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Networking: Reach Out And Touch Someone

01 Communique's I'm InTouch software makes remote PC access easy

By Joseph F. Kovar

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Digital integrators looking to help customers keep in touch with their home PCs from remote locations or who want to keep in touch with customers' PCs for remote troubleshooting and servicing can look to 01 Communique's I'm InTouch application.

I'm InTouch is a secure, Web-based remote-access application to allow users and digital integrators access to PCs via a Web browser, another PC or a wireless device.

With the software, users remotely access their home or office PCs, as well as download, upload or print files, says Brian Howden, vice president of marketing at the Mississauga, Ontario-based company. For instance, users who forget to bring a file when visiting clients can log on to their office PC and download the needed files. Webcams attached to a home PC also can be accessed remotely for security purposes.

I'm InTouch requires a sign-in server, separate from the user's PC and remote device, that can find the location of the target PC regardless of whether it has a static or dynamic IP address. When a user who pays the monthly subscription fee logs on to the sign-in server, it locates the user PC and facilitates the connection.

Because of the need for the sign-on server, digital integrators have a couple of ways to turn I'm InTouch into a service offering with recurring revenue, says Howden.

They can resell 01 Communique's desktop edition service to customers in return for a 20 percent commission on the monthly subscription charge of \$9.95 or yearly charge of \$99.95, he says. This arrangement allows them to also charge for installation and configuration services.

For digital integrators looking to set up their own managed services, they can offer the corporate edition, in which they pay a fixed license fee for use of the I'm InTouch software, set up sign-on servers in their own data centers, and charge customers for the subscription, he says.

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West Hartford, Conn.-based We Care Computers has customers ranging from an elderly woman with random computer issues to small businesses connecting two offices remotely, says owner Avi Smith-Rapaport.

The main use is remote tech support, Smith-Rapaport says. "For tech support, I set up a secure account for me," he says. "My selling point is my off-site tech support."

Alex Medwyk, project manager at @computersPlus, a Burlington, Ontario-based digital integrator, says his company offers both the corporate and desktop editions. Offering I'm InTouch as a service has turned out to be a big time-saver and money-saver for remote customers who require technical support, he says.

Some of those customers can be hours away by car, so anything that makes it easier to handle service calls is a big plus. "We can use I'm InTouch to do granular tech support," he says. "We can pop online for 10 minutes instead of charging \$75 an hour to go. So we don't worry about travel time or scheduling."

Security isn't an issue with I'm InTouch, says Medwyk, as no passwords are passed back and forth and all data is encrypted. "And there's no need to keep an Internet port open for remote access," he says. "If you leave the port open, people can get in and send buffer overflows. With I'm InTouch, the remote user calls the server, and if there's no answer, the Internet port is not opened."

In the next year or so, 01 Communique is looking at enhancing I'm InTouch in a number of ways, says Howden. One way is to deliver the software to a customer's computer in an e-mail rather than downloading a copy so that the software disappears once the remote access is finished, he says.

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