

## WHITE PAPER

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### Virtualizing Support

Sponsored by: Bomgar

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#### IDC OPINION

Technology has become pervasive throughout all aspects of most people's professional and personal lives. The dramatic increase in the adoption of technology has allowed significant increases in productivity and efficiency. However, these increases have not come without a cost. The level of sophistication necessary to resolve technical issues has also increased; therefore, when a problem occurs, end users generally are not able to fix it themselves and must turn to professional support for help. Additionally, the pace of business has increased, so when technical problems arise, there is often a sense of urgency to resolve the problem quickly. These facts have increased the pressure on IT help desk and customer support organizations.

The pressure is magnified by the increasing challenges that support staffs face. There has been a dramatic rise in the number of mobile workers over recent years. This can be seen by the significant increase in the number of laptop PCs sold compared with the number of desktops sold. In 2007, according to IDC's Worldwide PC Tracker, more portable PCs were sold than desktops.

These two forces are combining to increase the challenges IT faces. To help address these challenges, Bomgar has developed a "clientless" remote support solution. However, as the solution has evolved, the benefits have evolved beyond the initial target market of help desk support services. Specifically, the benefits of the solution come from being able to geographically decouple IT personnel from the task they need to complete. By doing this, organizations effectively "virtualize" their IT departments and can see a wider range of benefits. To illustrate these benefits, IDC interviewed the following Bomgar customers about their experiences with the solution:

- ☒ **The Salvation Army.** The Salvation Army is using the Bomgar solution to help provide support to its internal staff. By deploying the Bomgar solution, The Salvation Army was able to provide support for nearly 1,500 centers of operations in 13 western states in a cost-effective manner.
- ☒ **Information Technology Inc. (ITI).** ITI is using the Bomgar solution to provide support and software deployment services to its banking customers. The Bomgar solution enabled ITI to increase support staff utilization by more than 300% and improve customer satisfaction.
- ☒ **PracticeWorks Inc.** PracticeWorks is using the Bomgar solution to provide support services to its dental software customers. The solution has enabled the company to reduce the resolution time for complex software problems and increase customer satisfaction with more routine issues.

## **IN THIS WHITE PAPER**

This IDC white paper reviews the challenges that organizations face in providing technical support to both their internal employees and their customers and presents Bomgar's solution to these challenges.

## **SITUATION OVERVIEW**

All types of organizations have faced significant challenges in supporting both their employees and their customers. These challenges have become more difficult with the rise in the number of remote employees, telecommuting, and highly distributed client bases.

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### **Support Services Challenges**

Over the past several years, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of remote workers. According to IDC's Worldwide PC Tracker, sales of notebook and portable PCs outpaced sales of desktops in 2007. This clearly demonstrates the significant increase in the number of mobile workers. Additionally, most enterprises are becoming increasingly geographically diverse. As a result, providing support services for these workers has become much more difficult. This problem is exacerbated by the greater expectations and higher demands placed on employees and clients, coupled with the continually increasing pressure on IT to contain costs. Finally, most organizations are facing, or will face, difficulties in attracting talented IT employees. IDC is predicting that skills shortages will impact support and training functions, leading to challenges for organizations — especially in mature markets — in finding internal support staff. This is expected to fuel an increased need for external support services. To combat this trend, organizations will need to be flexible in how they recruit and retain talented IT support staff. One factor that can aid this search is the flexibility to recruit talent from a wider range of geographies.

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### **Current Support Methods**

To address these concerns, enterprises have traditionally relied on well-known methods of support. The most common method has been telephone support. Under this model, the client, or person with the problem, calls into either the corporate help desk or the vendor call center. What happens next is a pattern that is well known to anyone who has ever had to go through the experience of calling "tech support." In some cases, the caller initially navigates a complex phone tree designed to connect him or her to the right representative. This process usually takes several minutes, during which the caller loses valuable time and potentially becomes frustrated. At that point, the caller is connected to a representative who will attempt to "talk through the problem." Generally, this process initially involves the client describing the problem to the technician. The technician then asks the client a series of questions and tries to describe to the client the actions to take. The problem with this approach is that the technician cannot see the user's desktop environment, including the configuration of the PC, the monitor, and the status of the processes running on the PC. The result is a lot of wasted time, frustrated technicians, and frustrated users.

