



In This Issue: January 2006

Download Article: [Click Here](#)

Featured Article: [Telecommuting can be flu antidote.](#)

Industry News: [New Yorkers to get subway cell service.](#)

Special Report: [Making Business and Tech One.](#)

Special Report: [Faster Wi-Fi standard gets draft approval.](#)

Special Report: [The Promise of Wireless Mesh Networks.](#)

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JANUARY

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Telecommuting can be flu antidote. *Credit: By JOYCE M. ROSENBERG*

JAN. 11 3:35 P.M. ET The arrival of flu season can decimate the ranks of already thinly staffed small companies. But some advance planning and taking advantage of technology can help lessen the impact when several employees are out at once. High-tech innovations such as virtual private networks make it possible for employees to do at least some of their work at home when they're not feeling well. And knowing in advance how your company will run when it's short-staffed will also make a hard situation easier. To Michael McCann, president of McCann Protective Services in New York, preparing for flu season is no different from preparing for any other problem that might disrupt business. Technology has enabled his core staff of five to work from home, and he maintains a network of people willing to fill in for his employees on a per-diem basis.

"If there's one particular crisis you're planning for, and reviewing your plan and updating it ... when another issue comes up, you just pull it off the shelf," McCann said. Along that line, McCann said, it's also important that no one in the company be indispensable -- the rest of the staff should be able to step in and do absent workers' tasks. Of course, there's a human side to the flu season, one that presents a dilemma to business owners. They want to get the work done, but they also need to be concerned about everyone else on the premises catching the same bug if an employee shows up sneezing and coughing. Pressuring them to come to work is a mistake.

"If a person is really sick, you don't want them in the office because you don't want the whole staff to go down," said Reed Baker, owner of Sophist Productions, a New York-based music label and production company.

Moreover, someone with a fever probably can't concentrate on what he or she is doing. And leaning on staffers to come to work when they really don't feel may well generate a morale problem -- not only will sick workers be resentful, but so will all the other employees they complain to.

[Click here for the complete story.](#)

New Yorkers to get subway cell service. *Credit: By The Associated Press.*

NEW YORK (AP) -- Several major wireless carriers submitted bids Wednesday to wire 277 New York subway stations for cell phone use, including one proposal that involves four of the nation's biggest carriers forming an alliance. The bids mark a significant step in a long-running effort to make cell phone service available to the millions of New Yorkers who lose mobile phone communications when using the subways.

The 10-year contract calls for the winning bidder to wire only the platforms and not moving trains. But the companies were required to discuss how they would expand the network to the tunnels. Whoever wins the contract would have to let other carriers use the network, Metropolitan Transportation Authority spokesman Tom Kelly said. Cingular Wireless, Verizon Wireless, T-Mobile and Sprint Nextel Corp. teamed up to submit one of the bids, Cingular spokesman Clay Owen said. Atlanta-based Cingular, the nation's largest wireless carrier, will take the project lead if awarded the bid, Owen said.

GE Capital, Time Warner Cable, Andrew Corp., Transit Technologies and Dianet Communications LLC made up the second team that submitted a bid, Dianet President Jeffrey Just said.

"This is the right project at the right time for the MTA," Just said. "The financial model is there for the MTA to earn substantial revenue while increasing the safety, security and services to their riders."

American Tower Corp. also was said to be among the bidders, but the company did not return a call for comment. The fourth and final bid wasn't disclosed. Kelly said the MTA would not reveal the companies until the viability of their bids is documented, and did not know how long it would take to select a winning bid. It is not clear if wiring the subways will pay off. Industry experts said it made sense for the companies to form a partnership to allay the costs.

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Making Business and Tech One. *Credit: By Business Week Online, CIO Today.*

Imagine showing up for work one morning and discovering that the computer that had been on your desk isn't there. Nor is a computer on any other desk. No e-mail. No Internet connection. None of the documents you were working on yesterday. Could you do your job? Now imagine that all the systems running your company are gone. No electronic connections to your suppliers. No Web interface for your customers. Nothing to calculate and print your paycheck.

