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Break the WebEx Habit with RHUB's TurboMeeting Conference Appliance

By Frank Ohlhorst

Setting up and controlling web conferences has never been easier thanks to the TurboMeeting appliance from RHUB, a device that will give any SaaS conferencing solution a run for its money, while adding remote control, remote access and remote support to the mix.

Web Conferencing has become one of those business tools that most cannot live without, and the market has grown in leaps and bounds as more SaaS providers have gotten involved. Big names like WebEx, GoToMeeting and Microsoft Office Live Meeting have come to dominate the market with subscription-based services. While SaaS subscriptions are a great way to get started, many are finding out that the costs quickly escalate as web conferencing becomes more popular among the business's users.

RHUB Communications aims to solve that escalating cost problem with the TurboMeeting series of conferencing appliances, which not only brings web conferencing services in house, but also adds remote support, remote control and remote access technologies.

The idea behind the TurboMeeting appliance is to eliminate the need for external subscription-based web communication services and to move all of those capabilities into an on-premise device. Simply put, TurboMeeting is a hardware-based solution that acts like a server for the applications that enable

conferencing, remote control and other peer-to-peer or one-to-many connections.

RHUB Communications offers several models of the TurboMeeting appliance, starting with the entry level TM-200 for just \$995, which offers two meeting rooms and 10 concurrent users. The TM-200 is ideal for the SMB market looking to jump on the web conferencing bandwagon. The company also offers the TM-500, the TM-800 and the TM-1000, which offer more meeting rooms and concurrent user counts. The feature set is virtually identical in all the devices, with differences in processing power and user counts being the only real differences. The TM-1000 offers 50 meeting rooms and can support 200 concurrent users, making it a good fit for a larger enterprise.

To compete with a SaaS offering, RHUB had to make sure that the TurboMeeting appliance was both easy to deploy and easy to use, as well as capable of supporting numerous configuration scenarios. The unit can be configured for connectivity in a number of ways. Solution providers can set the device up behind the corporate firewall for both internal and external access. The device can also use static or dynamic IP addresses and can be linked to a corporate web page.

For smaller networks, the support of Dynamic IP addressing is very important because many ISPs don't offer a static IP address to smaller customers. Here, the TurboMeeting appliance relies on a dynamic DNS service to associate a URL with the

public IP address. The company has built in a client for DyDNS.COM, a popular dynamic DNS provider that offers basic support for free. By default, the device uses ports 80 and 443 for communication. Administrators can setup port redirects or select different ports if necessary, but that does complicate the setup process.

Basic setup of the unit is very simple, consisting of little more than plugging the device into a DHCP enabled network and logging into the administration console for the first time. The web-based administrative console is very simple – almost too simple, in fact. Those looking for fancy dashboards, setup wizards and drill down capabilities will be disappointed. Administration of the product is kept purposely simple, allowing access to only basic network settings, user account information. The simplicity is appreciated, but the look and feel of the management console has a decidedly amateur feel to it.

For more complex setups, administrators will probably have to rely on modifying their web servers or firewalls to accommodate anything custom. Ideally, the corporate web server could be setup as the primary interface for the user by incorporating hyperlinks that target the features of the device. Otherwise, users will have to rely on the very basic interface offered by the device. Luckily that interface offers three simple options, join a meeting, host a meeting or conference server management – making it highly unlikely that a user would ever be confused as to what

to do.

The product works by "pushing" a client application down to the PC, very similar to what WebEX or GoToMeeting does. Once that client application is up and running, all activity takes place via the client application, which integrates into the user's web browser. For the most part, everything is automatic.

Setting up meetings proves to be simple, where the host will schedule a date and time and then assign a password to the meeting. An email invitation can be automatically generated, which provides participants with an embedded link to launch a meeting. Meeting controls are straightforward, making

it easy to launch presentations, share desktops and perform most any task related to a web meeting.

Many users will find it easier to use the TurboMeeting appliance than competing SaaS offerings, which is a real testament to the simplicity designed into the product. A nice touch is the inclusion of a free conference call number, which can be embedded into the email invitations. That included service eliminates the need to integrate VoIP or other phone technologies into the device. Of course, administrators can use their in house PBX for the audio portion of a web conference, but it is probably not worth the effort required when one considers how easy it is to

use the free conferencing service that is included.

RHUB Communications offers a very basic channel program with distribution taking place through D&H, Neobits and Crossover Distribution.com. Margins are in the 20 percent range and the company does offer a private label/OEM program for partners wishing to self brand. Partners also have access to development APIs, which can be used for various integration scenarios and customization. Partners will probably realize their greatest profits from incorporating custom solutions and integrating the product into CRM, Help Desk or other customer or sales support services.



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