Gulfcoast Networking Newsletter

Your IT Management Experts

August 2021

Hello! We're pleased to send you this monthly issue of the Gulfcoast Networking Newsletter. It's our way of saying that you're important to us and we truly value your business. Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to friends and colleagues. Enjoy!

MONTHLY QUOTES:

"You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams."

Dr. Seuss

"In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on."

Robert Frost

"It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not."

Andre Gid

IN THIS ISSUE:

Windows Will Go Cloud

Microsoft has developed a new service, Windows 365, that gives access to a Cloud PC via a streamed version of Windows 10 or 11. While this is by no means the first service to offer virtual PCs, Microsoft is leveraging the opportunities offered by the new remote working paradigm developed during the pandemic.

Users will be able to connect to their Cloud PC using various devices, either with an up-to-date web browser or the dedicated Remote Desktop app from Microsoft. One useful feature is that when a user switches devices, for example from an iPad to an Android phone, the PC will be in the same state as it was on the previous device.

The new service will be launched on August 2 for a monthly subscription (prices have yet to be released); it will initially only be for business users, from single person operations to multinational companies.

Two iterations of the new service will be available, Business and Enterprise. Both versions use the Azure Virtual Desktop, and users can select the configuration of the Cloud PC with from one to eight CPUs, 2 GB to 32 GB of RAM, and 64 GB to 512 GB of storage. 12 individual configurations will be available in both versions of the new service.

As previously mentioned, having a PC in the cloud is not a new concept, where even Microsoft provided a similar service using Azure, but the company claims that the new service will be far easier to use and to manage than existing offerings and is hoping that many organizations that were previously deterred by the complexity or cost of using cloud PCs will be won over.

Creating a new cloud PC for an employee can be done very quickly and there is no need for employees to have any specific hardware, a great advantage to any organization whose workers are remote or on temporary contracts. With the whole PC being in the cloud, there are no security concerns about employees using their own hardware.

The timing of the new offering is fortuitous, given that many businesses are moving towards a hybrid home/office work balance, but Microsoft has been working on the new service for a few years, although the company did accelerate development to make it available more quickly. Many industry observers believe that the new business offering is the start of a development that may ultimately see individual home users offered PCs in the cloud as well.

Six Considerations for a Successful Backup Strategy

In these days of ransomware, viruses and hacking, nobody who uses a computer should be without a backup for their data so that it can be recovered in the event of a data loss, whether virtual or physical. Below we detail six steps you can take to ensure your data stays safe.

Design a strategy: you should have a strategy for protecting your data so that you make sure you have all bases covered. Think about what data you need to protect and if there's anything that doesn't need protecting, how often you should back up your data (once every 24 hours is ideal for important data), and how often you should check whether your backup is running properly.

Always consider data security: the easiest way of losing your data is not to keep it secure. If hackers get access to your account, they can easily and quickly plunder it for the data they want. The easiest way to stop this happening is to implement two-factor authentication with your devices, so that when you login to an account you will be asked for a second means of authentication in the form of a code sent to another device. This simple precaution can increase your data protection by an order of magnitude.

Know where your data is: as we change hardware, operating systems, and services, our data becomes more and more scattered; it's not uncommon to have some data stored in the cloud, some on a hard drive, some on an external hard drive, and so on. Draw up a map of where your data is stored, think about how it could be better organized and where the vulnerabilities in your storage lie.

Consider retention: backup systems generally offer a variety of retention lengths for backed up data, such as a month, a year, and forever. Think about your data needs and whether you just need short-term back up or a longer storage time.

Test your restore: obviously, no backup is worth anything if you can't restore from it easily. If your data is lost, it's too late to find out whether your backup works or not; test it out now and find out if there are any weaknesses in your restore plan that need addressing.

Archive data: if you need to retain data but won't be using it in the foreseeable future, archiving can be a good solution. Archive facilities, whether on your computer or in the cloud, keep your data stored safely in a place that doesn't take up main computer memory, allowing your computer to run faster.

News Bytes

Aramco Held to Ransom

The largest oil producer in the world, Saudi Aramco has revealed that it has been subject to a ransom demand of $50 million from criminals claiming to have access to data files leaked through a third-party contractor. The company was keen to emphasize that its own systems were not breached and that its operations had not been affected.

Statements on the dark web from the hacker claim they were in possession of 1 TB of company data which included oil refinery locations and privileged employee and client information. The hacker demanded $50 million from the company, while at the same time offering to sell the data to others for $5 million.

This is not the first time that the company has been subject to cyberattack, and other oil companies have also experienced similar threats. Earlier in 2021 the Colonial Pipeline hack in the USA led to fuel shortages on the east coast. With Aramco supplying 10% of the world's crude oil, security breaches have far-reaching implications for the global economy.

Router Attack Danger

French authorities have warned that hackers sponsored by the Chinese state are making sustained efforts to compromise commercial and home routers. Hacking groups linked to the Chinese government such as Panda, Zirconium, and APT31, which have a long history of attempting to hack state, financial, and military servers, have launched attacks against routers on an enormous scale. The authorities believe that the hackers' intention is to employ a network of domestic routers as relay stations for reconnaissance and attacks.