How long would your company survive?

The fact is, information technology is now so imbedded in business that there's no business without it. For this reason, I've taken to calling it "business technology." At many companies, it currently accounts for more than half of capital spending. Simply put, business and technology have converged.

Beyond Alignment

What hasn't converged, however, is the management of this technology. Despite their best intentions, business and I.T. executives at many companies still aren't singing from the same page of the hymnal. And so we get multimillion-dollar implementation blowups, lots of shelfware, chief information officers (CIOs) who take the blame and move on prematurely, companies operating below their potential, and companies taking a hit in the stock market when word of a technology failure gets out.

Efforts to remedy this have been labeled "alignment," and have been the subject of countless all-day meetings, articles, and conferences. Alignment means that the I.T. shop is giving the business side what it says it needs to run the business.

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Faster Wi-Fi standard gets draft approval. *Credit: By Tom Krazit*

A faster Wi-Fi standard appears to be about a year away, after a task group unanimously approved a proposal for an update to the 802.11g standard.

The 802.11n task group of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers approved the first draft of the new standard at a meeting in Hawaii on Thursday. Passage of the draft required 75 percent of the group to approve, but the final vote was 184 to 0, with four abstentions. Final ratification of the standard is not expected until next year, and several revisions are expected to take place before that final standard is ratified.

802.11n will allow notebook users to connect to wireless access points at much faster speeds than currently available with 802.11g technology. It will use a technology called MIMO (multiple-in, multiple-out), which allows the chips to use multiple antennas that can each handle more than one data signal at a time. This is expected to improve the range and throughput of 802.11n products to the point where they should be able to send video content around a house without interrupted playback. Products with 802.11n chips will be able to work with older 802.11a/b/g products at their slower speeds.

The draft standard is similar to the one proposed late in the evaluation process by the Enhanced Wireless Consortium, which consists of companies such as Broadcom, Intel and Linksys. The EWC made a proposal for the 802.11n standard just as two other groups were preparing to merge their competing proposals for the final standard last October.

Broadcom announced Thursday that it was immediately shipping a new group of Wi-Fi chips, called Intensi-Fi, that is compatible with the draft standard. The company claimed the new chips could provide data rates up to 300M bps (bits per second), although real-world speeds are generally lower.

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The Promise of Wireless Mesh Networks. *Credit: By Tom Krazit*

Ever wondered what makes Wi-Fi so easily embraced and accepted? The simplicity of Internet connectivity without the hassle of wires, the freedom of mobility with widespread coverage, and the ease of installation all relate to convenience. Statistics have shown that Wi-Fi will be the most exciting growth technology for years to come.

Looking at logic, the growth of Internet hotspots everywhere, Wi-Fi-enabled features being a standard offering in personal digital assistants (PDAs), phones and computers lend credence to the notion that this technology will continually evolve to match consumers' expectations and demands.

One specific area of Wi-Fi technology that is being focused on is the wireless mesh network. What is it? Well for starters, a mesh network is a type of wireless networking that uses redundant and distributed wireless network access points. Its aim is to provide greater reliability and range of coverage for any given wireless network.

How is this possible? Experience tells you that on a Wi-Fi network, the coverage is limited to about 100 feet or so from the nearest access point -- after which the signal deteriorates.

You will then have to reconnect to another access point or move back within the area of coverage. With wireless mesh network, connectivity is maintained at the next adjacent network access point, transparent to the user.

The wireless mesh network works by employing protocol that performs similar function to routers, that is forwarding packets from one access point to the next.

The protocol establishes an optimal path through a mesh of wireless access points to a wired gateway, creating a self-configuring, self-healing wireless mesh backhaul. This protocol also addresses the challenges of routing packets over wireless links, traditionally a complex matter due to packet loss characteristics compared to wired networks.

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