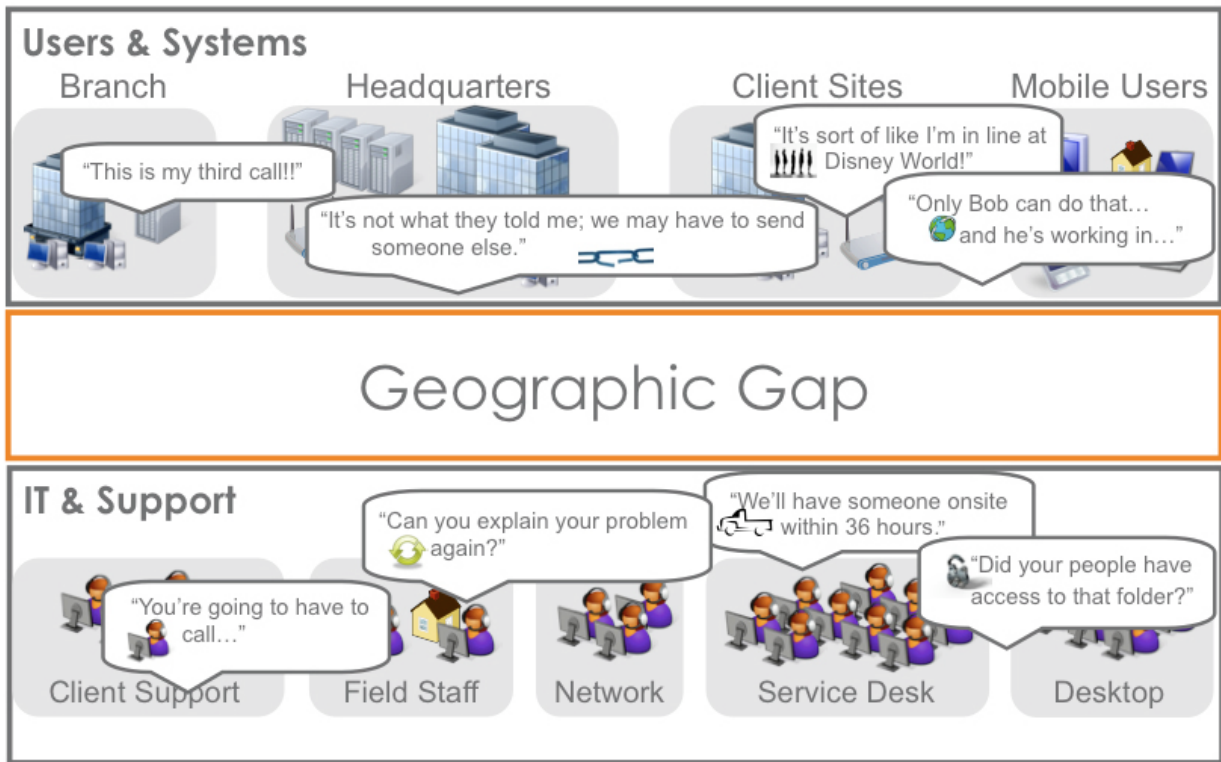
Less common than telephone support is onsite support. In this model, the technician visits the customer's desk and fixes the problem directly. Generally, in this scenario, the customer and the technician have a much better support experience. The CFO, however, does not because this is one of the most costly forms of support. In ideal situations, the technician and the customer are both located in the same facility. In this case, the additional time for the technician to go to the customer's office is limited, which makes this option feasible for enterprises that do not have remote workers, have IT staff located in every branch, and do not have any travel requirements. For the rest of the enterprises, onsite support cannot be the only, or even the main, form of support.

