

NetPilot benefits for Motor dealerships

Keith Baker – 19th July 2002

Overview

Motor companies are encouraging the creation of networks of operators with satellite dealerships and this is leading to major problems with inter-site data-communications and dealer management systems. It's increasingly clear that the need for good communications is becoming greater and many of the intermediate solutions that have been implemented can be messy stopgaps. The dealerships need to have a stable platform to start with and they need to look to the future rather than trying to paper over the cracks.

If the data-communications system used by the dealership to link their sites is the same as the data-communications link to the motor company, it makes sense to combine the two. Products such as Equinet's NetPilot secure server appliance can automate this process and leave everything in the hands of a single HQ-based administrator. They can also eradicate concerns over support and security for the network, and who is responsible for time-consuming updates such as new virus signatures at the dealership.

In addition, motor companies are becoming true advocates of technologies such as secure server appliances. They are being seen to encourage the use of good practice amongst their dealers by stressing the importance of:

- the use of Internet technologies to reduce costs
- a strong emphasis on network security
- emerging web-based applications
- looking to the future by expecting at least a three year lifespan from investments

Internet in motor dealerships

The extent to which data-communications and the Internet are used by motor dealerships varies greatly depending upon the size of the franchise and their general attitude towards IT. However, as a very minimum, Internet connectivity is required for accessing information such as used car prices, spare parts, finance, vehicle checks etc. and this more often than not results in multiples of modems and/or ISDN TA's on the same site. Traditionally, connectivity to finance providers is via costly 64kbps leased-lines, even though these services can now be securely accessed via the Internet.

The correct use of presently available Internet technologies could provide the aforementioned connectivity at lower cost, and in a more controlled and secure manner. Furthermore, many additional benefits could also be realised, which would result in a more efficient and even more cost-effective dealership operation.

The benefits outlined below are based upon the use of the NetPilot secure server appliance, the UK's market-leading solution in this field.

Cost benefits over existing systems

These are the savings made immediately by channelling all data-communications through NetPilot and a single Internet connection.

Only one Internet connection required – All PCs wishing to connect to a service on the Internet could do so via a single ISP account. Many PCs could also be accessing different services on the Internet at the same time at no extra cost.

Removal of leased-lines for finance – access to finance houses could also be achieved over the same Internet connection.

Removal of inter-site leased-lines - NetPilot's VPN (Virtual Private Network) enables totally secure site-to-site links to be set-up using the Internet.

Removal of satellite service – ?

Control over Internet browsing – All Internet browsing could be fully controlled, hence preventing abuse and time wasting.

Caching of information – Web sites visited would be cached locally on NetPilot, and served to the next person wishing to browse that site. This saves time as the response is immediate, and reduces costs if the Internet connection is ISDN as a call is not required to get the information for a second time.

Additional Benefits

In addition to the immediate cost savings, NetPilot offers many other benefits such as Internet security, email services, and functionality that will enable a dealer to run a far more efficient and effective business.

Firewall – Total security against hackers is provided by the fully accredited firewall built into NetPilot.

Email server – Both local and external email could be handled by NetPilot, which would also work in conjunction with an existing email server such as MS Exchange.

Virus checker – All email, internal and external, could be checked for viruses using the latest Sophos virus signatures, which are automatically updated daily.

Remote access – NetPilot's VPN allows totally secure connections to itself and resources on the local network from remote PCs. So you could collect your email from home or hotel using a lo-cost dial-up ISP account.

File server - Yes, NetPilot even has a small fileserver built in that allows data and files to be easily shared between staff.

Print server – Many could share a single printer.

Intranet server – Corporate intranet sites could be hosted locally to speed up access. NetPilot could also automatically update these sites every night.

e-learning/content server – Computer-based training courses and videos could be served directly from NetPilot to PCs on the local network. This content could also be automatically updated on a daily/weekly basis.

Kiosks - NetPilot could also drive customer-facing kiosks, greatly reducing the cost of the hardware and software usually required for this type of service.

Conclusion

The drive towards greater Internet usage in motor dealerships is undeniable. By using a secure multifunctional server appliance, dealerships can take advantage of all the Internet has to offer – cost-effectiveness, efficiency savings, speed – without any of the inherent worries about security.