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Review: GoToMyPC v. Remote Desktop Connection

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AUTHOR: Seth Rowland
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TechnoLawyer member Edward F. Harney, Jr. asks:

>"I am somewhat baffled at why folks would want to use
>GoToMyPC.com, especially in a small firm setting. We used
>PCAnywhere for years but switched to the Remote Desktop
>Connection application that comes free with Windows XP. It
>is incredibly quick and can be used on any machine that
>has XP. You just type in your static IP address and it is
>like you are sitting at your desk almost. Graphics take a
>bit of time to transmit but everything else is virtually
>seamless. With respect to GoToMyPC.com, is there something
>I am missing here? Is there a reason to use GoToMyPC.com
>instead of RDP with XP?"

Mr. Harney:

You are correct that you can use the Remote Desktop Connection ("RDC") application that comes with WindowsXP. You should know how to configure that application, including setting the firewalls, opening the appropriate ports, and closing the inappropriate ports. It will allow you access to your desktop. Because the RDC Service is a Windows Service that needs to be "enabled" to run, most computers are protected from this method of hacking. However, once enabled, you are opening your computer up to trouble.

The risk is that RDC, if not properly configured, will allow others access to your desktop, and then your entire network. So long as the RDC Service is running on your computer, it can be accessible to all manner of hackers. And not only will it be accessible, but it will also allow the hacker to "see" everything on your desktop and to "make changes" that appear to have been made by you. These changes will fly entirely under the radar screen. And unless you are physically present when the hack occurs or are the anal retentive type who reads your Windows log file on a regular basis, you will never notice the hack occurred until it is too late.

So why do I and so many others use and recommend GoToMyPC. The answer is simple: Security. GoToMyPC has multiple levels of security.

1. The Internet traffic is encrypted.
2. You need to log onto a Secure Web site and use a username and password to get access to the service.
3. You need to separately log onto your PC from that secure Web site and put in another password.
4. A configuration utility lets you set that PC-Password to a disposable one-time password.
5. In addition, you can keep the PC desktop locked with a windows login password.

Once you get past security issues, which are the baseline, you can look at features. With GoToMyPC, I can access and control my Windows PC from a Macintosh or a Linux box or even a PocketPC or PC-Phone (given sufficient memory) and bandwidth. I can FTP/Transfer files back and forth. GoToMyPC also includes a "remote printer" wizard that lets you access a file remotely on your desktop PC from a Hotel Conference Center and use the printer attached to the Hotel Computer without ever copying or downloading the file to the Hotel's computer. I have used it to engage in "chat" with my home office when on-the-road.

In addition to "remote access", you can also send invitations to others to "visit" your PC. While RDC does have an "invitation" capability, it requires special configuration to work and that the invitee activate RDC on their machine, opening them to vulnerabilities. By contrast, with GoToMyPC, you can right-click on an icon in your system tray and send an invitation. The user is prompted to accept a download of a Desktop Viewer, but such installation is temporary and removed from their PC at the end of the session. Moreover, during the session, you can send files and you can also engage in Whiteboard activities. This "cool feature" lets you draw on your desktop to illustrate a point.

I have used GoToMyPC to negotiate contracts -- quite successfully. In the typical negotiation, Firm A sends a contract to Firm B. Firm B sends a markup or a revised version back to Firm A. There is a discussion and then a new draft gets circulated and the cycle continues. With GoToMyPC, after the first draft, the opposing counsel is invited to review the document and comment on it online in a real-time session. You can field objection, change the appropriate language and get agreement to terms in a single session. This makes clients happier because the deal gets done sooner.

GoToMyPC.com is not a flybynight. It was developed by ExpertCity, Inc. It is part of a family of products that includes GoToAssist and GoToMeeting. ExpertCity is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Citrix Systems. Incidentally, it is Citrix systems which developer Terminal Server and Citrix WinFrame and licensed it to Microsoft to use in Remote Desktop Connection. After a parting of ways, Citrix has continued to develop WinFrame and expanded its family of products to include the ExpertCity line of GoToMyPC, GoToAssist and GoToMeeting.

Cheers,

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Community Manager's Notes

Learn more about GoToMyPC <<http://www.gotomypc.com>>. -- Sara Skiff, sskiff@peerviews.com

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