



Milestones

Volume 3, Issue 2

A publication of Milestone Computer Solutions, LLC

We're back with another edition of *Milestones*. Thanks for all the kind feedback on the last one.

Thanks also to all our customers who responded to our recent online survey. As you'll remember if you're a customer of ours (or may remember from the mention in our last newsletter), the survey only contained one question—on a scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to recommend us to someone else?

Across all responses, our average score was 9.8 (yes, we're tooting our own horn

a little but what did you think this newsletter was for, anyway?).

Seriously, we do appreciate the votes of confidence. We take a lot of pride in our relationships with our customers and in striving to deliver excellent service and value to them. If you're not an MCS customer, maybe you ought to find out what makes us different. We'd welcome the opportunity to discuss how we could help you.

Glenn Rainey

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Case Study...

Connecting Remote Sites and Users at Asheboro Elastics

Ever wish you could sit at home or somewhere on the road and connect to your computer at work to access files and run programs? Do you have remote locations/users that need to access data or run applications on your main server?

Such was the case for Asheboro Elastics Corporation. AEC is a recognized leader in the knitted elastic industry, supplying elastic to the men and women's underwear, athletic wear, home furnishings, pants, fleece, hosiery and industrial markets.

Their remote connectivity requirements included:

- multiple manufacturing locations in the Asheboro area as well as one in El Salvador.

- salespeople and others traveling extensively both domestically and abroad and some external salespeople permanently based in remote locations.
- folks who just want to be able to connect occasionally from home to check e-mail or get some work done.

AEC's main line-of-business application involves a Visual FoxPro database that maintains information on orders, shipments, inventory, production scheduling, costing, manufacturing performance, and other areas. Remote access to that database was a must as well as the usual needs for internal e-mail access (Microsoft Exchange), file sharing, Office applications, and so forth. Today, AEC is meeting those needs with a technology called Terminal Services.

Connecting Remotely... continued

VPN-Not

There have been technologies around for quite a while to allow remote access over an Internet connection. One of these is called a Virtual Private Network or VPN. A VPN is a network that makes use of the public internet for communication but, through the use of a 'tunneling' protocol and various security measures, ensures that communication is private.

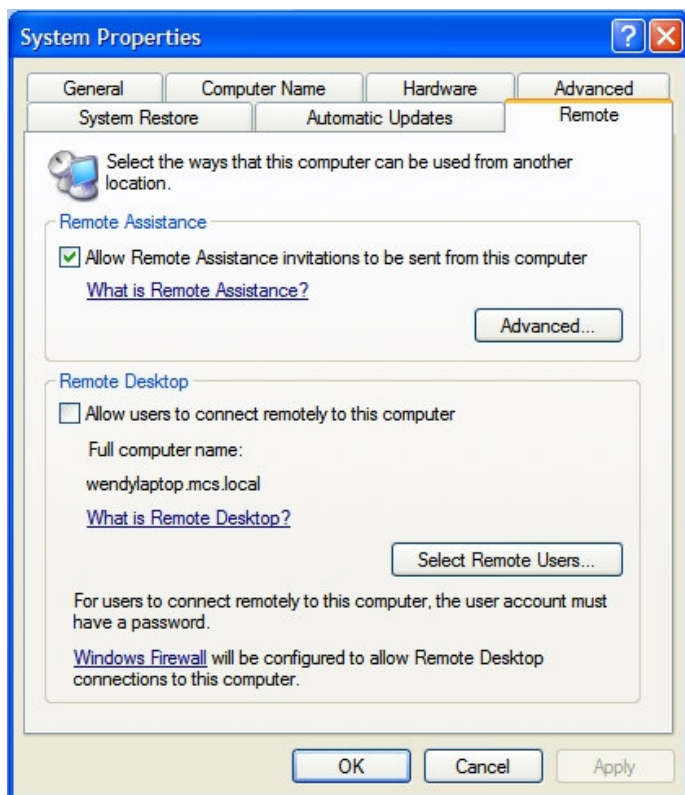


Figure 1—Turn on Remote Access

For a long time, we made use of that tool at Asheboro Elastics. It did allow the users to connect to the main server to access files and run applications. However, the connection tended to be somewhat slow, particularly for running database apps, which, of course, was a primary need. For accuracy's sake, we should note that this was making use of a purely software VPN adapter. There are VPN hardware solutions that do provide better performance but, of course, at a price.

Enter Terminal Services

Actually, before talking about Terminal Services, let's introduce it's cousin, Remote Desktop Connection. That's a technology that let's you connect to your desktop remotely (hmm, so that's how they came up with the name). Once you've done that, you can access files (both on that machine and any network files it has access to), run programs, and, basically do anything you could do if you were at that remote computer (and almost as quickly as if you were sitting at the machine). In addition, you still have access to resources such as hard drives and printers on the local machine you're connecting from (let's call it the client from now on) so you can copy a file from the remote machine to the client or run a program on the remote machine but still have that program print to a local printer attached to the client.

