



## Remote Desktop

If you're a would-be teleworker, XP's very useful Remote Desktop feature makes it well worth going Pro. Rosemary Haworth shows you how to go about accessing your office files once you've left the building

Until recently, I hadn't really considered the differences between the various versions of Windows XP, mainly because I have the Professional version installed on both my office and home computers.

But having finally got home broadband access and talked Geoff, *PC Advisor's* IT administrator, into allowing me a copy of our email client so I could work from home on occasion, I started pondering how else my new-found teleworking efforts could be improved.

Like many people, I'd got used to the vagaries of a web-based email account

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and having to hope that files I sent there to retrieve from my home PC actually arrived. All too often, they didn't. To be certain, I took to burning CDs of my files and stuffing them in my handbag.

With broadband access and Lotus Notes now up and running at home, I can finally depend on being able to access those files. But this still doesn't get round the inefficiency of having to email work documents home. Yes, it is fast thanks to ADSL, and yes it is easy because I can access the same email inbox on both PCs. But it seems a somewhat clunky method of file transfer.

## Setting up Remote Desktop

To use Remote Desktop one or both PCs must be running Windows XP Professional. You'll need to add the relevant XP components from the OS disc to any Home or Windows 98 systems you want to connect with.



**1** To open a Remote Desktop Connection, go to Start, All Programs, Accessories, Communications. Under the General tab, select from the drop-down list or browse to a list of available computers. To create a new remote connection you'll need to enter the IP (internet protocol) address of the network domain you want to access. Naturally, you'll also need permission to do so, so you may need a quiet word with your office IT manager to get approval

**2** Now you need to tell Windows about the speed of internet connection you have by going to the Experience tab and choosing from the drop-down list



**3** Select display and access options relating to the remote PC such as shared servers and printers or fax machines. Do this using the Display and Local Resources tabs. Finally, to establish the remote connection, select the Connect button

For one thing, it means you end up with duplicate files, one of which is more up to date than the other. And after a while this becomes inconvenient since you have to remember which version on which PC is the current one. As long as you're organised, this is easy enough with a handful of documents, but becomes less so after a few months of working this way.

Of course, it's not that hard to check when the document was last modified, but having to do so is an extra hassle. Plus the boss isn't going to go easy on you when an important client is waiting in reception and you tell him that the most recent version of those reports is on your powered-down PC at home.

### Remotely possible

Confusion is assured if, like me, you are the sort of person who's never working on just one thing at a time. Whether you're managing a succession of project-planning changes or budget updates to Excel spreadsheets, keeping tabs on work in various stages of completion isn't easy. Strewn across two locations, monitoring your files soon becomes an occupation that's both complex and time-consuming.

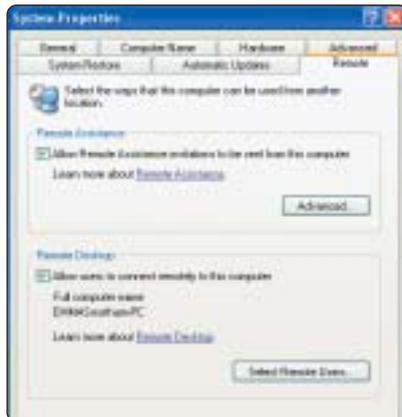
Remote Desktop, therefore, looks like my kind of application. As its name implies, it allows you to get hold of files and folders you need without sitting at the host PC. For security reasons you do, of course, need to have permission to access

your office network so make sure you speak to the office administrator beforehand. And while you're busily accessing the files you need from your work computer, no one else can use it as the desktop is automatically locked and secured from any intrusion.

A broadband internet connection will naturally enable you to get at your files and folders on the remote PC most efficiently, but with a bit of patience it's possible over a dialup connection too. And like many applications that rely on a static IP (internet protocol) address that identifies your network and PC, you can use it to access all the servers you'd be able to if you were in the office.

## Accessing files from your office network

In order to access files located on the remote PC you'll need to have administrator rights. Assign these by going to Control Panel, User Accounts and adding your PC's name to the administrator list. You'll also need to tell the PC to allow users to access it and, if the PC you want to get at is not networked, you'll need to establish its IP address.



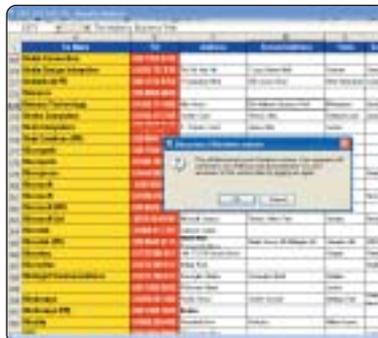
**1** Tell the PC you want to be able to access it remotely by going to Start, Control Panel, System and ticking the Allow users to connect remotely to this computer



**3** Once a Remote Desktop session has been established, you will be able to work on either the remote machine or your own local desktop. The remote PC is automatically locked so no one else can use it while you access folders and files in the usual way. You can launch an application remotely using the Programs tab. To set Remote Desktop to do this, go to Start, All Programs, Accessories, Remote Desktop Connection and specify the program to be launched on the Programs tab. You can choose to have the application close once you finish working remotely from the same options pane



**2** To access a PC other than your networked office system (which has a fixed IP address), you'll need to get its IP address. You may also need to install the Internet Information Services and Remote Desktop Web Connection component under World Wide Web Service from your Windows XP Pro disc. Type `http://ip address/tsweb` to locate the non-networked PC



**4** To end your Remote Desktop session, exit the program in the usual way or click the X next to the remote PC's IP address. To interrupt a session, go to File, Close. When Shut down Windows appears, click Disconnect, ok. Next time you fire up Remote Desktop, you'll automatically be taken to the last point where you left off

You can use Remote Desktop to send documents to an office printer too. Just tell your colleague where and when the document will appear and they can retrieve it in time for their meeting or presentation.

