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Telecommuting: A VALUABLE PROPOSITION

The mind numbing progress of office technology and telecommunications has made it increasingly common for general business enterprises to offer telecommuting as an option to employees.

And when you think about it, it may make a lot of sense for your organization.

What is a Telecommuting Solution?

Simply put, it is a program implemented by many leading organizations that commissions employees to work remotely, principally from a home office.

Consider some of the benefits a telecommuting program offers to your organization and employees:

Reduces Your Costs. Allowing employees to work outside of the office reduces real estate costs, office overhead and labour. Staff-work can be carried out wherever the appropriate skills are available, eliminating the need to keep full time people in-house – and less people in-house means less space needed.

Increases Your Efficiency. Establishing a telework program can grow your productivity by 10 to 40%. This is because it eliminates travel time, inclement weather delays and other interruptions typical in an office environment.

Improves Your Flexibility. You're faced with restructuring: a typically uncomfortable time for organizations and employees. With a "work from home" solution in place, employees continue working with minimal disruption to their lives. In fact, depending on the degree of change, restructuring can be largely invisible to many staff who don't spend much time at company headquarters.

Why a Telework Solution?

- Significant overhead reductions
- Increased productivity at the organizational level
- A more flexible work environment at the individual level
- Reduced travel time so workers can get more work done

Customer Satisfaction. Organizations supporting distance-work can extend their customer-focused services beyond typical working hours without the associated overtime. Customers appreciate the extended service levels while stakeholders appreciate the decreased cost.

Defeat the Distance. Reduced travel time allows workers to get more done.

A Happy Employee is A Good Employee

Increased Opportunities. "Work from Home" programs enable individuals to work at organizations outside typical commuting distances. Working remotely allows access to employees who face special challenges, including those with disabilities that make it difficult to travel, single parents and people who care for an infirm relative.

Flexible Hours. Employees appreciate the flexible approach to working hours that often accompanies a successful distance-work program.

Made for It. Employees who are self motivated will experience a high level of satisfaction from the freedom of working from home. Self starters living in an environment that allows them to work undisturbed are the best candidates for working remotely.

Heck, it can even have significant environmental benefit. Think about the reduction in morning and afternoon traffic, and the resulting decrease in pollution.

Assess Your Organization

Developing a program that encourages employees to work remotely is not the answer for every organization. Your management style and corporate culture may conflict with the flexible environment that usually accompanies telecommuting. You need to carefully evaluate your employees and your organization to determine if a telework program is right for your business.

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Server to Server

Telecommunications Made *Eeeeeasyyyyyyy*...

Transparent LAN Service (TLS) or Frame Relay, Which is Best For You?

You have multiple offices. You want to connect your Montreal office LAN (local area network) with your Vancouver LAN. You need connectivity... You have options.

With some diligence and crash-course education you've narrowed your choice down to two seemingly similar services.

It's all down to Transparent LAN Service or Frame Relay. The question is what are they? How do they differ? For your business, which one makes more sense?

Let's start by trying to figure out what they are.

Transparent LAN Service

Transparent LAN Service (TLS) is a high-speed data service that provides connectivity between two or more customer LANs – not in the same building – across the MAN (metropolitan area network) or the WAN (wide area network).

It's a point-to-point or point-to-multipoint bridged service, meaning it extends a LAN from one location to various other locations, whereas a routed service allows routing between locations, not limiting you to site-to-host and host-to-site data transfers.

Some Key TLS Points To Know

- A very simple and cost-effective solution for interconnecting locations
- Supports all your LAN protocols, such as IP, IPX, AppleTalk, NetBEUI, DLC and NetBIOS
- Bandwidth scalability from 1 Mbps to 100 Mbps in major metropolitan areas, giving your business the speed and flexibility you require. Further scalability in terms of price, reach and bandwidth is made possible with the options for ADSL and G.SHDSL.
- Does not provide for meshing (communication between any one of your locations directly with any of your other locations, i.e. any-to-any communication)

Frame Relay

Around since the early 1990s, Frame Relay is a high-speed, wide area, multiple connection service that connects LANs across remote distances. The name comes from the fact that Frame Relay does not do any processing of the content of the packets; rather, it relays them from the input port of the switch to the output port.

Some Key Frame Relay Points To Know

- Wide connectivity (pre-determined remote locations with a relatively infrequent need to communicate)
- Ideal for large transmissions, such as streaming video
- Supports bursty transmissions, which are large transmissions needing extra bandwidth from the network
- Supports 56 Kbps up to T1 (1.536 Mbps)
- LAN-LAN connectivity

Which is Better For Me?

You really have to look at your application and what you're trying to accomplish. If you're rolling out a network or have the requirement to provide connectivity between sites that are in remote areas, or in areas where TLS isn't available, the decision to go with Frame Relay is made easier. Also, installing huge TLS pipes when you require small bandwidth doesn't make sense. By the same token, requirements for large bandwidth will make Transparent LAN Service preferred over Frame Relay.

