Expert IT Solutions Newsletter

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Welcome to our first newsletter of the year; this time we'll look at options for mobile internet and blogging.

Internet everywhere

There's no doubt that our society is becoming more connected than ever. Looking at it from a small business perspective the main use case that comes to mind is supporting staff that's on the road to be connected.

So what are your options for sales or technical staff who spends part of their time outside the office? We'll look at this from both the perspective of how to connect to the internet as well as how to connect back to the systems in the office.

For mobile connectivity there are many options:

1. Tether to smart phone
2. Built in 3G / 4G functionality in devices
3. MiFi devices
4. Public WiFi networks
5. Dongle for 3G / 4G connectivity

One option is to use your smartphone to share its internet connectivity. This is suitable for intermittent use with no large data sets being sent/received. Note that the speed you can achieve depends on the type of connectivity (3G or 4G), the network (Telstra, Optus, etc.) and your location. Be aware that the antenna in most smartphones isn't as powerful as a separate device.

Many tablets (see our newsletter, issue 1) come with slots for SIM cards and are sold with plans for internet connectivity. Note that this limits the connectivity to the particular device but it can work well for staff that use tablets for data entry while they're out and about.

A [MiFi](#) (Mobile WiFi or My WiFi) device lets you share a 3G or 4G connection between multiple devices and is a better solution if the staff member has larger data and connectivity needs as a dedicated device likely has better antennas and signal strength. Note that MiFi is a brand name, many other devices are available from Optus / Telstra and others to provide the same service.

With the ubiquitous nature of wireless networks, often provided free at libraries, airports and your local coffee hangout this is of course an option, as long as your staff are "working" in these locations. The main issue with public WiFi is the shared nature (the backend connection is almost always a single ADSL connection) which can lead to limited bandwidth on offer. Security is also an issue, be aware that a very common way for people to have their devices attacked and compromised are on

public networks. This happens either through a "rogue Access Point" where a device advertises free WiFi to lure people to connect to it and then attempt to compromise your device or through hackers attacking your device while it's connected to a valid WiFi network.

For devices that don't have a built in 3G or 4G system Telstra, Optus and the others offer USB dongles that are relatively easy to setup. The benefit of these are that they have better antennas so as to give you a faster connection but you need a free USB port.

If your business has mobile connectivity needs don't hesitate to reach out for advice.

Once you have established an internet connection from your remote location the question of how to connect back to the server/ systems in the office also has several answers:

1. Remote Web App (RWA) is a web page hosted on your server.
2. VPN connection from your device to the server in the office.
3. Outlook Anywhere connects Outlook back to the server with no action required by you.
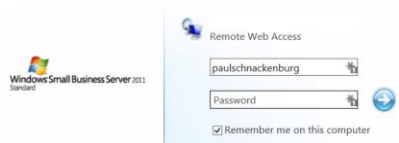
The RWA page is a web address that you can browse to in IE, login in using your normal network username and password and it then presents a page with several options. In SBS 2008 you can check your email and calendar in Outlook Web Access; "take over the screen" off a computer in the office (very useful for those applications that can't be run remotely from your laptop) and access your SharePoint intranet site. SBS 2011 adds the ability to access shared folders on the server. This way to access the server is easy as you just need a saved shortcut but it has some limitations, especially as you can't access shared folders in SBS 2008.
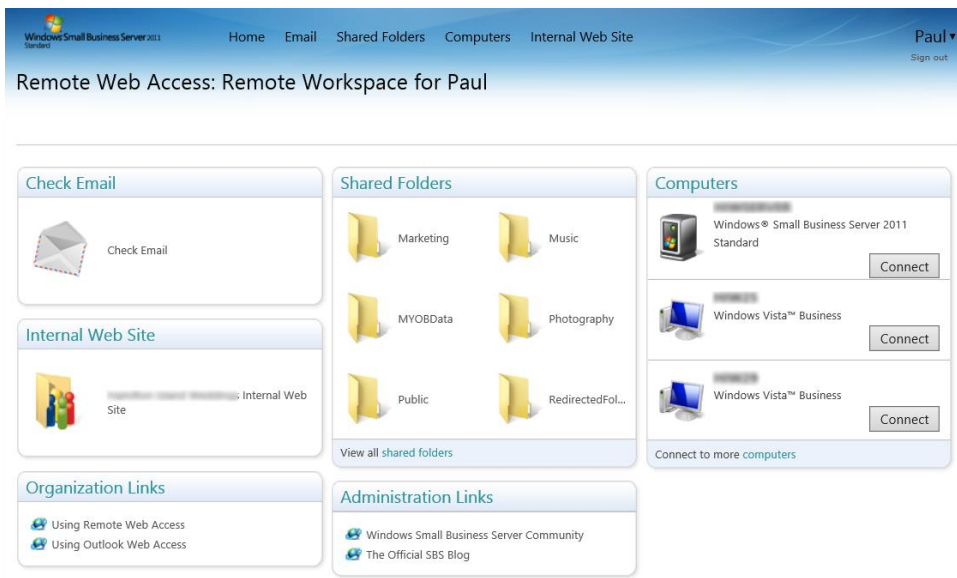
VPN connectivity require you to first connect to the internet and then make a second connection to the server back in the office which creates an encrypted tunnel over the internet directly between your device and the server. The benefit of this method is that once connected your device behaves just as if it was connected to the network in the office (although a fair bit slower), which lets you access shared folders for instance. If you're not sure how to set this up for your staff today, please contact me.

Outlook Anywhere takes a little bit of configuration in Outlook initially but after this it's transparent. Outlook will detect that it is "out of the office" and automatically create a secure connection back to your Exchange email server in the office. Emails, calendar syncing, everything just happens transparently but this only works for Outlook, no other program.

Blogging

Web based logs, blogs, have now been around for quite a few years. Providing the option for anyone to write about anything and present it to the world is an interesting "follow on effect" of the web. Obviously there are millions of blogs with very little useful information but for a savvy small business there's definitely an opportunity here.

The new world of social marketing where people share information with each other through LinkedIn, Facebook and all the other networks out there has led to a world where **content is king**. If you're a specialist in your field, sharing your expertise can result in more business, simply by people recognising you as an authority and sharing your posts with others. The key to do this is to post regularly, keep it focused on your expertise and make the information truly valuable for your target audience whether that's how to design a kitchen, make your nursery business more effective, hosting the perfect wedding or the benefits of hypnotherapy. A blog can either be personal or several experts in your business can contribute. I've been blogging about technology since 2009 at http://TellITasITis.com.au. If blogging is something you think can benefit your business and you'd like some advice, don't hesitate to contact me.

In our February newsletter we'll look at wireless networking in your office and how to choose a router for your business (and for your home).

If you have any questions or suggestions for topics you'd like covered in this newsletter, please email me.

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