# Guide to getting your product tested in the Network World Clear Choice Tests program

**Contact the right person:** The best way to get our attention if you want to have your product tested by Network World is to target both the appropriate testing editor and testing partner that focus on testing your type of product.

Network World has two in-house testing editors, Christine Burns and Keith Shaw, who collectively manage all testing projects for the magazine. Burns and Shaw work with a group of 14 independent testers collectively called the Network World Lab Alliance (www.nwfusion.com/alliance/index.html). Each tester examines products in his or her own area of expertise, and works with an assigned Network World editor to identify product classes and specific products within those classes to test, develop test methodology, and produce the articles that appear in print and on the Web.

*It is a waste of everyone's time to blanket all editors and testers with either a product pitch or a press release because most will delete the documents that fall outside of their testing purview. To pinpoint both the appropriate editor and tester for your specific product category, and get the corresponding contact information, please use our interactive testing beat finder at:* http://www.nwfusion.com/reviews/beatfinder.html

**Getting our attention formally.**
While sending us your initial general pitch to the specific editors and testers that follow your product's general market is a good introduction, we are also attempting to formalize that process so that we can better track products and product categories.

To that end, we've developed an on-line vendor test request form.
http://www.nwfusion.com/reviews/reviewrequest.html

Using this form, you can let us know that your product exists, where it stands in the network realm both in terms of what it does and what products it competes with, and how we get in touch with you if we want to test it. We absolutely prefer that you leave an email trail, and not a stream of voice mail messages.

*We expect vendors to complete the form in its entirety. Therefore, we request that the information be supplied by a seasoned PR or technical marketing professional. We also do not typically believe vendors that claim there is no direct competition to their products. If you don't have a competitive list handy, we suggest you ask your sales folks what products they are most commonly required to sell against in large customer accounts. While these products may not provide a feature-by-feature comparison with your product, they will generally help us to get the product properly aligned with other products that target the same network issue.*

*These forms are sent directly to the Network World test editors. We will make every effort to acknowledge receipt of your request within two business days, informing you if*

*there is a test of like products or whether we believe a standalone product test is warranted. It is also important to note that while Network World would like to test every product brought to our attention, limitations in space, budgets and content prevent that. We make our selections of which product to test based what we feel are of most interest to our reader base of enterprise network professionals.*

**Keeping our attention**
Once you make initial contact with us via the test request form, please feel free to send us product-specific press releases (we don't need to see "customer win," partnership or earnings press releases for testing purposes) that apprise us of new releases and upgraded feature sets.

*Please do not follow up your email correspondence with frequent telephone calls. Once again, a paper trail of information is much more useful to us as we track available products.*

**Target your type of test.** Network World generally publishes four types of testing-based articles. Please familiarize yourself with these so you know best where to pitch your particular product. Please note that it is the testing editor's choice, and not the vendor's request, that determines what kind of testing article products are included in.

- Comparative Product Test: *This is our preferred way of presenting product specific testing data to readers. Whenever possible, we will put your product into comparative review. These tests pit like products against each other in head to head comparison. Typically we assess these products based on performance, management, ease-of-use, features, security and installation/documentation. We use a scorecard for these tests based on a 1 to 5 scale and name a Clear Choice winner in all but extraordinary cases. These articles cover anywhere from 3 to 13 products and can run anywhere from 1,500 to 4,500 words in length.*

- Single Product Test: *We conduct single product tests for new products that we feel uniquely address a network issue, represent a major upgrades to an established, widely used product, or fall into one of the product categories we offer rolling tests for such as stackable switch/routers, 10 GBE switch/routers, and network servers. This is also the testing venue we pursue when vendors offer Network World exclusive access to their products. Testing on single products is done with the same categories and scoring method as with comparative reviews. We also make general comparisons between these products and like ones that exist in the marketplace. A product can be designated a Clear Choice winner if it gets a score of 4.5 or above. These articles run about 800 words in length.*

- Product Roundup or Issues-based Test: *We occasionally test products in a round-up scenario when they attack a network issue or task from a variety of angles but are not necessarily products that we can compare feature by feature. These*

*articles typically focus on how the products address the issue or task at hand and discuss in which network scenarios they would be most useful.  We don't typically score products tested in this fashion. These articles typically run about 2,500 words in length.*

- Product Peek: *Occasionally we come across a product that offers one or two unique features that we think would interest our readers but doesn't really warrant a full-blown single product review.  This format provides a very quick look at new or upgraded products that fall into this category.  It runs only 400 words in length and is not scored.*

- Cool Tools.  *If your product is a gadget, gizmo, or client-side software product, stop reading and contact Cool Tools Editor Keith Shaw at [kshaw@nww.com](mailto:kshaw@nww.com) to give him your pitch. The Cool Tools column runs weekly, and often features quick reviews on products that he tests. Products that need little to no IT help usually fall in this category.*

*Products tested in any of these scenarios qualify for consideration in our overall Best of the Tests program, results of which are published annually in The Network World Best Products Issue in February.*

**Don't ignore our formal invitations**

For comparative and roundup tests, we will send a formal invitation outlining targeted products, the scope of the testing, the testing timeframe and logistics, and an action item list that you will need to complete if you want to have your product included in the test.

