

POV



guest columnist • Kenneth Klapproth

SATISFYING CUSTOMERS' NEED FOR INFORMATION

The solution provider's new challenge is providing enhanced connectivity to data while ensuring security and quality of service.

WITH COMPUTERS, GONE ARE THE DAYS when people had “enter” anxiety—the fear of breaking something when they hit the enter key. Customers today are more technologically savvy and are experimenting with Web 2.0 approaches to be more productive and access the information they need to make day-to-day decisions.

own Adobe Flash dashboard to access a database that's sitting on a cubical mate's desktop rather than on the corporate server, the solution provider could be caught unawares. Providers must now consider today's dynamic capability between users brought about by this wireless revolution and addiction we have to information stores.

No matter how [customers] acquire technology, they want the ability to make decisions by accessing the information they need, when they need it.

But as technology gets more and more complex—and expensive—small and midsize businesses are considering options like SaaS or managed services to eliminate their burden of system maintenance and make it easier to manage IT expenses. No matter how they acquire technology, though, they want the ability to make decisions by accessing the information they need, when they need it.

For IT service providers, this compounds the problems. Not only are they being asked to make sure the IT infrastructure is working properly, but they're also being asked to provide an enhanced level of connectivity to data and applications for more people in the organization. And because customers are savvy enough to boil down volumes of data to a format that is convenient—a graph in Excel, for example—organizations also want to provide a “self-service” way for customers to pull service-level data they trust rather than pushing data of which they are skeptical.

The key is in the planning. It's easy to understand and deploy a typical client/server application like a CRM system where many users connect to one server. But when collaborative solutions like Microsoft Vista come out and people use its built-in Groove technology for peer-to-peer sharing, or when they use Yahoo pipes to connect their

This points to the growing importance of remote monitoring technology—particularly that which can separate needed data stores from the proprietary authoring application. Whether the technology is meant to monitor application usage, conversations on the network, or security access, it alerts providers that something has changed so they can determine whether or not that change is detrimental. Moving a laptop into another office for a meeting may be OK, but plugging in an unsecured wireless access point could alert the off-site IT administrator that something has changed that might be worth a look.

IT service providers want to be proactive and enable their customers to satisfy their own demands. They want to allow people to pull information on their own to discover why the network is down or why they haven't received email in the last 10 minutes. Something as simple as a red-light/green-light display or a bandwidth gauge on their corporate portal could instantly identify a problem server or application, letting them take their own remedial action.

People like choice. They like drawing their own conclusions and making their own decisions. This ability to get information on demand both reduces the service provider's expense and improves customer satisfaction—people get the information they need, in the way they want, and in a timely fashion. They want it, so let them have cake!

? Whose POV do you want to hear?

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