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Thin desk server system abandons hard drive, grants Net access

By MICHAEL BURNS

Situation: Over the past 50 years, Gaviller & Company LLP has grown into a regional chartered accounting firm with offices in Owen Sound, Walkerton, Collingwood and Meaford, Ont.

Today, the firm's support staff of more than 50 comprises CAs, certified management accountants, certified general accountants, certified financial planners and others specializing in various areas of business service.

A few years ago, the Collingwood office needed to update its computer server, and one of the partners, Sue Martin, just happened to come across Infreon Inc. at a conference she was attending. Infreon offered a very different approach.

Solution: Infreon looks after the computer networks for about a

dozen CA firms in Ontario. Its clients purchase their own computers and software, but the servers are maintained in Infreon's data centre.

Infreon also offers something they call a thin desk, whereby clients use workstations without hard disks and access the server over the Internet using terminal services or citrix. Infreon also supplies the computer equipment and peripherals that are required, but will endeavour to use existing equipment if possible.

The Collingwood office of Gaviller & Company implemented the thin desk approach about three years ago. The office switched over on Friday and was up and running without a hitch on Monday. The office now has about 20 people on the system accessing all programs and data over the Internet using a high-speed connection.

Challenges and resolutions: Gaviller was concerned about what would happen if Infreon went out of business, considering the company is a small operation. The concern was quickly dealt with by replicating the firm's data in a server in its own office, which is updated hourly.

Another concern was over the security of Gaviller's client information. But it was apparent from the start that Infreon was an expert in the field of security and would provide even better security than Gaviller has had in the past.

Would the system be slow over the Internet or would it be unavailable? As it turns out, Gaviller's systems are now faster than ever and the Internet connection is reliable.

Before Infreon, Gaviller had one of its employees look after the firm's computer problems. Now, it relies on Infreon, which

has implemented a process in which computer calls are handled based on their priority.

Costs and benefits: The costs for Infreon consist of an initial investment of about \$35,000 with a full five-year warranty and monthly maintenance fee of \$1,000.

The biggest benefit was in the cost savings of the PCs—Gaviller now uses clones without hard disks.

These machines offer other advantages in forcing everyone to maintain their client files on the server, so they can always be retrieved.

The clones are also much quieter than the old PCs they used in the past.

Another saving was in the freeing up of the employee previously delegated to looking after the computer system. The chargeable time for this person

was about 40 per cent and is now at about 55 per cent.

Other benefits include working from home and not having to worry about uploading and downloading files or using the wrong version of the document.

One clear drawback would involve employees who are on the road a lot and don't have access to the Internet.

Nevertheless, Infreon has come up with a compelling business model that should appeal to many CA firms.

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