWRIX

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