

Continental Airlines Flies to Success With Fiberlink's Remote Access Solutions

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 have forever changed the airline industry, not only in terms of additional airport and on-plane security, but also in the way that airline employees access critical data.

As the #1 rated airline by consumers, Continental Airlines serves over 150 US cities and some 120 international cities. And, since Continental has such a diverse mobile and geographically dispersed user population, which uses network access to send and receive e-mail, tap into the company's Intranet and customer database, and access seat inventory and flight operations, supporting remote access is critical to its success. In addition, with over 1,500 mobile users, remote access is also crucial to all areas of the airline's operations including: city ticket offices, corporate headquarters, outside sales, and various other types of support operations areas. So, Continental decided that it needed a remote access solution that would improve productivity, safeguard confidentiality, and reduce costs.

The Challenge

As Continental's remote access needs proliferated from dial to broadband to wireless and security risks continued to grow, so did the complexities of managing its mobile workforce. It soon became clear to Continental's IT staff that the solution they had in place for remote access was less than ideal. The company realized that it needed a product that provided its mobile workers with a secure and dependable access solution that was easy to use and could accommodate the way its remote users needed to access corporate data. Faced with a pressing need to improve and update its remote access solution, Continental began the process of finding a more efficient and effective solution, which would allow its remote workers to maintain the same level of productivity working remotely outside of the corporate office as they did while in the office.

According to Stacey Thomas, senior manager of telecommunications technology at Continental, one of the largest areas of pain that the airline was experiencing with its former access solution was end-user frustration associated with accessing huge amounts data over low bandwidth dial-up connections. "Our employees need to be able to connect and work proficiently no matter where they are in the world," says Thomas.

Although Continental's previous remote access provider, a single network carrier, supported dial-up remote access over a private network, the airline wanted to implement a remote access solution that continued to support dial-up, but could also support the growing demand for broadband and wireless – all with a single, consistent user interface.

Thomas says that Continental's goal was to provide its mobile employees with a user-friendly solution that would allow them to connect to all of the information that they needed back at corporate headquarters. "We wanted to provide our employees with technology that would make accessing critical information easier," she says. "For example, said Thomas, some of our employees had three or four different icons on their computer desktops to use for different remote access scenarios, from dialer and broadband icons on the access side to the VPN icon on the security side - it was extremely confusing." Our goal was to find a 'one-click' remote access solution that was secure and easy to manage."

Although many large enterprises have implemented various security software and applications such as personal firewalls, VPNs, virus protection, and patch management with the hopes that these programs would help protect their enterprises from malicious attacks on their networks, many of these organizations did not have the tools necessary to ensure that end-users were running the most current versions of the software. In Continental's case, its mobile workers were not required to have a personal firewall installed nor had the company deployed antivirus software – creating an even greater security risk. It became apparent to Continental that without a firewall, antivirus software or end-to-end management and security enforcement, it would be virtually impossible to ensure that its' end-users were compliant with corporate and security policies prior to accessing the corporate network.

The Solution

Continental wanted a remote access solution that could combine comprehensive access with end-to-end security into a single, unified package. Fiberlink's software-based client provides a single, user interface designed to take the frustration out of enterprise access. In addition, the client can be customized to meet each customer's specific requirements, ensuring both a positive user experience and the enforcement of a company's remote access and security policies. In addition, it was important for Continental to ensure the integrity and security of its corporate network, to be able to manage and monitor usage, performance, and billing accuracy, and to provide its employees with a solution that was both robust and cost effective.

In order to meet its challenges, Continental chose the Fiberlink solution as the answer to its remote access needs. Fiberlink provides a comprehensive remote access solution that delivers maximum security, high-availability, ease of use, and a lower total cost of ownership. This solution integrates three critical elements of an enterprise-class remote access solution: security, global access, and management. And, Fiberlink's remote access solution is designed to give mobile professionals a secure local connection virtually anywhere in the world as well as providing enterprises with the widest global reach, quality performance, robust security, and world-class management and monitoring.

Effectively Managing the Extended Enterprise

According to Thomas, another primary reason Continental chose Fiberlink was its CostView and ConnectView consolidated, reporting systems. Both ConnectView and CostView are powerful applications that enable enterprises to monitor and analyze the user experience, as well as manage remote access costs.

Thomas says that robust reporting capabilities was an important factor because before implementing the Fiberlink solution, the company had no idea who its users were or where they were accessing from – making it extremely difficult to manage its extended enterprise. “Our previous solution did not have an effective way to provide our users with unique personal identifiers, nor could we track business versus personal usage,” she says. The result, according to Thomas, was that Continental was funding a lot of personal usage. “With the Fiberlink solution, we can manage the process better, which has led to greater cost control and improved policy enforcement because our users are only using the corporate Internet service for business purposes,” she continued.

