



Wireless at Work

BY KEYNO HANNA

Although Wireless technology is no longer new, it is still exciting technology which offers endless possibilities. Wireless technology has been around since the early 20th Century when the first Wireless transmitters went on the air using Morse Code. Common examples of Wireless equipment in use today include cellular phones, Global Positioning Systems (GPS), cordless computer peripherals such as the cordless mouse, keyboard and printer and satellite television.

In the Bahamas, the use of Wireless technology is more prevalent in the home than in the corporate environment. We would all be amazed to know how many Bahamians have a Wireless router at their home for shared Internet access. On the other hand, in the business arena where data flying around is risky business, only a handful of offices employ a Wireless infrastructure. Solutions aimed at addressing the risks of Wireless technology, such as Wired Equivalent Privacy (WEP), are not perfect and suffer from the perception that drivers-by will sniff our corporate secrets and sell them to the highest bidder.

However, if you can manage the challenges of using Wireless technology, there are significant benefits to be had by employing a Wireless solution in the workplace.

Convenience

In this modern Bahamas where greasy chicken is king and convenience is highly sought, one of the biggest advantages to be had by deploying Wireless in the workplace is convenience.

One of the areas in which convenience can be gained through Wireless is in presentations or meetings. A presenter can do away with their cables and still be able to show slides from a presentation saved on the network, browse the Internet and send email.

In addition, for those of us who primarily use the Internet, there are Wireless solutions that enable us to access the Internet without even getting on to the corporate LAN via a Wireless guest access.

Other solutions that are highly convenient for a worker are Blackberries and PocketPCs that employ Wireless technology. These solutions give us access to corporate and other information from anywhere in the world without sitting at a desktop computer or even using a 7lb laptop.

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SOLUTIONS FOR A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Mobility

Another big advantage to be had by deploying Wireless in the workplace is that it enables the “mobile workforce.” There is now a whole new type of worker that travels for their job and requires the ability to stay in touch with the office. You may just travel from island to island or from country to country; either way, Wireless technology makes communication between the road warrior and the home base a lot easier.

Wireless technology is now common in a lot of places that business travelers frequent. Most business hotels boast Wireless Internet access and many coffee shops and airports are now classified as hot spots.

Access to this technology is considered to many business people to no longer be a luxury but a necessity; work needs to get done whether the worker is physically in the office or not.

Security

Security concerns have been the biggest obstacles to the widespread use of Wireless technology. In an ideal world, we wouldn’t have to worry about hackers or sniffers but, unfortunately, the world is far from ideal.

Technology has anticipated the risks associated with using Wireless at work and has offered solutions. WEP was one of the first big ways to tackle this problem. However, in 2001, a major flaw was detected in WEP which led to it being compromised. Nevertheless, WEP is still widely used today. WPA (Wi-Fi Protected Access) is intended to be a replacement for WEP. WPA offers more robust methods of encryption and authentication.

The most secure method of accessing critical data across the Internet is Virtual Private Network (VPN) technology. This method is highly recommended. Wireless vendors now put VPNs to work to secure Wireless data.

The current trade-off between usability and security in Wireless solutions will likely continue. The more secure a solution, the chances are that it will be less user-friendly. The goal of solution providers today is to find a happy medium.

If giving your workers access to files across the Internet frightens you, then perhaps you could use Wireless technology to give Internet access to mobile and home workers. Wireless has a lot to offer in terms of convenience and mobility. If you are also mindful of the security limitations of your chosen Wireless solution, you and your organization will be able to reap the benefits.

To provide feedback on this column, please email MakingITwork@providencetg.com

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