Symantec Enhances *pcAnywhere* Remote Control Software

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Management Summary

Having spent many years in IT, my niece assumes that I can fix any PC problem that is making her life miserable. Unfortunately, she lives in New York and I live in Boston, so troubleshooting these problems over the phone can be a very frustrating experience for both of us. She always starts the conversation with "the computer is broken" and then I spend hours asking her to open this icon, or right-click on that icon. Fixing problems remotely is not only a problem for family members; help desk personnel face these same problems every day.

Companies with all of their people located within the same building have an easier job maintaining PCs and servers than companies that have people spread out across geographical locations. Help desk personnel can simply walk over to the offices or cubicles and install new software or troubleshoot problems while sitting in from of the systems. However, many companies have workers located in remote offices, constantly traveling on the road, or telecommuting from home. Here, it is very expensive and very impractical to have help desk people travel to the various locations. Debugging problems solely by talking end users through commands over the phone is time consuming. Remote control software mitigates this problem by allowing help desk personnel to take control of the remote PC or server and enter commands to install software, transfer files, or troubleshoot problems.

For many years, all connections between the help desk and remote machines were point-to-point connections, which were reliable and secure but did require knowledge of the Internet Protocol (IP) address of the remote machine. Furthermore, the expansion of networks now means that remote machines can be located behind firewalls or Network Address Translation (NAT) devices making connections more difficult since administrators have to navigate through dynamic or private IP addresses. Alternatively, remote machines sometimes are managed through hosted Web services. These third-party services can be easy to configure and use, but are accompanied by recurring subscription fees based on the number of managed devices, and can raise security concerns for those users who need to retain full control of their remote access solution.

Remote control software can facilitate resolving help desk problems quickly, but it must be easy to configure, while providing the right levels of security to ensure that corporate security policies are not violated.

Remote Control Software Requirements

Recent security headlines may have some companies concerned that remote control software may provide unrestricted access to corporate machines. However, well-designed remote control software can mitigate these risks. For example, remote control software must require user authentication in all cases. In addition, it should provide the following options.

- Verify that the proper level of remote control software has been installed and prevent access by any host that is running an unauthorized or modified version of the program.
- Generate logs that report on all connections attempted between machines. Unsuccessful attempts must be recorded to alert personnel to network problems or breeches.
- Maintain logs on all commands executed between the connected machines for audit purposes.
- Authenticate all users through a centralized access list or directory.
- Limit connections of hosts to specific IP addresses or subnets to prevent unauthorized connections.
- Encrypt data to prevent data being intercepted and misused during transfers.

Symantec's pcAnywhere

Symantec pcAnywhere remote control software provides these features. In fact, this software product is now used by the top enterprises to decrease the amount of time to resolve help desk calls. Version 12 of pcAnywhere provides additional features designed to ease the job of the help desk person.

New Features

- **A gateway option** automatically discovers and facilitates connection to devices behind firewalls or NAT devices. This eliminates the need for help desk administrators to navigate through private or dynamic IP addressing schemes and minimizes the amount of port configuration required to make easy remote connections.
- **Host invitation** allows hosts to initiate reverse connections from behind firewalls and NAT devices. With this feature, connections can be initiated from the remote location to the centralized help desk. Neither side needs to know the others IP address.
- **Host and remote platform support for** *Mac OS X* was added to existing support for *Linux* and *Windows*. All of these hosts can be accessed

through web browsers. Simultaneous connections of different hosts can be displayed in one view.

- **Improved tools to troubleshoot problems with Windows Mobile/PocketPC devices and telephones.** Fewer steps are now required to connect to these devices, and less bandwidth is required to transfer data.
- **Support for 64-bit environments.**

pcAnywhere Access Server

Symantec also announced a new product called *Symantec pcAnywhere Access Server*. This works in conjunction with pcAnywhere and requires *Windows XP Pro*, *Windows 2000 Server*, or *Windows Server 2003*. Service providers can support their customers on different devices through a centralized site regardless of how the devices are connected or where they are located. Supported machines running a pcAnywhere host can register themselves to pcAnywhere Access Server from behind firewalls or NAT devices, eliminating any requirement to know the host IP address and removing the need to configure routers. The pcAnywhere *Web Remote* software, included with pcAnywhere Access Server, allows remote machines that do not have pcAnywhere installed to connect via hosted web services. Symantec pcAnywhere Web Remote supports *Microsoft Internet Explorer*, *Mozilla Firefox*, and *Safari* browser environments.

Symantec added one feature that will appeal to service bureaus and help desks responsible for supporting many devices. The hosts that they are responsible for supporting can be organized logically into categories, such as customer, location, or department.

Summary

Companies that have their entire staff located in the same building all of the time are the exception these days. Remote control software allows remote workers to be supported as if they were all located in one central location. Nonetheless, companies must choose wisely and only implement those solutions that are easy to use without compromising security.

Symantec pcAnywhere meets these requirements, but this is not new software. In fact, it has been available and enhanced for twenty years. And, now that it is installed on my niece's computer, I no longer dread those "the computer is broken" phone calls.

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About the Author

Dianne McAdam **is Director of Enterprise Information Assurance for the Clipper Group**. She brings over three decades of experience as a data center director, educator, technical programmer, systems engineer, and manager for industry-leading vendors. Ms. McAdam has held the position of senior analyst at Data Mobility Group and at Illuminata. Before that, she was a technical presentation specialist at EMC's Executive Briefing Center. At Hitachi Data Systems, she served as performance and capacity planning systems engineer and as a systems engineering manager. She also worked at StorageTek as a virtual tape and disk specialist; at Sun Microsystems, as an enterprise storage specialist; and at several large corporations as technical services directors. Ms. McAdam earned a Bachelor's and Master's degree in mathematics from Hofstra University in New York.

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