Another common support service tool is traditional remote control software. Using this software, IT departments can remotely connect to the customer's PC, see the monitor, and assume control of the keyboard and mouse. This can generally lead to a more satisfying support experience because it eliminates many of the problems associated with both telephone and onsite support. However, there are drawbacks to this solution. For traditional remote control software to work, customers must have some client-side software installed and operating properly on their PCs. Additionally, this type of solution can pose security risks in environments with strict auditing requirements. In addition to the security and compliance issues raised by these solutions, there are severe management challenges. These tools are generally not designed to provide support, and as a result, they lack the management capabilities that are required to operate an effective support services organization. Specifically, the tools often do not provide the types of reporting and performance management that are required in help desk situations, which greatly reduces their effectiveness for providing support. Finally, these tools often cannot support all aspects of the customer's infrastructure. They are focused on providing support for the client device, thus requiring organizations that need to support devices beyond the client to deploy multiple solutions.

All of these support approaches have resulted in the situation illustrated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**

Overview of the Current Situation



Source: Bomgar, 2008

**Other Support Tools**

In addition to the support methods mentioned earlier, there are several other tools that enterprises have used to address their support services challenges. The most common of these tools is help desk ticketing software. Ticketing tools were designed to track trouble tickets, not for help desk personnel to address the problem. IDC believes that these tools serve a valuable function and should be used in combination with tools that are designed specifically to help remediate technical support problems. Combining the two types of tools can result in greatly increased help desk efficiency.

**BOMGAR SOLUTION**

To help address these challenges, Bomgar has developed a "clientless" remote support services tool called the "Bomgar Box." The solution was initially designed to enable IT help desks to provide remote support services to end users. However, as the solution matured, customers and Bomgar began to find that the real benefit of the solution was the ability to virtualize not only support staffs but also other areas of IT and the business. The term "virtualization" has several meanings, depending on

the market. However, the overall concept is the ability to decouple a resource from its specific location. In this case, support staff virtualization allows the client to decouple support personnel from their physical locations. As a result, organizations gain the flexibility to address a wide range of support issues. A virtualized support services group is better able to handle peaks in demand because personnel from many different locations can be virtually deployed to address the concerns. Additionally, a virtual support services staff can more effectively deploy personnel with deep technical skills because technicians can be virtually deployed to where the problem is regardless of their physical locations.

By virtualizing the support staff, organizations can address the challenges described earlier. Support services professionals who can remotely connect to any user and control that user's client device can avoid the common miscommunications associated with talking users through the problem and resolution. This generally results in faster resolution times and greater customer satisfaction. While providing high levels of support is important for all IT help desks, it is particularly important for companies that are providing support to end customers as opposed to internal employees. A recent IDC survey found that 94% of customers that rated the support they received from enterprise software vendors either a 4 or a 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 would recommend that software vendor to a colleague. So for technology vendors, providing exceptional customer service can lead directly to increased technology sales.

By virtualizing support services, organizations are also able to reduce the number of costly onsite support services visits. The most immediate impact of this benefit is the reduction of onsite visits due to technical "break/fix" issues. However, the benefits of a reduction in the number of onsite visits can be expanded well beyond just break/fix. Organizations that have deployed these types of solutions have found that they generally can reduce the number of onsite visits required for software deployment, education and training, and upgrades or configuration changes. These benefits can be realized by organizations that are using these solutions for either internal or external operations.

Finally, by virtualizing the support staff, organizations are in a better position to address the anticipated skills shortage. Because the support staff has been decoupled from the physical location, organizations can run a centralized help desk from multiple geographically decentralized locations. Technical specialists do not have to be deployed in every location they are required to support. This also enables organizations to recruit talent where they can find it and thus helps mitigate the challenges associated with the anticipated skills shortage.

While the Bomgar solution was initially designed to help IT support staffs, the benefits can often be extended beyond the help desk throughout IT and, in some cases, throughout the entire organization. Specifically, using this technology can help systems administrators deploy or upgrade software, can reduce the amount of travel required to install software at a client site, and can assist in employee training. To date, these are the most obvious applications for the solution beyond technical support. However, given the product features, IDC believes that the more innovative organizations will find ways not yet anticipated to use the product.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES

To better understand how customers are using the Bomgar solution, IDC interviewed The Salvation Army; Information Technology Inc.; and PracticeWorks Inc. Each of these customers had a considerable amount of experience with the Bomgar solution. In some cases, the customer had replaced a competing product with the Bomgar solution, while other clients had used only the Bomgar solution. Each customer identified various benefits of the solution that are particularly valuable to its organization and particular support situation.