Another advantage of remote printing is that you don't have to provide an electronic copy of the file so there are no fears that it could be changed in any way – useful for sensitive data such as budgets.

## Look smart

Like many features in Windows XP, Remote Desktop isn't a new idea. A similar function was available in Windows 2000 and NT, going under the less than obvious title of Terminal Services. Microsoft has seen that third-party applications such as LapLink have a reasonable market among business users and notebook PC owners so decided to build a similar function into its operating system.

As the boundaries between home and work continue to blur, the company has also come up with a brand-new way of using such a feature in the guise of smart display technology.

A smart display is a wireless, touch-sensitive panel screen that you can use anywhere from the bedroom to the living room to the garden, as long as it's within range of your wireless router's reach. This will enable home-based PC owners to use their computers anywhere in and around their houses without being tied to a poky setup in the attic or the smallest bedroom-cum-junk room where there's just about space for a tower and a screen.

Right now, Remote Desktop – the technology enabling smart displays – isn't built into the Home version of Windows XP. Microsoft and hardware partners such as ViewSonic have countered this by bundling an upgrade to XP Pro and a wireless access point in the smart display package. But the deal's still not the most attractive at around £1,000 ex VAT.

## Freedom at a price

Like all first-generation technologies, cost will seriously limit the number of people likely to buy into the idea. ViewSonic is one of the first two companies to launch smart displays in the UK but cheerfully admits they will account for no more than one percent of its flat-panel sales this year.

Its 15in AirPanel can work remotely as a replacement screen for a PC in another room as well as independently as a carry-around device thanks to its built-in wireless functions and onscreen tools (see *What's so smart about a screen?* on page 123). ViewSonic also offers a more portable – and cheaper – 10in remote access-only screen.

European product manager Aaron Fright sees smart displays as devices aimed at

## What's so smart about a screen?

**W**indows-powered smart displays, originally codenamed Mira – a word derived from the Spanish term 'to watch' – are pretty-looking but basically dumb screens. These wallflowers use Windows XP Professional's Remote Desktop feature to send information to a screen via a wireless home access point. Depending on the model, the display either acts as a touch-sensitive mirror of what's on your home PC or can be used as a substitute for a regular screen. The added advantage is portability. On receipt of that hilarious joke emailed from your dad, you can actually take the screen into another room to show your spouse or kids. Surely an indispensable function.

As with tablet PCs, the supposition is that business users and, in the case of smart displays, consumers, will be willing to pay a premium for mid-range specs on devices that offer portability and cachet.

### Bundled options

In addition to ViewSonic's XP Pro and Service Pack 1 bundle (Philips is banking on not having to bundle XP Pro, thereby lopping £100 off the retail cost and undercutting its rival), smart displays come with an 802.11b wireless network adapter. Their built-in onscreen tools, such as a virtual keyboard and digital stylus-based text-recognition input capabilities, are accessed via a button on the screen's surround.

Users must launch a blank document and define a cursor insertion point for characters to be captured and stored. Most standard word processing, email and web-surfing functions can be performed on a wireless smart display, but video streaming won't be possible until later in the year when it's likely the faster wireless protocols to make it practical are ratified.

Microsoft is pitching portable screens as something that will free us poor home technology slaves. It wants us to believe that – far from increasing our dependence on computer-esque devices – the ability to check our email and get help online with our children's homework while we wash the dishes will come across as something liberating.

So far, it sounds like a misogynist's list of reasons for put-upon, multitasking females to remain strapped to their apron strings.

### Women's institute

Cynicism aside, women (in addition to the usual early adopters) are a marketing target. Perhaps that's not such a bad thing now that manufacturers acknowledge women are equally technologically confident and competent as men. After all women make up half the workforce and are a significant part of the consumer market.

Don't hold your breath for news of overwhelming sales figures. But with video streaming-capable Wi-Fi transfer standards such as 802.11a and g set to become available later this year and the reassurance that Windows XP Media Centre Edition PCs, will also support Remote Desktop (see page 38), smart displays may yet have a future.

As more manufacturers produce them – we understand Benq, among others, is already developing its own version – second- and third-generation smart displays will have to start coming with competitive price tags.

May we politely suggest a version with a tethered digital stylus suitable for lefthanders as well as righties? Oh, and some decent summer weather so we can properly assess whether these glare-prone screens really will let us bask in the sunshine while we surf the web for a bargain getaway.



so-called 'early adopters' who insist on having the very latest gadgets and devices before their peers. At £1,099 and £869 inc VAT for the 15in and 10in AirPanels, it's hardly a consumer concept so far.

More realistically, cheaper, screen-only products for PC users with an existing home wireless access point and a copy of XP Pro already to hand will be available later this year. For now, teleworkers like me have a more immediately useful application to get to grips with in the form of the enabling Remote Desktop application. Okay, I have to admit it

doesn't have the curvy, comforting appeal of a feel-good lifestyle product, but this is one Microsoft idea that has the potential to make the task of balancing work and home commitments rather more seamless.

Yes, Remote Desktop will come in very handy the next time London Underground grinds to a standstill, the boiler repair man is due sometime between the hours of 8am and 6pm or I quite simply feel like spending a peaceful but productive day in the company of my dog rather than the all-out chaos that sometimes reigns at *PC Advisor Towers*.

While I opt to have a lie in, smug in the knowledge that eight million other Londoners wait in traffic, I can work on my files without even leaving the house.

Armed with a smart display, I might even become a real lady of leisure and catch up on those pressing emails from the comfort of my own armchair. How decadent is that? ■



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