ConnectView, a Web-based user experience-reporting tool, is designed to monitor and measure the connection history of the end-user population. While other reporting tools simply look at connection rates and error codes, ConnectView enables IT to: troubleshoot connection problems, analyze connection data for the entire user base, analyze usage across different transport types, identify users with the highest number of connection issues for proactive user support, detect potential security risks, and manage configuration more easily. And, ConnectView does not require any additional software or data to import. The result? A sizable reduction in administration costs as well as administrative headaches.

CostView enables Continental to monitor and analyze the costs associated with its remote access usage. Fiberlink customized the reporting tool to reflect Continental’s organizational hierarchy, making it easier to add, change, move, and delete users and departments. CostView has enabled Continental to: analyze remote access charges and allocate costs back to individual cost centers, monitor remote access cost trends, import usage data to existing cost reporting applications, quickly and easily generate PDF reports for internal usage, and analyze charges to see if certain users should be reassigned to more optimal billing plans.

Because every enterprise’s network needs are unique, the power to administer, enforce, and update policies must remain firmly in the grasp of the IT staff. Fiberlink helped Continental address its security needs by providing an additional layer of security with its remote access

solution, which in the airline's case integrated both a personal firewall and antivirus software. "The ability to integrate these additional levels of security was extremely valuable because it allowed us to proactively protect the endpoints (e.g., laptops) ourselves by ensuring that all of our end-users were compliant with corporate and security policies", says Thomas. "Once I saw the flexibility of Fiberlink's remote access software and the robust security associated with their solution, I said 'let's do it.'"

According to Thomas, Continental has been able to reap enormous cost savings by using the Fiberlink solution. Since signing with Fiberlink, Thomas says Continental has reduced the cost of remote access by over 20 percent; a substantial savings considering the Fiberlink solution not only integrated multiple access technologies, but has also provided multiple layers of security to our remote access solution. "Our users now have the access options they need from dial to broadband to wireless while our IT staff has the added security they need for peace of mind, and the company (as a whole) has received more than double in terms of value," she says.

Solution Deployment

Thomas says that the support that Continental received during the deployment process was 'awesome.' "Fiberlink's account team went above and beyond the call of duty and was critical to our successful deployment," she continued. According to Thomas, the rollout went as efficiently as possible considering that Continental did not know who all of its users were. However, once the rollout was completed, Thomas says the Fiberlink solution became a part of the 'standard build' for every laptop that gets distributed in the field. "It is also, she says, a requirement for all users accessing the corporate network using a home computer."

The Future

Continental has tested Fiberlink's *Extend360™* and is expected to begin deployment in the coming months. *Extend360™* is the industry's first truly enterprise-class solution, integrating robust connectivity with unrivaled protection and management features. Its intuitive, intelligent interface provides users with one-click access to important features and automatically gives them the important information of what connectivity options are available – all while ensuring the highest levels of 'always-on' protection to keep both their connection and data safe. According to Thomas, one of the main reasons the airline is interested in *Extend360™* is because of its *Restricted Application Protection™* feature. This feature ensures conformance with corporate IT policies, lowers legal exposure, and reduces the risks of virus outbreaks by prohibiting 'blacklisted' applications (e.g., consumer instant messaging and peer-to-peer/file sharing, games, etc.) from running on mobile worker's PCs.

Thomas says she also likes Extend360™ because it senses different access methods, making it easy to support. “Users can just connect without having to worry about figuring out which access method to use and this alone will help reduce support costs,” she says. “In addition, she continued, Extend 360’s™ ability to push updated virus signatures is a huge advantage.” Thomas says that Extend360™ will enable her team to have even better control, incorporate one client for all access technologies, and help the company enforce its corporate policies.

The Bigger Picture

For the 10th year, Continental is operating under the *Go Forward Plan*, which is the company’s blueprint for success. This evolving, four-point, plan helps the company define and communicate its goals. The *Four Cornerstones* of the program are “Fly to Win,” “Fund the Future,” “Make Reliability a Reality,” and “Working Together.”

According to Thomas, with the help of the Fiberlink solution, her team has been able to influence the “Fund the Future” cornerstone that involves managing company assets to maximize stockholder value along with reducing costs with technology. Fiberlink, according to Thomas, has helped the company’s IT staff contribute to its “Fund the Future” cornerstone by creating a huge cost savings – a major focus of the airline industry.

The second Cornerstone touched by the Fiberlink solution is “Working Together.” The goal of this cornerstone is to help well-trained employees build careers they enjoy every day, make employee programs easy to use, and keep improving communication. With Fiberlink, Continental’s goal of providing its employees with an end-user friendly one-click solution enabling employees to connect to all of the corporate information they require from anywhere in the world, is now possible.

“We have a communication initiative where corporate executives post messages once a week, which can be accessed by employees on the company’s Intranet. Fiberlink supports our paperless initiative through the deployment of a reliable remote access solution that allows our employees to do their work remotely in a more efficient and effective manner,” she says.

And finally, Thomas feels that making technology more user-friendly and accessible has proven beneficial in helping Continental achieve and maintain the important status of Fortune Magazine’s top 100 companies to work for, OAG’s Airline of the Year, Fortune’s No.1 Most Admired Global Airline, among dozens of other accolades.