



COLLABORATION AND SECURITY

Robin Layland

Open up your network

We are making it too hard to collaborate with others. Our networks are closed forts to anyone outside of the corporation.

Consider this example: A vendor needed access to a device behind a client's firewall. First, the vendor's internal contact had to apply to the client's security administrator and provide information on the person needing access, the company and the equivalent to swearing an oath that the person is a good person. After the application was reviewed and approved, the vendor had to call the security administrator to get a token. The vendor then had to act immediately because the token doesn't last long; even a short delay would start the process over again.

What is the moral of this story? You better be motivated to let the other person in because it will not be easy, it will take a lot of time and you better have a good case.

What would a solution look like? Each PC or server would need software that allows the owner to specify who can come in and what application or file that person can access. There would be a standard way to specify people, a

universal name or number, and the length of time an authorization is good. If the PC accepts them, then the firewall would take no further action. If the PC rejects them, then the firewall would block the connection, maybe even using intelligence to track the person's connection to see if he is just walking through the corporation

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knocking on doors. The system then would block his attempt to find an unlocked "house." The firewall also could monitor the connection to make sure it doesn't access something it shouldn't.

The reason we don't want to think about this approach is that it requires us to do something we aren't good at — knowing who is behind the

connection. Registration and authentication on a global scale is needed to open up the world and help make it safe. We should be working in industry forums or through the government to solve this problem. Acting like it is not our problem doesn't make it go away and we will have to face it one day. We will all soon have to reach out beyond our walled cities and open up to the world and our customers.

Companies have a large stake in solving this problem but are doing little. It is not enough to hope vendors will step up to the plate; they will not solve the universal registration problem. Users need to speak up and tell vendors and government we need a solution. We need to rethink how we do security and move away from walling ourselves off and instead start opening up the walls. The companies that effectively do this will open up a whole new world.

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CACHE ADVANCE

Linda Musthaler

Reconsidering the IBM-Lenovo deal

Earlier this year, I expressed misgivings about the sale of IBM's PC division to China-based Lenovo Group (www.networkworld.com; DocFinder: 8557). While I thought IBM was smart for unloading its unprofitable PC group, I also thought ThinkPad and ThinkCentre customers would get the raw end of the deal.

However, I recently spent an intense day talking with Lenovo's senior executives, and they have allayed my fears. In fact, these discussions have given me a positive outlook on Lenovo's worldwide role in the PC market. Of course, it's just barely three months since the sale closed, so time will tell if Lenovo can pull off its grand plans.

Initially, I had three concerns about the sale: 1) the inevitable loss of innovation if Lenovo curtails the funding of R&D to which PCD was accustomed; 2) The fear that Lenovo might focus simply on cost cutting in order to stay competitive, resulting in a loss of corporate customers outside of China; and 3) a potential "brain drain" if former IBMers refuse to don a Lenovo badge. Lenovo addressed each of my fears with a very palatable response.

Let's discuss the easy issue first — the potential brain drain. Before his appointment as Lenovo president and CEO, Steve Ward headed PCD. He had the dubious distinction of telling thousands of his fellow IBM employees that their division had been sold and explaining the rationale for the sale. Ward expected a backlash; instead, he received applause and cheers.

Ward attributes the unexpected reaction to the employees' passion for the PC. In recent years, IBM did its best to stifle that passion by de-

emphasizing PCs and making PCD feel like the unwanted stepchild. Lenovo's adoption of this stepchild meant that PCD would gain a prominent position in a growing company focused on the PC platform. PCD employees could feel like rock stars instead of back-up singers in their new company. Ward says that less than a handful of employees declined the offer to trade an IBM badge for a Lenovo badge. So much for the brain drain.

Next, let's look at the R&D angle of the acquisition. I've always considered IBM's Think PCs to be high on the innovation scale. The built-in ThinkVantage technologies are truly valuable

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features that make the PC easier to use and maintain than commodity brands of PCs. Lenovo thinks so, too. That's why the ThinkVantage technologies will live on and grow under Lenovo. Peter Hortensius, former IBM employee and current senior vice president of worldwide product development for Lenovo, told me PCD and Lenovo have a similar approach to developing meaningful technology to solve real users' problems. Hortensius and George He, Lenovo senior vice president of research and technology, pledge to continue to drive innovation that will make PCs easier and more cost effective to use — for both con-

sumers and business customers.

So what about the cost issue? Yes, Ward says, Lenovo is going to be relentless in cutting costs from its PCs, but will do so through efficiencies and not by cutting R&D or product quality, as I had feared. The company can improve its manufacturing efficiencies by having plants in China, where most of the component pieces are made. This will eliminate shipping of components before assembly. Ward believes Lenovo business PCs can be priced competitively to those of Dell and HP, without sacrificing features or quality.

Lenovo has already developed its sales models to accommodate the vastly different needs of consumer and business customers, and products will rally around these models. The traditional Lenovo PC products are aimed at consumers (outside the U.S.) and sold through a high-volume "transaction" model, which includes Internet and retail sales. The Think brand of business products will be sold through relationships — either direct or through resellers. What's more, IBM will continue to offer these products through a long-term sales relationship with Lenovo. So if you've been buying your PC products from IBM over the years, nothing has to change.

I always thought the economics of this sale made sense. Now I've come around to thinking that freeing PCD from the clutches of IBM might be good for the PC market, as well as for Lenovo.

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