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### The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an organization that has provided humanitarian aid throughout the United States for more than 125 years. It operates 8,500 locations across the United States. Over the course of the past several years, its IT organization has grown organically, resulting in a federation of loosely connected "silos." Each of those silos had developed its own way of providing support services. To increase efficiency, The Salvation Army's USA Western Territory went through an IT reorganization and centralized IT functions into one department. However, despite the fact that the department had been centralized, it was still very geographically diverse and still needed to support an equally geographically diverse workforce. As part of that reorganization, The Salvation Army decided to address the way it provided support to its employees. It evaluated a series of support solutions that would meet the following requirements:

- ☒ **Zero footprint.** No client-side software could be installed on end-user PCs.
- ☒ **Network independent.** The solution had to work across any network and a variety of operating systems/platforms (e.g., Mac).
- ☒ **Cost effective.** Like most IT departments, The Salvation Army's IT department had limited budget for support services tools.

These requirements led to the Bomgar solution, which addressed these concerns. Bomgar's zero footprint solution does not require any client-side software. As a result, The Salvation Army was able to deploy the solution very quickly. "We have nearly 1,500 centers of operations here in the 13 western states, some with hundreds of computers, and with only 75 [IT staff], going to every site to deploy software is not possible," said Clarence White, CIO and IT Secretary of The Salvation Army's USA Western Territory. Because the Bomgar solution works over a standard Internet connection, it is network independent. This enables The Salvation Army to provide support services regardless of the location of the person needing support. A long-time proponent of remote support, White acknowledged that "Bomgar enables the support group to become more *virtual*." Finally, the solution was more cost effective than other solutions due to the licensing model Bomgar uses. Bomgar counts the number of concurrent support users to determine the license cost rather than requiring a license for each named support user. If The Salvation Army had used a solution that required named users, it would not have met the third requirement because it would have had to purchase more than 75 licenses to be able to provide support. With the Bomgar solution, it needed to purchase only 20 licenses — the quantity appropriate to support its typical workday capacity. For The Salvation Army, this is the most cost-effective

way to provide the support it needs. "[The Bomgar solution] relied on concurrent licensing, not named users, so we were able to support all 75 of our IT users with 20 concurrent licenses, which perfectly meets our needs and is a licensing situation we can afford," said White.

In addition to meeting all three requirements, the Bomgar solution provided some unexpected benefits. One was the ability to provide support services for Macs. The majority of the computers The Salvation Army supports are PCs; however, it has a limited number of Macs, and with the Bomgar solution, it is able to provide support for its Mac users as well. Additionally, The Salvation Army has been impressed with the responsiveness of the Bomgar team and the speed of innovation. Finally, because the solution is an on-premises appliance, it feels more comfortable because it does not have to rely on an external provider. "The [Bomgar] tool has helped us move in the right direction in the way we provide support," said White.

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### **Information Technology Inc. (ITI)**

ITI provides technology solutions for the banking industry; thus, security is of paramount importance. The Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council (FFIEC) provides regulations for auditing financial institutions. One of the regulations involves authenticating anyone who has used a network resource on a bank's system. The Bomgar solution enables ITI to verify exactly who has been on the system. These security features made the Bomgar solution very appealing to ITI. Additionally, ITI was impressed by Bomgar's willingness to continue to develop the product and improve the security and functionality.

Prior to adopting the Bomgar solution, ITI had been using a solution that required it to "pay by the drink." Initially, this approach was fine because it was using the solution only for emergencies. However, as the IT staff began to use the clientless remote solution more regularly, costs became a greater consideration due to the licensing structure.

