

Improving your customer value chain

Creating customer value with remote access solutions **By Gary Grabowski**

How does your company create value for its customers? Different companies have their own unique formulas, but much of a firm's value proposition is created in part through processes. Improved processes result in better value to your customers.

A remote access solution is one way to enable your employees to become more productive, creating more value and, ultimately, greater customer satisfaction.

Remote access is the ability to access a computer or application on a firm's Local Area Network (LAN) through a secure connection from a remote location. Executives and employees can access e-mail, files and applications from home or on the road.

Network administrators can remotely manage multiple PCs and servers, and your sales team can access key customer and product information while traveling.

Building a solution

There are numerous approaches to remote access solutions. They vary in degrees of complexity based on the types of access required, but they all share two basic components — a personal computer or laptop, and a connection to a public communications infrastructure such as the Internet.

For the home user, the availability of high-speed Internet access is increasing and is typically available through a local cable television provider or the phone company. Both broadband (cable modem) and DSL (phone company connection) solutions offer connection speeds that support the needs of the average remote access user. For mobile users, the basic setup includes a laptop computer with an Ethernet port or a wireless LAN card.

There are Web tools that work in conjunction with most of the popular messaging applications that provide basic remote access to things such as e-mail, calendars and contact lists. This type of solution typically requires just an Internet browser and a connection to the Internet.

For complete remote access to the corporate network, one of the most widely used and cost-effective solutions is a



Virtual Private Network (VPN). A VPN provides the user with a secure connection via the Internet to the corporate network. This type of solution provides users with the ability to work at a remote computer just as if they were in the office. VPN solutions come in various hardware and software configurations and can be scaled to meet the needs of your business.

Several types of users benefit from remote access.

■ **Executives.** Executives have complete access to company information day or night.

■ **Office employees.** Employees can't always finish the day's work, meet deadlines or catch up without staying after hours, and they typically aren't as productive during this time of day. With a remote access setup, they can leave the office, eat dinner with the family, then get online, finish the day's work and prepare for the next day. This relieves a lot of stress, making for a more productive and satisfied employee.

■ **Telecommuting employees.** The availability of broadband connectivity in the home has given millions of working Americans the flexibility to better balance work and family demands, resulting in improved productivity and cost savings from reduced overhead.

■ **Mobile users (sales representa-**

tives). Mobile users have the benefit of expanding "hot spots" in public areas in most major cities. Airports, hotels and even coffee houses offer free wireless Internet access. Most major communications carriers offer wireless air card services that enable Internet connectivity virtually anywhere. Your sales reps can access customer data, inventory and order information, and can respond to client inquiries in real time.

■ **Network administration.** System administrators can manage remote branch offices and remote users from a single location, resulting in reduced overhead costs and providing a quicker response time to resolve system issues.

Creating value through remote access solutions promotes customer loyalty and revenue growth and differentiates your organization from the competition. Careful planning, including a complete needs analysis (both user and processes), along with a detailed IT infrastructure review, will put your company on track to implementing a successful remote access solution and strengthen your company's position in your customer's value chain.

GARY GRABOWSKI is the operations manager at TriLogic Corp., a solutions integration company focusing on IT Infrastructure. Reach him at info@tri-logic.com or (724) 745-0200.

Experts **Technology** is brought to you by TriLogic Corp.