

Solutions

VPNs: What Can They Do for You?

VPN stands for “Virtual Private Network”. A VPN links two or more separate networks together, using the public Internet as its main method for connection. These networks are usually in two geographically separate locations, but not necessarily. Privacy is achieved by encrypting the data sent between networks. The data is encrypted prior to transmission, decrypted when received, and processed as if it were regular traffic on the local network. A primary advantage to implementing a VPN is the cost savings gained by eliminating the need to set up and maintain an expensive leased line.

Other benefits include portability, availability, ease of maintenance and ease of configuration. Since the Internet consists of multiple networks all interconnected in a large mesh with multiple redundant pathways and connection points, it has a high degree of availability and reliability. If one or two servers or routers on the Internet go down, the traffic gets routed around the trouble via another pathway and completes the trip to its destination. Another advantage to using a VPN is security. Since all of the traffic is encrypted while being transmitted, it cannot be read or “eavesdropped on” by anyone between the two endpoints.

So, who uses VPNs and for what purpose? Many businesses with remote offices and home-based workers use VPNs to connect to their main office. The connection allows them to utilize resources that reside on their servers such as files and printers. More commonly, “road warriors” or mobile professionals use VPNs to connect to the main office when they are on the road. Since there are many “hot spots” located throughout the country now, it has become much easier to find broadband access while traveling which helps with the overall experience when working remotely.

VPNs – Continued on Page 2

What is Metadata? And Why It’s

Important

Metadata is “data about data”. In other words, it is information about your documents. It can be as simple as the name of the person who typed the document or more significant, such as the computer/server name and path to where the file is stored.

According to Microsoft, metadata can be stored in Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files. Upon creating and editing your files, hidden tags are embedded that track information about you and the edits that you have made. These tags are referred to as metadata.

Why Do You Need to be Concerned?

When you send a Microsoft Word document to someone via email, you are most likely sending some metadata regarding the file along with it. If you use “Track Changes” in Microsoft Word, you may also be sending revisions and deletions that were made to the text of a document. This metadata may include information that you did not want the recipient to see.

How do you Remove Metadata?

There are several approaches that can be taken in order to minimize metadata within your documents. In Microsoft Word 2003, you can modify your user information to prevent it from appearing on documents. You can also instruct Word to exclude personal information upon saving your documents and you can disable “fast saves”. If you are tracking changes, be sure to remove all redlining information from the document prior to saving. You can also remove old versions of the document by selecting File, Versions, then select and delete older versions of the document.

These are just a few steps to minimize the amount of information you send about your files. There are more sophisticated tools that are designed specifically to

Metadata – Continued on Page 3

While a VPN is a valuable way to obtain access to files and printers at your main office, it is not a recommended method for accessing larger databases. Database applications require a consistent connection and a steady stream of data. Since VPNs route your data across the Internet, your data travels a different path each time and does not have the consistent speed that is usually needed.

VPNs come in a variety of types and are made up of many different combinations of software and hardware. There are purely software based VPNs which consist of an application running on a server within the main network and a client application on a PC or server at the remote network. Hardware VPNs are made up of specialized devices which negotiate the connection to each other, and then pass the data from either end through the tunnel they create. There are also combinations of hardware devices with software applications that run on a PC, which then sets up the secure connection.

It is important to note that although VPNs have many positive attributes, they may not provide the best solution in every circumstance. Due to the high amount of traffic that is exchanged between endpoints, a VPN can be difficult to use at dial-up speeds. Additionally and as previously mentioned, they are not recommended for using applications which require steady streams of data and high throughput. If you have this requirement, consider other remote networking technologies such as Microsoft's Terminal Services or Citrix, which are better suited for these particular needs. VPNs may also be used in combination with these other methods to help augment their security and provide for a more robust solution.

There are a multitude of factors which need to be considered when choosing a remote networking solution. VPNs have many great features and benefits and are certainly worth consideration when you are looking to set up a remote connectivity solution. ☺

For more information contact Jeff Smereczniak at ext 214.



Worldox Document Management

Does your firm have trouble locating documents after they are saved? Most companies rely on their staff to save their work, such as word processing documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and emails to a specific location on the network. The directory into which documents are saved may be organized by client name, case name, case number, etc. However, there are situations when a document may not be saved into the appropriate location. Document management systems are software applications that provide a uniform method of saving, retrieving, categorizing, and sharing information within documents on a network.