The Bomgar licensing structure eliminated this obstacle. "After implementing the Bomgar solution, employee utilization grew by more than 300%, driven by the demand of virtual support and services," said Phil Demuth, Assistant Vice President and Knowledge Services Manager. This innovation is changing the way ITI does business. "Prior to installing the Bomgar solution, deploying one of our banking solutions required one to five visits to the client location, depending on the project," said Demuth. With the Bomgar solution, ITI is able to put together packages including virtual implementations and training and allow clients to pick the package that best suits their needs and budgets. Based on initial feedback, ITI's customers are pleased because they gain increased flexibility with regard to deployment timelines and realize the savings associated with the cost of travel. ITI's employees like the solution because it cuts down on their travel, which for some employees was as much as two weeks per quarter. Finally, from a corporate perspective, because the support staff can dramatically reduce the amount of travel, they can accomplish more installations and upgrades for their clients, thus generating additional revenue. For ITI, the Bomgar solution has enabled increased revenue at a reduced cost.

## **PracticeWorks**

PracticeWorks has been in operation since the 1980s, providing software and hardware for dentists, orthodontists, and oral surgeons. The software is a comprehensive solution that allows doctors to do everything from electronic claims processing to scheduling, charting, determining eligibility, and image acquisition. "The technology is a one-stop shop for the doctor," said PracticeWorks' CIO Brian Denton. To support its 30,000 United States-based customers, PracticeWorks has 300 United States-based agents who handle 500,000 calls per year. This support services organization faced the typical challenges associated with phone-based support — trying to talk customers through problems. This resolution challenge is further complicated by the limited technical skills of some of its end users. "We are supporting dental hygienists. They are not IT people; their level of technical experience is sometimes quite rudimentary," said Denton.

PracticeWorks was looking for a solution that would enable it to provide secure support for its customers. "We had to come up with a solution that addressed security concerns [and] HIPAA and [that would] be flexible and robust enough for the future," said Denton. The company currently supports 30,000 active customers in the United States. Generally, PracticeWorks encounters two types of problems, and it has identified specific benefits that the Bomgar solution (Bomgar Box) brings to each. The first type of problem is associated with users who are not technically savvy. These problems can be anything from a simple "How do I use this feature?" to basic remediation. The Bomgar solution has not reduced the time it takes to resolve these issues, but there is a feeling of a higher degree of customer satisfaction. While this does not have a direct relationship to cost savings, recent IDC data has indicated that 94% of customers that have positive overall support experiences (customers that gave their support services provider an overall rating of 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5) are willing to recommend the software to a colleague. The second type of problem is associated with some of the more complicated aspects of the software. Usually these problems are data corruption oriented or related to data transmission. PracticeWorks has seen a reduction of approximately 15 minutes in the time to resolve these problems. This improved resolution time has a direct impact on overall costs.

## **CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES**

IDC believes that the most significant challenge Bomgar faces is the relative size of the company. While the solution is very appealing from a technical perspective, Bomgar is still a small company in an emerging market. Therefore, customers face the risks associated with standardizing on an organization that does not have the same financial stability as a larger organization. However, this risk is less of a concern in this case due to the deployment model. Because Bomgar deploys its solution as hardware, customers are more insulated from any potential growing pains that Bomgar might encounter.

Bomgar will also face challenges educating its potential customers. Traditional remote control software has been available for many years. However, this type of solution generally has required that end users have some client-side software installed on their PCs for the solution to function. While this requirement does not seem

too imposing, it does present challenges: The user may need to have a license for the software, the software may not be installed correctly, and finally, there are security concerns. While the Bomgar solution does not face these challenges, some clients will incorrectly assume that the Bomgar solution has the same requirements. As a result, Bomgar will need to focus on educating potential customers about the differences between its solution and traditional remote control solutions.

## **CONCLUSION**

IDC believes that the challenges that support services organizations are facing will become only more significant over the coming years. The trend toward remote employees is not expected to be reversed, and the dependence on technology will not lessen. Therefore, support services organizations will need to develop innovative solutions to address the support needs of their organizations. These strategies need to be able to address a variety of requirements, including compliance and security. Virtualizing the support staff can help clients address these requirements and provide a better support experience for end users. IDC believes that enhancing the support services organization will result in higher productivity and more satisfied customers.

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