French authorities have issued an advisory which provides guidance on how to check whether a router has been compromised by hackers. The guidance includes 161 IP addresses linked to the hack, which are spread across the globe. Hackers frequently target routers used by small businesses and domestic users for a number of purposes, principally as cover for malicious attacks that cannot be traced. It is advised that anyone concerned that their router may be compromised should restart their device from time to time, because the majority of malware cannot cope with this. Users should also turn off remote administration, check that no configurations have been altered, and ensure their device has the most up-to-date firmware available.

Question of the Month

Question: ***How can I accept an Outlook event I have already declined?***

Answer:

It might sometimes happen that you have received an invitation on Microsoft Outlook and declined it, only to find later that you actually need to accept it. However, all is not lost as you can recover your invitation. When invitations are received by Outlook, they appear on your calendar where you can accept them, in which case the event becomes permanent on your calendar, or decline, in which case it disappears.

Whatever version of Outlook you are using, all declined invitations will be sent to the Deleted Items folder. When you open Outlook, go to Mail > Deleted Items and the declined invitation should be there (if it isn't, it's probably best to ask for a new invitation from the organizer). Simply open the invitation you previously declined and change your response; you can also add a message if you wish. Alternatively, the event itself may be in the Deleted Items folder, and you can click on Change Response to accept as well (you can also, if you wish, mark the item as "tentative" if you are still thinking about whether or not to attend; this will then appear on your calendar for later action).

If you're using a mobile device (Android, iPhone, or iPad), when you find an invitation in your account deleted folder, just tap RSVP > Accept and your intention to attend will be sent to the event organizer.

How to Deal with a Stolen Laptop

If your laptop is stolen, obviously there is the financial cost of replacement to deal with, but the threat to your data and online security could potentially be far more expensive. If you are unlucky enough to suffer a laptop theft, the following advice could mitigate the damage you suffer.

The best way to deal with theft is to be prepared for it, so that if the worst happens the thieves won't be able to exploit your data. Encrypting your hard drive so that only a person with a password can gain access to your data is the best way to do this. Make sure that your password, if you must write it down, it is not kept anywhere near your laptop! Make sure all your data is regularly backed up so that you won't lose it in the event of theft; this is good practice in any case for dealing with viruses, breakdowns etc. Your last bit of preparation to guard against the consequences of theft is to have tracking turned on using Find My Device in Windows 10 or Find My in iOS. Remember, you can't activate this after your laptop is stolen, so turn it on today.

If your laptop is stolen, with a Windows PC you can go to the Microsoft website's devices page, click "Find My Device" and select your laptop. The device should appear on the map; take a screenshot of it to show the authorities. Next you should select Lock > Next, which means that nobody (even you) can access the laptop without going through your Microsoft account.

The next thing to do is to report the theft to the police, either in person or online. When your report has been approved, get a copy of it with the case number, the name of your contact officer and their contact details so that you can show them to your insurance company. Even if all the information on your laptop is encrypted, contact your bank to have your credit cards frozen.

You should also file a claim with your insurance: generally, homeowner and renter insurance will cover theft, although remember this only applies if the laptop was your own property and not your employer's. You should also contact the laptop manufacturer; most manufacturers will be able to flag your device as stolen so it can be reported if any attempt is made to apply warranty protections or seek technical advice.

To add further data protection, you should use either the Microsoft or iOS systems to wipe all the data on your device remotely; if the device is returned to you, you should also wipe the device completely in case any spyware or ransomware has been installed. Finally, change the passwords on all your online accounts, turn off password autofill in your browser, and sign out of all your online accounts. Starting everything from scratch will ensure that the thieves can't access your accounts.

Your Newsletter

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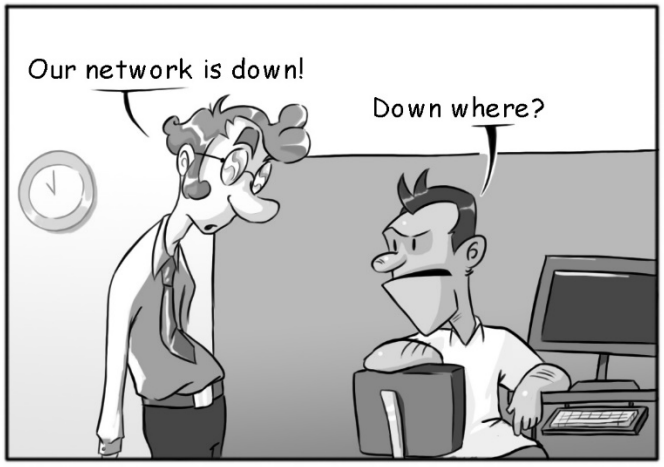
A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER TO INFORM AND ENTERTAIN OUR CLIENTS **AUGUST 2021**

APP OF THE MONTH: FEEDLY

Feedly is an app that offers a new way of organizing web content for Mac, iOS, and Android users. The app allows a user to define the type and sources of content they are interested in, and these will be collated and presented by the app. Once you have the information that you are looking for, there are several sharing tools that allow you to post the information across message groups, boards and so on. The app can also be integrated with social media so that your discoveries can be quickly shared across the web. Feedly has a free trial available; subscription services start at $6 per month.



Gulfcoast Networking, Inc

FROM THE DESK OF:

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If you don't have a managed-service agreement in place, please let us know and we'll conduct a needs analysis and provide you with a proposal free of charge!

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