

xp workshop



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Remote Assistance

When your PC's playing up and you're in the middle of something important, the last thing you want to do is pack everything up and take it to the local repair shop. Guy Dixon and Ben Worcester show you how to get help without moving from your seat

If a friend, colleague or neighbour runs into trouble with his or her PC, chances are you can pop over, inspect the troubled machine, rectify the problem in person and pop back home or to your office desk in the amount of time it takes to brew a pot of tea.

But what if the troubled PC user is thousands of miles away? It's simply not practical to charter a transatlantic flight, especially if it's just to enlarge the font size for your elderly grandmother.

Of course, there's the phone but you often end up pulling at your hair when it turns out that the person you're trying to

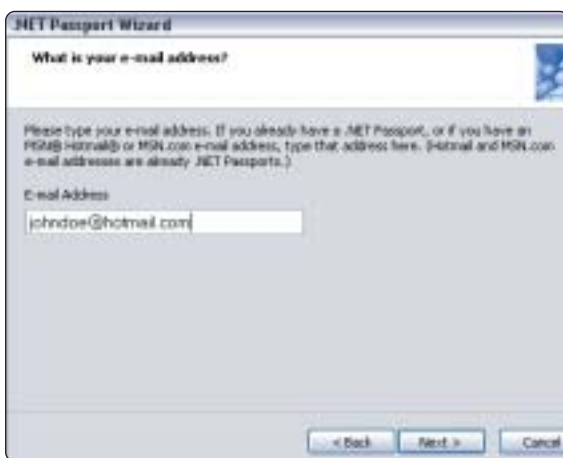
help is so inexperienced they can't outline their problems effectively. It seems that the more troubled someone is, the less able they are to accurately describe the precise nature of their dilemma. It all boils down to one common problem: it's difficult to help someone when you can't see what's on their screen.

All that changed with the arrival of Windows XP's Remote Assistance feature. While similar facilities have existed before in third-party applications, the inclusion of Remote Assistance in Windows XP carries on Microsoft's time-old tradition of 'embracing and extending' – that is,

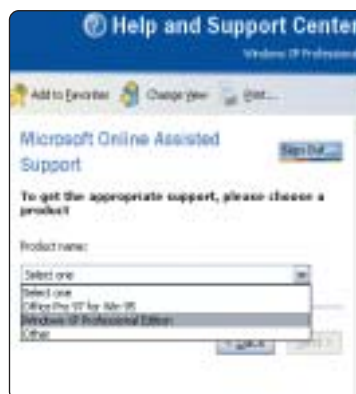
Getting a .Net Passport

If you want to use Remote Assistance to contact a friend, you will need either Windows Messenger or Outlook Express and a .Net Passport. For remote help from a Microsoft support professional you'll also need to sign up for a Passport if you don't already have one. Owners of Hotmail or MSN email addresses can skip this step.

- 1 To start up the .Net Passport Wizard, go to Start, Help and Support Center. Click 'Get Help from Microsoft' then choose the 'I want to create a Passport account' option



- 2 The wizard will hold your hand through the process. Remember, if you have a Hotmail address you don't need to sign up for a new Passport as you already have one. You can cancel the wizard and return to the Help and Support Center at any time



- 3 Once you have your passport set up, you will be able to log in by clicking the Sign In button. Note that once you're signed in this becomes a Sign Out button. Now you can start to solve your problem by choosing the relevant software or hardware from the drop-down list

adding to the features of its operating system by incorporating more and more applications within it.

PC Advisor reader Taran Barry Scott says "I used to use LapLink and I have also used PCAnywhere extensively. Since Remote Assistance is an integral component of Windows, it makes a third-party solution an unnecessary inclusion on my systems."

Taran uses Remote Assistance regularly to help a friend in Canada as well as for domestic and business purposes in the UK. When he uses this Windows XP feature over broadband he regularly gets it to act as a distance-learning aid.

"I can demonstrate onscreen the solutions to various problems and walk a client through a series of processes

where they can see what it is they need to do and how it all goes together," says Taran.

"As a software developer and as someone who regularly trains others in the use of applications, it is a convenient tool to teach with," he continues.