What's Required?

Not too much, actually:

- The remote computer has to be running Windows XP Professional or Windows Vista Business, Ultimate, or Enterprise editions.
- You have to turn on Remote Access on that computer. For Windows XP, right-click on 'My Computer', choose 'Properties', then the 'Remote' tab and check 'Allow users to connect remotely to this computer' in the Remote Desktop section (see Figure 1).
- You must be a user on the remote computer with administrative rights or be a member of the Remote Desktop Users group.
- The client computer can be almost anything from Windows 95 on up. Even a Mac or PDA can connect. You do need Remote Desktop Connection software installed. If you have Windows XP or Vista, it's already there (for XP, for example, go to All Pro-

grams/ Accessories/ Communications). If you have another device or operating system, you can get it as a free download from Microsoft.

- Usually, you're connecting the two machines over the Internet so, obviously, both must have Internet access. Actually, you can do Remote Desktop over a network, VPN, or any type of connection, but the Internet is the most common scenario for most folks.

Setting Up The Client Connection

Figure 2 shows the initial dialog that comes up when you start the Remote Desktop Connection program (if you don't see the tabs on your machine, click the 'Options' button).

On the 'General' tab, you're first asked to specify the computer you want to connect to. Usually, this means the computer's ip (Internet Protocol) address. You're also prompted for a user name and password that are authorized to connect to the remote machine as well as the network domain or computer name you're logging on to. Notice also the 'Open' and 'Save' buttons. 'Save' lets you store the parameters for connections that you use frequently. Next time, you just 'Open' that named connection so you don't have to retype everything.

The remaining tabs let you customize various things about the connection. For example, the 'Local Resources' tab (Figure 3) lets you specify whether to make the client hard drive and printers available during the Remote Desktop session.

Click on the 'Connect' button and you should soon be seeing the desktop of the remote machine. From there, you've got access to do anything just as if you were sitting at the machine (except that it's a little hard to pop a CD into the drive). One

word of note—anyone working on the machine will be locked out until you disconnect. And, no, they won't be able to see what you're doing on the screen.

Why Is It So Fast?

We alluded to the fact earlier that a software VPN connection can be terribly slow. What makes Remote Desktop/Terminal Services different? Simply this—programs are actually running on the remote machine rather than on the client. The only thing that has to pass over the 'wire' are screen updates, keystrokes and mouse moves/clicks. With a VPN connection,

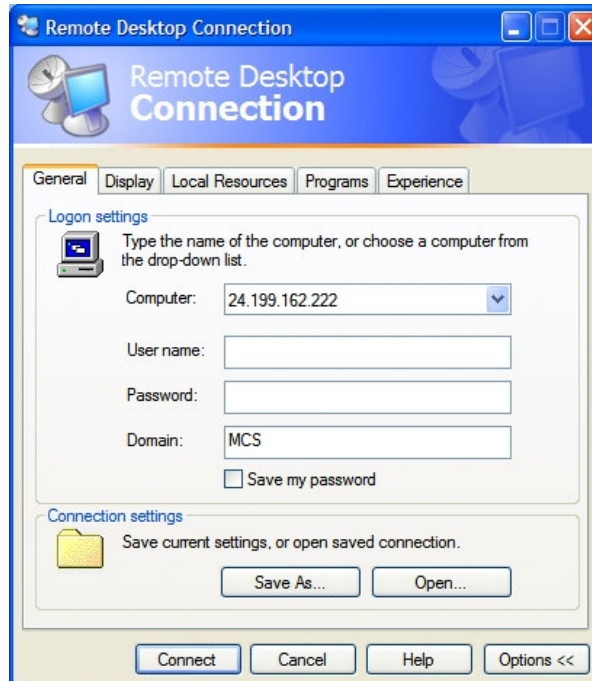


Figure 2—Remote Desktop Screen

programs are running on the local client and any data that program needs must be sent over the connection. That's why database applications are especially slow. For example, opening a customer table over the VPN is pretty much effectively like copying the entire table over the connection before it can be used by the client. In terms of running applications, there's simply no comparison in speed between the two.

Connecting Remotely... continued

Ok—This Time Really About Terminal Server

Terminal Server is like Remote Desktop on steroids. It's pretty much the same technology but running on a server product such as Windows 2003 Server. Basically, you configure the server to take on a Terminal Server role and multiple users can connect to it simultaneously (unlike Remote Desktop) and run programs, access files and data, and so forth. Those users are running the very same Remote Desktop Connection software we discussed above on their local machines.