Worldox is a popular document management application that organizes your documents so you are able to quickly access the information stored within each file. Worldox incorporates the following features:

- ❖ **Saving/Cataloging/Retrieving:** Worldox will store information pertaining to the document in a profile card. The profile card contains information, such as location, date created, and security settings that will assist users in retrieving the document.
- ❖ **Network integration:** Worldox provides users with single-point-of-access for document retrieval, no matter how dispersed the documents may actually be within the directory structure of the network.
- ❖ **Document Security:** Security can be placed on documents through Worldox based on individual users, groups of users, and the roles in which users serve the organization.
- ❖ **Text Retrieval:** Worldox creates a document index that easily enables users to search documents based on specific criteria.
- ❖ **Document History:** Worldox tracks document history that contains information on each modification made to the document including who performed the change, its date and time, and the nature of the change.
- ❖ **Access Control:** Worldox can lock a document while it is in use so that other edits cannot be made to the document at the same time.

Document Management is becoming more and more popular as companies move towards electronic storage for most of their information. Perhaps your firm could also benefit from the organizational tools offered by a document management system. ☺

For more information contact Stacie Sebeck at ext 211.

HP LaserJet 4345 MFP Series

HP has recently expanded its multifunction printer solution into the workgroup LaserJet product line. The LaserJet 4345 MFP is a 45PPM black-and-white networkable laser printer that will provide faxing, copying, scanning, and digital sending (scan to e-mail) capability from one easy to use device.

The LaserJet 4345 MFP is configurable based on the end user's needs to include automatic 2-sided printing, additional 500-sheet input trays (for up to 2,100 total sheets), a 75-envelope feeder, an MFP stand w/storage cabinet, a stapler/stacker accessory, and a 3-bin mailbox accessory.

Standard features include:

- ❖ 50-Page Automatic Document Feeder
- ❖ Touch-screen control panel w/10-key number pad
- ❖ 256MB RAM
- ❖ 20GB Hard Drive
- ❖ JetDirect Fast Ethernet Print Server



You will no longer have to sacrifice speed, reliability, ease-of-use, and office space to get all of these valuable business functions from one device. ☺

For more information contact John D'Amico at ext 204.

Metadata – Continued from Page 1

remove metadata. Microsoft offers an add-in for Office 2003 and Office XP that will permanently remove from Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Microsoft PowerPoint files. These tools can help you prevent confidential information from being transmitted unknowingly to someone you didn't intend to see it. ☺

For more information contact Stacie Sebeck at ext 211.

HP ProCurve Network Switches with Gigabit

HP has been producing Gigabit speed (1000Base-T) network Switches for many years. However, most small businesses were not able to benefit from a Gigabit capable Switch due to the lack of Gigabit-enabled Servers and PCs on their network. That has all changed because most industry standard Servers and business class PCs now include an auto-sensing Gigabit Ethernet Network Interface Card.

It is now possible for data & files to move at faster speeds at the Server level and even down to the PC level. Many of today's data intensive software applications will benefit from the improved application response and file transfer times that are possible by implementing a Gigabit-enabled Switch.

The HP ProCurve Switches are available in sizes ranging from 8 ports up to 50 ports. You can choose between a Switch with all ports capable of Gigabit speed or with just 2 or 4 ports capable of Gigabit speed while the remaining ports are 10/100Base-T auto-sensing. Regardless of which ProCurve Switch you choose, HP warrants it for as long as you own the product. ☺



For more information contact John D'Amico at ext 204.

Announcing Timeslips® Users Group

The Timeslips Users Group Meeting will be held on Thursday, April 7th from 12:00pm – 1:30pm at the Omni William Penn Hotel, downtown Pittsburgh.

The Timeslips Users Group is a great opportunity to meet other Timeslips users to compare notes and ideas. This meeting will focus on "Tips and Training". Meet us for lunch and learn about some of the tools you can use to improve the way you use Timeslips and other billing procedure recommendations.

Lunch will be served and the cost is \$15. Please RSVP for the meeting to Jenn Schreck x210. ☺

P L U M M E R S L A D E
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N E W S L E T T E R

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

VPNs: What Can They Do for You..... 1
What is Metadata? And Why It's Important 1
Worldox Document Management 2
HP LaserJet 4345 MFP Series 3
HP ProCurve Network Switches with Gigabit 3
Announcing Timeslips Users Group 3

WHAT'S HAPPENING...

Plummer Slade has updated Training Manuals available for the latest versions of the following programs:

- ❖ Time Matters 6.0
- ❖ Billing Matters 6.0
- ❖ Timeslips 2005

These manuals include instructions, examples and exercises. Visit our website or call 412-261-5600 for more information on these manuals.