Taran's Canadian friend lives in a rural area but has an ADSL connection. The two friends hook up twice a week for a couple of hours each time and Taran teaches her and her eldest daughter Visual Basic and Office integration.

Where she lives it would be impossible to find suitable tuition. Remote Assistance, combined with a microphone, solves this and creates an environment that's almost as effective as being in the same room with one another.

XP's Remote Assistance has transformed the way IT consultant and PC Advisor forum editor Peter Thomas conducts his daily business. "I can now fix problems without having to go to the client," he says. "I can fix a problem while the client watches on his or her screen. I can teach a client how to do something – such as how to use some new software – without leaving my desk.

"It's difficult to explain what a joy it is to be able to fix something for someone remotely. I have a client in Sydney whom I must have helped through a dozen problems over the past month alone."

What you will need

To use Remote Assistance you must have two PCs running Windows XP Professional

Inviting a friend to assist you

It's not a requirement to talk to a Microsoft techie – you can ask a friend to help with your problem instead, allowing them to take remote control of your computer and solve the problem. Microsoft support guys can do the same thing, but many people prefer to ask a knowledgeable colleague instead – perhaps someone who is working on the same file or project – and Remote Assistance allows you this option.

Far from being purely a problem-fixing solution, Remote Assistance's 'Invite a friend' option has become a popular real-time teaching/learning tool, connecting people living and working in different countries.

- 1 Double-click the name of a contact who's online to open a conversation window in the normal way. Click 'Ask for Remote Assistance' in the righthand pane



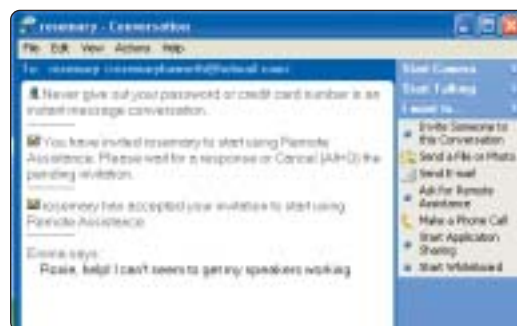
Emma is inviting you to start using Remote Assistance. Do you want to **Accept (Alt+T)** or **Decline (Alt+D)** the invitation?

- 2 Messenger will send an invitation to your chosen contact which they must accept or decline for the remote session to continue



- 3 Once the helper clicks Accept, Remote Assistance makes contact with the PC that sent the invitation

- 4 Once the helper has accepted the invitation, type your problem in and click Send to start receiving assistance



or Home Edition. Both the PC receiving assistance and the system providing assistance must have the operating system installed.

Both machines will also need to be connected via a network or the internet. If you want to connect via instant messaging then Windows Messenger must be installed on both PCs. Be warned, though, that AIM (AOL instant messaging) is not compatible with Remote Assistance.

Ideally, you will also need a broadband connection. Using Remote Assistance over a narrowband connection is very challenging, as PCA reader Phil Patterson found out. "I have tried Remote Assistance with XP-to-XP machines that were both on a 56K dialup connection. It was terrible waiting for the arrow to move across the screen in slow motion, not to mention opening folders," he says.

To access many of the features of Remote Assistance you'll also need a

.Net Passport – Microsoft's security pass for accessing all its websites and services. It's worth signing up if you don't already have one as it means you've only the one username and password to remember in order access all .Net services.

If you have a Hotmail or MSN email account then you've already got a .Net Passport; the same applies if you use Windows Messenger.

By invitation only

To ensure that you don't get any undesirables commandeering your system, a user requesting help must first issue an invitation to the prospective helper. You can issue an invitation either by email or by Windows Messenger. If you're using email, start by opening Help and Support on the Start menu. Under Support, choose Remote Assistance.

Follow the prompts to the Send an Invitation screen. An email invitation can

be sent to anyone who has email, while the Windows Messenger invitation can be sent to anyone on your Buddy List.

If you're asking for help from the same person on a regular basis it makes sense to select Save the Invitation as a File. When you next require assistance, you can simply attach the file to an email message and so save a few steps.

