TIME BANDITS

Where does the time go? We all wonder about this but non-more so than the IT managers. Not only are there not enough hours in the day but there also does not seem to be enough bandwidth in their systems to improve the delivery of data at an effective rate. So what can be done?

There are many articles about “Time theft” but these usually focus on how employees find ways to “minimize” their daily contributions by elongated bathroom breaks, private phone calls, etc.

“Bandwidth theft” is another area that has attracted many words but here the focus is mostly on how individuals or companies extract data from current web sites and use that to their own, cheap advantage.

Our Time Bandits are a relatively new breed. Wander among the cubicles of almost any enterprise and you will either see people with headsets gently stomping to their favorite web radio station or even hear music direct from the cool speakers of their PC’s. Hopefully this provides for a happier and so more productive employee but what about the effect on the network they are connected to?

Of course many of them are also surfing the web – often as part of their job function but not always – and what cumulative effect does have on the overall network performance? Napster is dead but replaced by many other look-alikes such as Kazaa.

How many employees may snatch a few minutes to down load their latest favorite tracks and how does that impact the network response time?

Recent industry measurements show that all of these “non-productive” activities can soak up as much as 28% of the available bandwidth in any enterprise system. This is an average so, at some points in a day, the total non-company useable bandwidth could peak to much higher levels and so compromise company critical tasks and data flow.

Of course every company and IT manager has put in policies and some safeguards but often there is no actual management or measurement of the effects on the system.

There have been many statements in the past that bandwidth is essentially free but most financial officers will disagree when they get the monthly communications bills. If it were free, then adding more bandwidth would be a great solution but, if not, there needs to be another solution.

First enterprises need to get a handle on the extent of the problem. Today, there are non-intrusive ways of measuring the traffic and potential bottlenecks on both the LAN and WAN areas of company networks. These methods can be used to determine where the traffic problems are down to the level of even each node or PC on the system and over any typical working period.

Once this is achieved, an analysis will provide the data to design an improved system to include new policies, managed links and routers etc. Hardware and software components can be put in place to set and manage parameters that will ensure sufficient bandwidth availability for all tasks depending upon the level of priority set. Mission critical data will always get top priority - and of course the IT management staff will be able to set their own high level to ensure their own access.

Experience from use of such managed systems is that not only can the system performance be substantially improved, but also “spare” bandwidth can be created which may be used to implement new productivity solutions. These applications can be everything from providing Voice over IP to instituting a low cost, video conferencing system.

The bandwidth theft described here is just one aspect of compromise in the workplace. Of course there is another major issue of company liability when employees download music or pornography. This is the subject of another article but the tools mentioned here can also be applied to management of such potential problems.

So, are our Time Bandits going to be less content and productive if we use these systems to take away their entertainment?

Well maybe, but generally the bandwidth management tools do not prevent the “non-productive” use of the networks but just prioritize the traffic to ensure that the enterprise works properly. So music and data can co-exist and swing together.