A couple of notes. One, each user or device connecting to the terminal server does require a terminal server license in addition to any network user licensing.

more). It's best if you can beef up the Terminal Server as much as possible, particularly in terms of memory. It's even better if you can dedicate one machine to be the Terminal Server and leave other server roles on a separate machine.

What's It Done For AEC?

It's truly made remote access practical. After recently installing a new server, we were able to take the old machine and dedicate it as a Terminal Server. Today, they have about 20 users connecting remotely. This includes plant managers and other personnel at the remote plants (including El Salvador), data collection applications running at the remote plants, salespeople based remotely and various folks as they travel.

Additionally, several others use Remote Desktop to connect to their desktop machines for working outside the office.

What Does It Do For Us?

There's another substantial benefit to this technology for us and our customers. Using Remote Desktop/ Terminal Services allows us to connect to their servers and desktops as well. We can administer their network, e-mail, and virus protection; install software and program updates; troubleshoot problems; and do a host of other things without ever leaving our office.

That let's us provide much better response times at lower costs and reduces the lost productivity of travel time—pretty much a win all the way around!

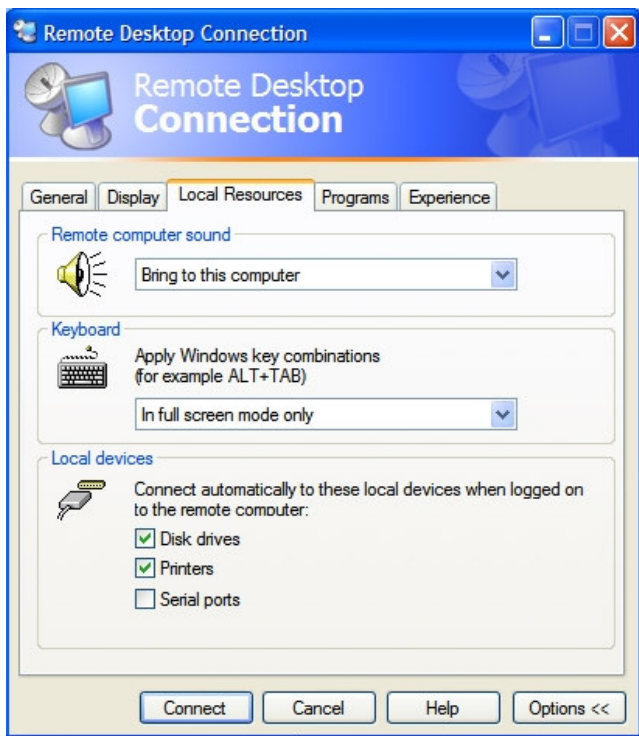


Figure 2—Remote Desktop Screen

Two, terminal server can be a bit of a resource hog. That's easy to understand when you remember that multiple users are all running programs directly on that machine at the same time (it's not just about file-sharing or even application sharing any-

Shortcuts—Tips and Tricks

Some Random E-Mail Musings

This issue, a few tips for being more effective with your e-mail. Most of the detailed steps below were written primarily with Outlook (and specifically Outlook 2003) in mind. If you're using a different version of Outlook or Outlook Express or another e-mail client, your mileage may vary. Actually, there will be a way to do most everything we discuss—it'll just be buried somewhere else—try searching in Help for the topic.

Send Somebody a Website

Ever need to send somebody a link to a website? I do it quite often and I've always copied the URL from the address bar of my browser, opened Outlook, created a new e-mail, pasted the link into the body of the e-mail and so forth, and sent it on.

Did you know that you can do it directly from Internet Explorer? In IE, go to File/Send and choose 'Link by E-Mail'. It will automatically create a new mail item for you with the link in the body.

Actually, you can go one better and send them the whole webpage in an e-mail. From the same menu in IE, choose 'Page by E-Mail'.

Use BCC

Sometimes it's nice to send e-mail to multiple people without everyone seeing the distribution list. Maybe the 40 friends you just forwarded the latest Internet joke to don't want their e-mail addresses being shared through all of cyberspace. Or, you want to copy someone without the primary recipient knowing it.

That's what the BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) feature is for. In Outlook, when you're composing a new e-mail, click on 'View' and check the 'Bcc' item on the menu. You'll now see an area in the message header for entering Bcc recipients (in addition to the 'To' and the 'Cc' fields). By

the way, the field will remain visible in subsequent e-mails until you uncheck it from the View menu.

Add a Signature

Want a standard signature at the bottom of all your e-mails – maybe your name, title and contact info? In Outlook, go to Tools/Options and choose the 'Mail Format' tab. Click on 'Signatures' and add one or more signatures. You can also choose which signature (if any) to automatically add to new e-mails and/or replies and forwards. If you don't choose to have Outlook automatically add a signature, you can still do it on an individual e-mail basis. With a mail item open, click on 'Insert' on the menu, then 'Signature', and then choose the one you want.

