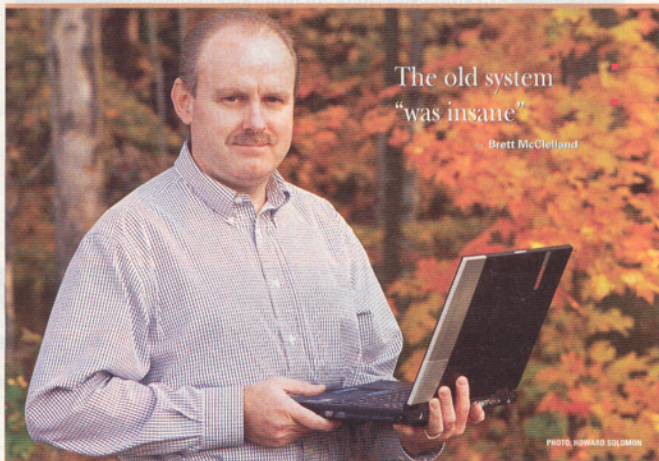


Drowning in troubles

The travelling staff were sinking in connection problems until they dried out their ISP



Client: Zenon Environmental

Solution: iPass, Neoteris

ROI: Support calls cut 60%

The old system
"was insane"

Brett McClelland

PHOTO: HOWARD SOLOMON

BY HOWARD SOLOMON

Connecting to the Internet is easy these days, but sales and technical staff travel who around the world also need a cost-effective and easy to use solution.

That was the problem faced by Zenon Environmental Inc. of Oakville, Ont., which sells advanced membrane-based water purification in more than 40 countries. Some 120 mobile users need dial-up connectivity to Zenon's product and service database daily as well as deal with important communications services such as e-mail.

But the service provider it had been using for many years was drowning the firm in technical troubles: A clumsy interface that needed the launching of two programs, and slow performance.

"We had some fairly senior people in the United Arab Emirates who'd get connections so slow they were almost unusable," recalls Brett McClelland, Zenon's chief

information officer. "They'd type a few keys and wait several seconds before the letters appeared on the screen.

"It was insane."

Robust service and a large number of local points-of-presence (POPs) are among the features offered by major telcos and international Internet service providers such as Allstream (formerly AT&T Canada) Uninet, MCI and others who are fighting for business of companies like Zenon.

Earlier this year McClelland became fed up with the trouble Zenon's employees were having and began searching for something better.

Not only was the interface bad, the phone database wasn't automatically updated, so travellers had to know where they were going before they left. In addition, the service provider didn't keep session statistics, so Zenon couldn't track and trouble-shoot problems.

In February McClelland drafted a remote access strate-

gy, setting out the company's needs and criteria for selecting a new service provider. The needs included a better dialup application which could support upcoming technologies such as broadband and wireless, and the purchase of a clientless virtual private network (VPN) appliance for improved security.

The criteria demanded of the service provider included rapid response, ease of use, good security, robust connections, wide global coverage and good reporting. A key goal was the solution had to cut 40 monthly support calls in half.

As it turned out, the winner was almost right under their noses. One of Zenon's U.S. sales managers was using a virtual provider called iPass Inc., which has POP agreements with 200 local providers in 150 countries. Its Canadian reseller is iPass Services Inc. of Concord, Ont.

Joseph Vida, an iRoam account manager gave a presentation which stretched into two

hours as he outlined the company's global reach and help desk tools. Zenon liked the fact that iPass could integrate into the company's Windows Active Directory, so use could be made of existing passwords.

After looking into other providers McClelland chose iRoam in part because it was flexible: while the provider wanted a three-year deal, it agreed to one year plus a letter of intent to extend the contract, with some contingencies McClelland wouldn't detail for competitive reasons.

Zenon decided to buy a new Intel-based server for the Windows-based iPass software. iRoam was helpful with installation, he said, providing deployment, training and testing guides.

Meanwhile the search for a VPN appliance was limited to the three companies who at the time had products — Neoteris Inc., Aventail Corp. and Netilla Networks Inc. (In the last six months others have joined this market). Neoteris was chosen because its technical support staff answered questions faster than the others, McClelland said. The device was bought from Contego Information Security Solutions of Mississauga, Ont.

"It's been a huge success for the IT department," McClelland says of the new solution, which cut support calls by 60 per cent. "We have more people travelling because we're a global company and whatever we can do to make their experience better is good for us."