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Thoughts and ideas from The Systems Consulting Consortium

Managing the Mobile Enterprise

Enterprises are beginning to recognize the benefits of enabling their employees with mobile devices and applications. Today's workforce is demanding greater mobility, flexibility and real-time access to critical data. However, for all the convenience and productivity gains these devices provide the end user, they present the enterprise with entirely new IT challenges, especially when deployed in a wireless environment.

New Challenges

The increasingly wide-scale deployment of mobile wireless devices can be a dual-sided challenge for IT departments. For many businesses, wireless computing is a mission-critical necessity driven from the top down. IT must provide wireless access to enterprise applications and data, enabling mobile employees to conduct business anytime and anywhere. At the same time, many IT departments are facing a phenomenon similar to that of the '80s when corporations experienced the rapid proliferation of PCs throughout the enterprise. As individuals and departments buy devices for Personal Information Management (PIM) and email use, they demand support from IT to configure network connections, provide access to corporate email, backup data, and fix problems.

Whether the challenge is deploying mission-critical mobile wireless applications, harnessing user-proliferated devices, or both, IT is being asked to bring order to a world of daunting complexity. The wireless landscape is one of multiple device types, operating systems, networks, and ever-evolving standards. Further, typical systems management tasks that are now routinely handled for networked desktops become entirely new problems in a wireless environment. Solutions for wireless must deal with complexities such as intermittent connections, variable bandwidth, short battery life, and devices that are prone to loss or theft.

A few quick real-world examples serve to illustrate the problems introduced by mobility:

- 500 new PDAs, including 3 different device types and 4 different application profiles, must be deployed across the country within the week.
- A salesperson needs to access critical account

information in his email 20 minutes before an important customer meeting and can't get the email client on his PDA to work.

- A security breach requires immediate distribution of new network access codes to 2,000 laptops and PDAs.
- The VP of Sales loses his wireless PDA containing confidential sales data.

Ensuring Manageability

Today's mobile devices have the power and features to run a wide range of sophisticated business applications. But before an enterprise can rely on mobile devices in mission-critical situations, IT must ensure that it can:

- Efficiently deploy software and keep it up to date.
- Track, manage and configure devices cost-effectively, even though they are spread to the far reaches of the enterprise and intermittently connected to the network,
- Get remote visibility into the wireless device to diagnose and correct problems and provide a means to solve problems when the device is disconnected.
- Safeguard sensitive data if a device is lost or stolen, especially if a connection to the network is still open.
- Systematically backup mobile data to central servers without relying on the end-user.

Equating the size of the device with the size of the task can be costly. Gartner Group estimates that the total cost-of-ownership for a PDA is 5X the cost of the device itself. At best, ad-hoc management practices will do little to defray this cost. At worst, critical business processes may be interrupted and valuable data lost.

In summary, enterprises should manage mobile and wireless devices with the same level of efficiency and control as they do other enterprise systems. By taking a systematic approach and using tools designed specifically for a mobile and wireless environment, the enterprise can maximize the return on its investment in mobile and wireless technology.

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