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Question:

A lot of our road reps want us to buy them GPS (global positioning system) navigation systems, but I have heard that these systems will soon be obsolete as many smartphones are now offering satellite navigation. Is this the case and, if so, am I better off simply updating staff phones to GPS-enabled smartphones?

N. Frost, NSW

Answer:

Both have their pluses and minuses. An in-car GPS has a bigger screen, is voice activated and easy to see when driving. On the downside, you do not want the unit to be visible when the vehicle is unattended and it will require regular map updates, which will probably involve a subscription fee and regular connection to the Internet.

Many of the latest model smartphones are GPS enabled, making it easier to have a single unit with integrated phone, email and GPS access. The maps on a smartphone will constantly be updated, but you will need to check with your provider as to whether access to GPS services is part of data charges. Personally, I think an integrated unit is the way to go – small, easily updated – some will have voice instruction and there are no in-car security issues.



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Setting up safe remote network access.

More and more organizations are choosing to provide staff with the ability to access business networks from home. This style of remote access offers numerous benefits including minimizing down time when staff are home ill; providing after hours or weekend access for 'catch up'; and offering options for a more family friendly or flexible work environment (such as telecommuting = working from home on school holidays or set days per week or fortnight).

In order to maintain security of data when accessing the network from home, the first question to ask is how will staff access the business network? Will they be using company equipment such as a notebook for access, or will they use their own home computer?

Utilizing a company notebook has the benefit of the computer being pre-loaded with your business's security software. A simple desktop log-in icon and a remote access user ID and password could then be set up to access the network.

Alternatively, access via a home computer could pose potential security risks given you will most likely have no control over the security software (if any) being utilized. A more acceptable alternative could be to establish a secure web access page where users use a computer or device such as a smartphone to log directly into the network with a user name and password.

Other security items worth considering regardless of your choice are session time outs (automatic log off following short periods of inactivity to avoid unauthorized use) and restricting a user's ability to save or transfer files from the network down to the local computer (to ensure data integrity and so on).

Check with your technology provider or IT (information technology) department for the solution most appropriate to your business needs and budget.

Although 24/7 connectivity provides great flexibility to access data remotely, from a work/life balance perspective, it can create problems if its use is not identified to staff up front. It is important that employees are aware of business expectations regarding the use of the network from home – the development of simple guidelines that detail access, use and restrictions (such as allowing remote log in during certain hours) would help guide staff.

In summary, offering network access will only provide flexibility and return on investment if you get the balance right. The most productive employees tend to be those that are able to switch off when necessary and recharge their mind and body to enable them to focus on the challenges of the next working day.

Point to note: In both the US and Australia, many organizations (including American Express, Apple and local governments) offer, or are giving consideration to offering, a partial or total telecommuting (work from home) structure to staff to reduce overheads and increase productivity. This may be something to explore further down the track depending on your business structure.

The information contained in this article should be used as a guide only. For your businesses specific needs you should contact your preferred technology provider who can advise what is best for your specific requirements.

Ms. Donna Hanson is the technology translator. A professional speaker and director of productivity training company Prime Solutions Training & Consulting, Ms. Hanson translates what is often technobabble into everyday, simple and easy-to-understand language. For more information, visit www.primesolutions.net.au or her resource centre, www.thetechnologytranslator.com.

