



BY STEVE TIELENS

# Helping the Help Desk

**For many corporate help desks support is provided by one of the many new software tracking and monitoring solutions available. These powerful new tools quickly pinpoint software malfunctions, detect human interaction errors, and alert network managers and help desk personnel to individuals who might require further software training.**

**WOULDN'T** it be great to know exactly what occurred on a Windows desktop just prior to the system crashing? What a pleasant surprise it would be if the only calls to the corporate help desk were to tell them that everything's running great — no problems. How easy it would be if we were able to anticipate potential network problems before they happened. Sound too good to be true? Not with a little help.

Sometimes a thankless job, help desk administrators face an onslaught of desktop problems everyday. Unfortunately, many of these calls are the result of poor computer training, with the same questions and mistakes surfacing over and over again. The result is a tremendous amount of wasted time and energy on the part of the help desk.

One example of an every day situation that wastes time, energy, and money is user abuse. Not uncommon is the employee who decides to "play around" with the controls and settings on the desktop. Most of the time, no major damage is done, but what about the user who decides to change his network settings and inadvertently disconnects his PC from the network? These changes then log him off the LAN so that he can no longer access files, print, send email, or access the Internet.

Another issue is the user who calls the help desk for support but can't recall exactly what tasks he was attempting at the time his system failed. In these scenarios, typical problem tracking questions such as "What were you doing on your desktop when the PC failed?" often elicit such responses as "I don't know," or "Nothing...it just crashed." Thus, the help desk is no more well informed about the nature or cause of the

problem than before the user called and now must spend precious time piecing together what really happened.

Another drain on help desk resources occurs with the deployment of new software across the enterprise. With the vast functionality offered by today's Windows-based programs, network administrators and help desk personnel are often forced to roll out a new product without having properly trained the user. Word for Windows, for example, offers users easy entry to change where the files or documents are stored. If the corporate policy is to store the files on a file server so they can be backed up and a user alters this setting, then critical files could be lost in the event the PC has a disk crash. Macros, for example, are another potential problem in Microsoft Word. Many companies have had serious problems with macro viruses. Many of these problems can be avoided if some additional tools are made available to the help desk support group.

For many corporate help desks this support is provided by one of the many new software tracking and monitoring solutions available. These powerful new tools quickly pinpoint software malfunctions, detect human interaction errors, and alert network managers and help desk personnel to individuals who might require further software training.

To prevent these problems, a successful help desk should be able to centrally monitor and control access to individual, remote, and enterprise-wide Windows-based PC application activity. This new wave of software tools is providing key information and control to the help desk to assist administrators in doing their jobs better. These tools tell administrators exactly

how each Windows-based PC in a company's network is being used. Some of these tools can actually provide a very clear picture of the day-to-day use of all the company's Windows applications and allow controls to be set from a central location to manage what the users can access at the desktop.

### SELECTING THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

How do you know which tool is most likely to help your organization improve the effectiveness of its IT investment, raise productivity, and cut costs? There are several key features that should definitely be present for any of these solutions to provide significant corporate benefits.

1. The solution must be able to centrally monitor all Windows operations information and distribution. By tracking each step-by-step use of any Windows application, the help desk can see what an employee is doing on the desktop, track how long each application is being used, and identify which users may need more training. With a database of user activity, profiles can be created by job description, training needs can be identified, and game playing and non-productive activities can be identified and prevented. Activities that cause desktop instability can be prevented, thereby preventing problems from occurring. If software that causes problems such as system crashes or network outages is identified, then the database will

show who is using the software and that program could be restricted from being run. The help desk will no longer get the call and the end user won't incur downtime or be non-productive.

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2. The solution must provide the network administrator the ability to deny access to a particular Window within an application, prevent the user from changing desktop or application settings, as well as disable applications such as Web browsers and games.

Tracking and monitoring is fine, but if you cannot prevent a user from being destructive, then you cannot prevent network problems. Quickly identifying and stopping unauthorized activity can save hours of wasted network downtime.

3. The solution must have accurate audit trails for application usage. By seeing exactly what steps an employee took before the system crashed, the help desk can quickly and effectively pinpoint problems, thus reducing costs and improving response time. Instead of having to encounter the same problem over and over again, the help desk can simply say, "Don't change your network settings and your system will stop crashing."
4. The solution must have some way of quantifying its information. By producing statistics on application usage by department, division, or individual user, the solution can more accurately determine hardware and software requirements and catalog the use of corporate assets such as Internet access. In this manner, the help desk becomes a wealth of information on what works and what doesn't, what's efficient and what's not.

Several newly announced tools provide this much-needed help desk support. One example is WinVista Pro (WinVista

## Wasted Time

**Just how much time are users wasting? Let's take a mild example. Imagine an employee earns \$50,000 a year (including salary, benefits, vacations, etc.). Then let's say this employee wastes five minutes each day on unproductive computer time - time spent on technical problems, time wasted because of errors caused by not being properly trained, time wasted waiting for programs to run, reports to print, repair persons to show up, or the technical support staff to pick up the phone. That turns out to \$2.50 per day, \$12.50 per week and \$646 per year per employee!**

**In fact, according to a recent business computing survey of 6,000 workers, SBT Accounting (San Rafael, Calif.) found that users waste five hours per week on unproductive computer time. Cited as the most time consuming causes of wasted computer time were the wait for repair personnel and help desk response.**

Corporation, Boca Raton, Fla.), which provides help desk and system, network, or whomever managers the tool, with the ability to monitor what each user does on the desktop, track if employees are using their desktops and software properly, and control and block functions, software programs and file access — all based on individual, departmental, division, or enterprise-wide global preferences.

Additionally, products such as WinVista Pro provide managers with a combination of unique tools that allow Chief Information Officers (CIOs) to efficiently evaluate and manage their company's Windows-based environments. This allows CIOs to document how their company's PC hardware and software equipment is being used and to manage these valuable market resources as effectively as any other corporate asset.

Sound like Big Brother? Not quite. In today's rapidly evolving world of technology,

the more information we have at our fingertips, the better off we are. Now new software is making it possible to track and prevent those same mistakes from occurring repeatedly while educating employees on the most effective use of their technology. It's just another way of making the corporate enterprise more productive and profitable. 

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**As Chief Technology Officer of WinVista Corporation, Steve Tielens has more than 14 years of experience in the Information Technology, Information System, and Communications arenas. Mr. Tielens responsibilities include all areas of research and development, IT, Communications and product development. He is also the company's primary spokesperson on technical and product issues. Contact WinVista at [www.Winvista.com](http://www.Winvista.com).**

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