And Maybe a vCard, Too

A vCard is a virtual business card that you can send with your e-mail to allow the recipient to easily add you to their address book. To include one along with your signature, go back to the 'Mail Format' tab mentioned above. Click on 'Signatures', select the one from the list you want to add the vCard to and click 'Edit'. Choose a vCard from the list or add a new one by selecting an entry from your Contacts (obviously, you'll need to have yourself in there).

Check Multiple Accounts

Do you have more than one e-mail account and want to check them all from the same program? Most e-mail clients make it easy to do that. In Outlook, choose Tools/E-Mail Accounts and then select 'Add a new e-mail account'. Select the type of account (typically POP3 if you're talking an Internet e-mail account). From there, you'll need to enter the



Some Random E-Mail Musings—cont.

required information about the account that the provider should have supplied you with. This includes e-mail address, user name and password and the names of the servers for your incoming (POP3) and outgoing (SMTP) e-mail.

How Do I Keep My Inboxes Synched?

Along a similar line, what if you have multiple e-mail devices or programs and want to make sure that all your messages show up in each Inbox? Let's say you've got

a Blackberry and a PC and you've noticed that some messages are showing up on one but not the other.

The reason for this is simple. The default for most e-mail programs is to delete the e-mail off the mail server once it's been downloaded. In the example above, once the Outlook running on your PC grabs your Internet e-mail, it deletes the messages (on the POP3 mail server). Now,



The reason for this is simple. The default for most e-mail programs is to

the Blackberry goes out and checks and those messages are no longer there, or the reverse occurs if the Blackberry happens to check first.

The solution is simple. Most all e-mail programs allow you to leave a copy of the messages on the mail server or leave them temporarily but delete them under certain circumstances. So, in our example, we might set up the Blackberry to leave messages on the server indefinitely, and configure Outlook to leave them there for a certain number of days (long enough so you know your Blackberry will have grabbed them before they get gone). Another Outlook option is to leave them on the server until you delete them from your Deleted Items. To get to this setting in Outlook, click on 'More Settings' on the main e-mail account settings page and then click on the 'Advanced' tab.

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”

- Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)

Around MCS—The Home Page

This issue, we're spotlighting the latest edition to the MCS staff, **Christie Smith**. Christie joined us part-time last November and has been full-time since the first of the year so many of you have already had the opportunity to get to know her.

Christie comes to MCS with a wealth of experience. She graduated with a BS in Information Systems from UNC-Greensboro in 1996. Since that time, she's worked with Novartis Crop Protection, Matney Consultants, Jasper Engines & Transmissions, and had her own consulting business—Horizon Consulting Services.

She's a skilled systems analyst and Microsoft Visual FoxPro programmer and has worked extensively with Sage's ACCPAC accounting software (formerly SBT) including writing customizations to the product and custom appli-

cations that integrate with it. She's developed mobile applications for the Pocket PC and worked in a number of networking, operating system and software environments.

Just as important as her technical skills, she's a people person and brings a warm and caring attitude to dealing with customer service and support issues, as those who've had the chance to work with her will attest.

Christie resides in Ramseur with her husband, Greg. She's an active member in her church, First Baptist of Ramseur, including serving as Church Treasurer. Other interests include digital photography, graphic design, and golf.

Welcome aboard, Christie—we're glad to have you with us!



Who Is MCS...

MCS has provided our clients with Information Technology solutions since 1980. Our primary focus is the development of **custom database applications**, helping turn data into information that will support business processes and improve decision-making. Manufacturing applications are a special focus although we serve a broad range of business sectors.

We work in a number of **Microsoft database and development platforms** including Access, Visual Basic, Visual Fox-Pro, and SQL Server.

Capturing accurate data in a cost-effective manner is often the first step in turning that data into information so many of our applications include **portable and ADC** (automated data collection) components. We're experienced in developing solutions involving bar-code printing, scanning, and data capture with PDA's and other mobile and wireless devices.

We can help you turn your static website into a dynamic, **database-driven Internet application** that brings it to life and enables it for e-commerce and enhanced communication with your customers and other business partners.

If you're one of the many organizations choosing to **out-source** all or parts of your **IT functions**, we can also help you with areas such as network setup and administration; software and hardware installations; and administering e-mail, virus protection, and backup functions.

We understand that information is the lifeblood of any organization and one of its most critical resources. Our fundamental goal is to help our customers use that resource more effectively. We truly believe in delivering solutions—not just software, hardware, and services. We pride ourselves on listening carefully to our customers to understand their unique needs, working with them as partners, and providing the systems, training, and ongoing support necessary to ensure success.

Contact us for a free consultation to see how we can be of service to you.



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**"TO GLORIFY GOD BY SERVING
OTHERS WITH EXCELLENCE, VALUE,
AND INTEGRITY WHILE SHARING THE
LOVE OF CHRIST."**

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