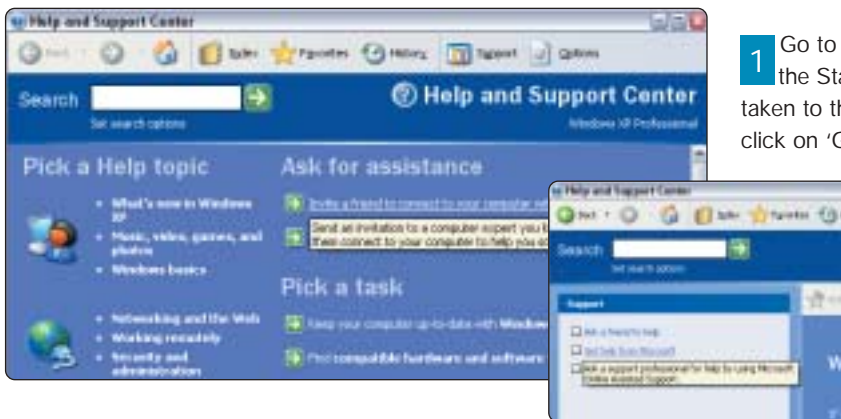
It's a good idea to set security settings for the invitation. Once you've password-protected the message it's time to send off the email.

When the recipient (that is, the helper) opens the mail attachment, he or she is asked whether or not they want to accept. The prospective helper can then click the Take Control button, whereupon the sender of the email allows the helper to take control of his or her system.

It's worth pointing out that although the helper now has control over the troubled user's PC, the mouse and

Asking Microsoft tech support for help

If you don't have a friend to ask for help, Microsoft's tech guys are waiting to assist. We found using this service very easy and staff got back to us promptly over our silent speakers problem. Within 15 minutes, we were happily listening to the strains of Engelbert Humperdinck once more.

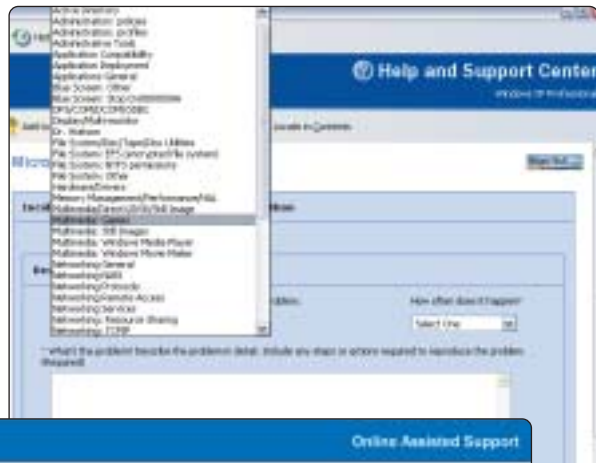


- 1 Go to the Help and Support section found in the Start menu. Click on that and you will be taken to the Help and Support centre. From there, click on 'Get support, or find information on Windows XP newsgroups'. You can then choose to 'Ask a friend to help', 'Get Help from Microsoft' or 'Go to a Windows website forum'. Click the second option to be connected to Microsoft's Online Assisted Support

- 2 You'll be asked whether the problem exists on your PC or another one. If you respond that the error is on the PC you're using, your system setup will be scanned and a drop-down list then appears detailing the hardware and software installed on it. Choose the problem package or choose Other if it's a hardware error



- 3 You'll then see the Incident Report form. Fill it in with a description of the problem in the biggest box and pick an answer from the two drop-down menus to categorise the problem and how often it happens



- 4 Remote Assistance queries are saved online in Microsoft's database and you can view them anytime you like, even if they've been solved



keyboard can still be used as normal by their owner. This is particularly useful in terms of establishing that the user has actually taken the helper's advice on board, recreating the steps that resolved the problem.

If both the helper and the user have microphones and sound cards, they can also talk through the problem at the same time.

Using Windows Messenger

Using Windows Messenger to start Remote Assistance makes the whole process even easier.

The troubled user simply starts Windows Messenger, clicks the Tools menu and selects Send An Invitation. The message immediately appears on the helper's desktop and he or she is invited to click to Accept.

The helper can then diagnose the problem and take action to correct it. If, for example, a new driver is required the helper clicks Send File. The troubled user will then instantly receive the required file. ■



Unsure of a technical term? Find out exactly what it means in our searchable Glossary which is on the cover disc