One thing is certain, used optimally, both solutions are cost effective and reliable.

Check out this chart which highlights some of the key differences in the two services.

Transparent LAN Service (TLS)

- Built on the premise of LAN-LAN connectivity
- Scalable from 1 Mbps of bandwidth to 100 Mbps, therefore ideal for larger transmission requirements
- Point-to-point connection, or host connection to multiple points
- Asymmetric and Symmetric DSL options offered on TLS
- Does not have a Disaster Recovery Option (DRO), however, the use of DSL would enable TLS to serve as cost-effective back-up
- Does not support voice and video transmissions
- Not available in all remote areas of Canada

Frame Relay

- Built predominantly as a wide area service, providing reach anywhere in North America
- Supports 56 Kbps up to T1 (1.536 Mbps) transmissions, therefore ideal for smaller transmission requirements
- Point-to-point and point-to-multipoint connection, and network meshing
- Symmetric DSL offered on Frame Relay
- DRO option
- Supports voice and video transmissions
- Much wider footprint than TLS

Some Questions To Ponder

Here are some questions you need answers to before making your decision... Some internal, some for the vendor.

- What are my bandwidth requirements?
- How much speed and bandwidth do I need for my applications?
- What connectivity issues can arise when using Frame Relay or TLS?
- For Frame Relay, are there video and voice requirements I need to know of?
- Can I opt for Frame Relay and Transparent LAN Services in a managed service environment?
- What is my disaster recovery strategy? Does the vendor have one that suits my business?

For more information, please contact your AT&T Canada Sales Representative or visit www.attcanada.com and have a look at our Data Services.

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Just So You Know...

- Computer monitors need to stay cool. Unfortunately, they make handy resting places for various items. But if papers, manuals, and other miscellany are piled on top of the monitor, the cooling vents are blocked. Internal heat shortens the life of monitors.
- Technology collections are becoming more popular. According to some experts, people today are choosing to collect old toasters and typewriters because technology is changing so fast.
- The number one reason for employing a 1-800 number is to increase brand loyalty.
- To play “Mary Had A Little Lamb” on your telephone: 3-2-1-2-3-3-3, 2-2-2, 3-9-9, 3-2-1-2-3-3-3, 3-2-1-2-3-1.
- Public telephones in Israel are no longer operated by tokens as they were in the past. They are now operated by a magnetic card known in Hebrew as a telecart (tel-eh-cart). These plastic cards, the same size and shape as a credit card, are available at post offices, some hotel reception desks, street kiosks, and dispensing machines.
- The first telephone book ever issued contained only fifty names. It was published in New Haven, Connecticut, by the New Haven District Telephone Company in February, 1878.

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Tennis Canada Fulfills Flexibility Requirements with Managed Hosting Solution

from AT&T Canada

e-business feature

Background

Tennis Canada, the national sport governing body for tennis in Canada, is committed to leading the growth of tennis and fostering the pursuit of excellence for all players. To that end, Tennis Canada oversees the development of the grass roots game and organizes competition throughout the country. Two of the organization's biggest events are the Rogers AT&T Cup and the Tennis Masters Series Canada.

Challenge

For two weeks every year, Tennis Canada goes into high gear. And so does their Web site, which creates specific challenges for the organization. "We required a more comprehensive hosting solution," said Kirsten Wallace, Marketing Director for Tennis Canada. "We experience very high site traffic for three months out of the year, and we needed a solution that provided reliability and optimum performance. In addition, we wanted to combine customized functionality with the flexibility needed to scale back during low traffic periods."

Solution –

The AT&T Canada Advantage

Tennis Canada turned to AT&T Canada to satisfy their unique requirements. The organization implemented a load balancing solution to manage heavy traffic flows during its peak months of June, July and August. AT&T Canada also offered the flexibility of scaling back during non-peak periods. In addition, Tennis Canada programmers received a host of tools that allowed them to design more sophisticated Web sites to satisfy the business and marketing objectives of the organization.

Results

"After significant promotion of the site and the implementation of AT&T Canada's Managed Hosting solution, we had the best Web site year to date," said Wallace. "Even with double the traffic, our servers did not crash as they had in the past, and we received very positive feedback from users in terms of content and navigation."

In addition, the tools provided by AT&T Canada allowed Tennis Canada to understand how visitors were using the site. "We used the database part of the solution to track banners and page views," said Wallace. "That information has been valuable for us to improve our site and tailor it to the needs of our audience."

"Our Web site is a key driver of our business growth, helping us showcase our tournaments and provide valuable returns for our sponsors. AT&T Canada understood our need for reliability and flexibility so they customized the solution to meet our unique traffic flows, which in the past has been the biggest hurdle to overcome."

