💻 Computer Corner

Computer Networks Go Wireless: Are You Ready To Cut The Cord?

by Frank Muehleman

(NAPSA)—The wireless revolution in personal computers is officially underway.

Employees in small businesses worldwide are tapping the Internet, checking e-mail and accessing office networks without being tethered to network cables. Currently, more than 200,000 small businesses in the United States have deployed a wireless network, and this number is expected to grow to more than 325,000 in 2003. Companies that have not considered going wireless may be a step behind their competition in helping employees be more productive and better satisfied with their jobs.

Wireless fidelity, or Wi-fi in technical speak, is the ability for laptop and desktop PC users to connect to a local area network wire-free. With a wireless connection, employees can access the Internet, share files or e-mail from a conference room or other common area in an office without a network cable.

Setting up a wireless network is simple: an access point is placed somewhere in the office and automatically connects users with wireless-enabled computers to the network when they log on. The starting price of the access point is about $130, while wireless PC cards for notebooks or desktops start around $80.

Many companies have a combination of a wired and wireless network and prefer access points with router capabilities, which give them the option of wiring up to four computers to the network.

To determine whether a wire-

Access points are your wireless connection to the future.

less network is right for your business, consider the following:

1. Type of systems: Does your business operate on desktop or notebook computers, or a combination of the two? If employees are using primarily notebooks systems, a wireless network makes sense. For businesses that use desktops, particularly those in older buildings, and move them frequently, a wireless network may help reduce costs associated with unwiring and rewiring the systems. Or if a desktop computer is needed where there are no network cables, such as in the front of a retail shop, a wireless network can easily connect the system to the network without breaking the budget.

2. Number of systems: On average, a wireless access point can accommodate up to 20 systems. However, if employees are heavy network users, a second access point may be necessary. Wi-fi at its best allows 11 megabits per second (mbps), but employees could see a decrease in performance as more bandwidth is used. During the next year, the industry anticipates wireless networking technology to get closer to the performance of a wired network, which typically operates at 100 mbps.

3. Location of systems and office square footage: Another consideration for wireless networking is coverage area. Wireless access points can reach up to a 300-foot radius. However, walls, floors and other environmental factors between users and the access point can affect range and speed performance. If you have more than one common area in your office building where users will access the network, additional access points may be required.

4. Security: Access points have encryption protection built into the device so one user cannot see the information transmitted from another. Additionally, most companies can easily configure their access points so their signal will not be detected by systems outside the organization. There are some small businesses whose data is highly sensitive or critical to national security; these companies will want to invest in an enterprise-class access point with more security features.

Thousands of businesses are realizing the benefits of a wireless network. Taking part in this wireless revolution is not only "cool," it's easy, comes with an affordable price tag and can help make a difference in your business.

For more information on Dell TrueMobile Wireless products, visit www.dell.com or call 1-800-917-DELL.

Frank Muehleman is senior vice president and general manager of Dell's small and medium business division.