*While a typically test cycle begins as much as four to six months before the publication date, the invitation response window it typically no longer than three weeks.  Please respond with your level of interest as soon as possible after receiving an invitation, even if it is just to say "I'm checking with technical folks" or "I'm not the right person, but I'm passing this matter onto X." This helps us track which companies we may need to nudge along for an answer as the RSVP deadline looms. Much too often, these invitation fall into a PR abyss and products get left out.  It's not good for you or us to publish a review that does not include your product simply because the ball was dropped.*

*Additionally, if either the technical marketing or the engineering folks at your company require a conference call with the Network World editor and tester(s) involved in the project, we'll need as much lead time as possible to set that up.*

**Read the invitation in its entirety**

Our invitations are very long for a reason.  We put all the pertinent information that addresses the issue specific to the test at hand and include a lengthy FAQ derived from over 10 years of working with PR folks to get testing-based articles published on a weekly basis.

*This FAQ addresses questions about who else has been invited, what your chances are for sidebars, whether we want on-site engineering help for the tests, how we prefer artwork to be delivered, and our policies on vendors seeing copy before it goes to print (in short, just so you know: they don't.)*

**Shipping your product to be tested**
The product(s) go to the testers' labs, which are geographically dispersed across the country. Exact shipping instructions are included in the text of the invitation. Vendors are responsible for all shipping and insurance costs to and from the testing venues.

*Please do not ship your products the Network World testers' editor(s) as we will just have to reroute them at your expense to the lab locations.*

*Also, our testing windows are set in order to allow the tester to devote enough time to each product included in the test. It is very difficult for us to curb these dates to suit individual vendors' production cycles. You can certainly ask to be tested last in the cycle if you are on the verge of releasing a new version of your product, but please be prepared to deliver your product to us within the extra time we extend. Don't ask for an extension if your engineers tell you "we might have it ready by then." If we push things out on your behalf, we expect you to deliver.*

**Vendor involvement during the testing process**
Whether or not vendors are allowed to be onsite for part or all of the testing cycle varies test by test and is ultimately the call of the individual tester. As a bare minimum for all tests, we require that you provide us with a designated technical contact that will be readily available to our testers should they have questions regarding how the product is supposed to work or if they need to resolve a situation in which the product is not working as it should. If products require an intricate installation process or offer several layers of complexity, testers may allow vendors to visit the lab for a portion of the testing cycle. With the more performance intensive tests, vendors are typically present in the labs with the testers at the vendor's expense while their own product(s) are being tested.

*We strongly suggest-- regardless of the level of engineering support warranted in each test—that the PR team touch base with its technical team regarding any issues that may arise during testing. While Network World's strong policy is that no vendor will see article copy before it is published, it is not our intent to surprise vendors with bad reviews. If we find something amiss with your product during testing, your technical contact will most likely know about it.*

**Sliding publication dates**
While we set a tentative publication date for each test during the invitation process, more often than not, that date is moved for a variety of reasons, including a larger-than-

expected vendor turnout, a longer-than-anticipated time to assemble the necessary test bed, or other problems testing the products. In any case, it is very wise to check with the editor managing the test project several weeks before the tentative publication date to confirm that date still holds.

*Please do not ask this question of the testers, as it is the editors who make the decision on when any given testing article will be published.*


**Rebutting anything negative we publish about your product**
Obviously, we take every precaution to publish fair and accurate assessments of any product we test. Given the competitive nature of our testing environment, we are well aware that vendors don't always agree with either our assessments or how we express them in the text of our articles. Therefore, we'd like to outline how we would prefer to receive your comments.

Contact both the tester and editor via e-mail: *It is very helpful in getting to the bottom of any alleged error if both the editor (who is ultimately responsible for the copy printed) and the tester (the holder of the detailed testing notes) are on the same page about the nature of the complaint.*

Let us know in a reasonable timeframe: *Please let us know the week the article publishes if you have issues with it. We typically only hold onto products for a week or two after publication. If we ship back your product and your complaints warrant us retesting it in some fashion, our response to your queries would be delayed.*

Present a united front from PR, engineering and marketing: *A bulleted list of concise complaints makes it much easier for us to render a timely response.*

Distinguish erroneous facts from differences of opinions: *If we publish that your product doesn't support X, and it in fact, does and you can prove that, we are willing to correct that error. But if your engineers make a conscious choice to follow one protocol and our testers feel that another protocol is the better route to take in an enterprise network deployment, that is a difference of opinion; we would not be inclined to make a correction in that instance.*

Know what we can do for you: *If we get a fact wrong, we will change the story online and run a printed correction in the next issue. If your company feels the need to express its opinion over the test in general or any specific differences of opinions as described above, then we openly accept letters to the editor.*