— Kirsten Wallace, Tennis Canada

Beyond the solution, Wallace was impressed by the processes and service in place to support it. "Working with AT&T Canada was excellent – the level of expertise was evident, the response was almost immediate and the procedures were in place to handle technical support in a timely manner. I think for us, the expertise is what stood out the most, from both the business and technical perspectives. AT&T Canada was able to apply its knowledge of our business to the solution. When we needed to customize technological aspects of the solution to meet specific needs, it was done on demand. That made a huge difference for us because it helped us meet extremely tight timelines."

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Top Three Technologies That Will Survive the Dot **Gone**

With the North American economy in a downturn and the shine off the dot com world, many companies are trying to re-assess their IT strategies. When once a massive wireless marketing program seemed like the natural next step, now companies are trying to justify basic expenses. Clearly, technology's role in corporate Canada is undergoing a shift from a revenue producer to a cost-saver. After all, as recently noted in an Internet trade magazine, few companies managed to make money on the railroad; many early operators went bankrupt in the panics of 1857 and 1893. Yet by slashing transportation costs, railroad operators reaped the spillover benefits of a stronger economy at large. I believe three key technologies will emerge by 2005 as the key components of a new economy.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Despite battered stock prices, most CRM vendors continue to do well. CRM is really a two-step technology. First, all contact with your customers – from inbound inquiries to your call centre to outbound marketing campaigns – is logged in a database. Then, every subsequent contact with that company or person is matched to a detailed history. In real terms, this means that before you pick up the phone, you can receive an on-screen report of outstanding complaints, status of orders, volume and trend direction of purchases, and so on. From there, any member of your staff can print comprehensive reports on practically any front-office data, comparing success rates for different marketing campaigns against how they fared in different customer sectors, for instance. But a caveat: The largest cost isn't the system itself, but rather the integration and implementation services. Many large CRM rollouts aren't expected to provide ROI for up to three years, so smaller companies would fare better looking at retail packages like Act! or Goldmine. Remember that providing top-quality customer service will be in fashion no matter what the economy is doing.

V-Commerce

Voice-commerce, though still a year or two away, I expect will prove itself to be a necessary arrow in every competitive company's arsenal. To simplify matters, V-Commerce is the solution to voicemail hell – you know, where you're presented with a list of options, have to determine which category your call falls into, punch in your account number, your PIN, wait ten minutes, then speak to a human being whose first question is "What's your account number and PIN?"

V-Commerce, on the other hand, will enable callers to get to the right person (an important distinction over "the right menu option") faster, while freeing your customer support staff to work on more strategic issues. For example, a caller would say recite a one- or two-sentence description of the issue they're handling, and voice recognition would decode the sound, send it for syntactic analysis to determine what that means, quickly log that in a simple database so you can monitor trends, then flip the call to a rep. Ideally, if your system is backed by a CRM solution, your rep takes the call with a screenful of customer history in front of them. Charles Schwab has a system like this already in place. Want to change your account password? Just say so. Want to sell 500 shares of IBM? Just tell the system, and it'll get you 4/5ths of the way there.

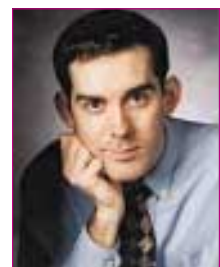
Corporate E-Learning

Finally, one of the strongest sectors remains the quiet enterprise e-learning sector. Many companies are finding that placing their training material online is saving costs for flying staff to specialized courses or reviews, and computerized systems can have built-in incentives tied directly to progress and accuracy in the course. For instance, a successfully completed skills upgrade to a particular kind of software could trigger additional days off or kick in a payroll bonus. But be sure to structure human contact into the curriculum – the most effective programs are hybrid in nature – bringing learners together in teams periodically to work on larger projects.

Tod Maffin is "one of Canada's most influential futurists" [Report on Business] and speaks to more than 50 conferences each year on the future of technology in small- and medium-sized business. He hosts "Future Now" on CBC Television, and is trying to cut down on coffee. His web site is www.todmaffin.com

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by Tod Maffin
Technology Futurist and Broadcaster




 A graphic featuring the word "SPHERE" in large, white, 3D block letters. The letters are set against a background of a green, textured sphere with a grid pattern, suggesting a globe or a network.

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www.symantec.com/avcenter/	Security
www.searchcrm.com	CRM Resource
www.icbtollfree.com	Toll Free Resource
www.tmcnet.com/	Communications Resource

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HELP US HELP YOU **FEEDBACK**

Here's your chance to tell us how you feel about Sphere.

What did you like?

What didn't you like?

What's missing that you would you like to see?

And most of all, what would you like to learn from Sphere and from AT&T Canada?

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