Give Me the Remote Control!

No, not what you see in a 1950s B movie, with a mad scientist punching buttons on a cheesy-looking panel ("No, Dr. Chandler, don't push that button!!!"). This is about being able to access your office or plant computers from a home office or while traveling. Let's discuss the merits of three approaches.

With *remote control*, a technology that's been around for years, you access your own PC (in your office, typically) via phone line or Internet and take it over. Programs run on the PC in the office, so the only data being transferred are keystrokes and screen updates. Performance over a dial-up connection is OK. The best-known remote control product is pcAnywhere, which supports both dial and Internet connections. Internet connections can be tricky to set up, but when both PCs have high-speed Internet connections, performance is excellent. A newer alternative is Go To My PC, which operates over Internet connections. A nice feature of Go To My PC is that the remote (controlling) PC requires no special software, only the target. Go To My PC is a service, so you pay for it annually. The main disadvantage of remote control is that each PC to be controlled requires software and possibly a phone line.

Remote access allows you to get into your company network via dial-up or Internet connection. Since you are not taking over a PC in the office, all programs run on the remote PC. This is OK for word processing or spreadsheets, but database programs may run poorly or not at all. But if you need to upload a presentation or download documents from a server, remote access is perfect. Access via the Internet is usually through a virtual private network (VPN). Both the remote PCs and the target network need to have VPN set up.

The last option, *remote terminal*, is more complex. All applications, word processing, database, etc., run on servers, not on users' PCs. The servers have to be hefty, but the workstations can be simple (and cheap). Citrix and Microsoft offer remote terminal solutions.

Whichever approach you choose, be sure to use security features like encryption and passwords. We don't want Dr. Chandler pushing the buttons!

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