

# Remote management as a platform

by Bevan Hayes

**G**overnments are constantly confronted with the challenge of increasing service delivery expectations in the face of shrinking budgets. As governments turn to automation and remote operations to save costs and improve service delivery, they must also seek out a unifying system for remote management – a system that enables users to effectively merge, manage and optimize information being returned from disparate remote systems.

Remotely deployed systems limit the need for costly human interaction and can be effectively used to deliver standard services and gather a large amount of information. They can also be used to extend services beyond standard business hours and into remote regions that would be inordinately expensive to staff with personnel.

Despite a broad acceptance of remote management capabilities, most organizations have gaps in their ability to manage or even view remote equipment, let alone introduce the operational efficiencies one could realize from a single source/platform management tool.

Modern remote management platforms are capable of extracting performance, usage, and error data from multiple systems and transferring data to a centralized server or unifying platform. Authorized users of the remote management software can perform a number of functions remotely such as repairs, content updates and location-specific events. For instance, a remote manager can program the system to enter energy savings mode at 6:15 PM local time to save energy and maintain a socially responsible green footprint. In a fully integrated remote management environment, users can also make strategic decisions based on centralized data gathered from all systems and ensure all

systems are working together to deliver optimized service.

In Canada, the best opportunities for governments to cut costs through the use of remote systems are where citizens interact directly with government equipment or staff, following a pre-defined process, such as clinical healthcare or health information exchange (HIE). HIE is the interoperability between health IT (HIT) systems throughout various medical practices for data sharing to improve healthcare delivery. A July 2007 Commonwealth Fund survey of healthcare opinion leaders showed that 67 percent of healthcare opinion leaders thought the acceleration of health IT would be “very effective or effective in improving quality and safety in healthcare.”

HIT and HIE initiatives are gaining momentum elsewhere. The Washington D.C.-based eHealth Initiative and its Foundation, a non-profit organization whose mission is to drive improvements in the quality, safety and efficiency of healthcare through information and information technology, issued a report entitled *eHealth Initiative Blueprint: Building Consensus for Common Action*. In the report it stated “Over the last several years, recognition of the importance of health IT and health information exchange to improve our nation’s health and healthcare have grown significantly, bringing a number of policy changes – both at the federal and state levels.”

E-Health Ontario is in the process of implementing HIE and HIT. Two of its strategic initiatives include Wait Times and Patient Education.

Wait Times are essentially a combination of using defined processes to determine the availability of resources – such as the availability of beds, doctors, nurses, technicians and diagnostic equipment. The ability to view asset performance, and extend visibility to traditionally discon-

nected components (beds, heart monitors, medication dispensing machines, staffing levels and so on) can be achieved through the same mechanisms remote management tools use for customer/patient flow. The combination of these elements in a single view facilitates real time measurement, feedback, and an avenue for improvements. For instance, Esprida offers remote management solutions that can be deployed today to reduce wait times, provide better access to information, and introduce additional revenue streams to facilities.

Patient Education includes hospital wayfinding systems, drug and treatment information systems, and other knowledge and information kiosks. These systems can be remotely monitored, managed and updated from a common interface with appropriate remote management software in place. Where appropriate, the systems can also be used to introduce additional revenue streams to facilities.

Medical device manufacturers were early adopters of remote maintenance capabilities, linking high priced systems such as MRI machines with central help desks and field service reps. While these links provide the manufacturer with a basic service view, little has been done to amalgamate information from these systems into a single view that hospital administrators can use for planning and patient throughput.

As remotely deployed equipment becomes more intelligent, equipment manufacturers insert value-added features to aid in their management. This is a bonus when you’re dealing with a single type of equipment, manufactured by a single supplier. However, when you have dozens or even hundreds of deployments, across a number of processes and platforms, it is virtually impossible to manage or otherwise use these features. This renders systems worthless in many cases because multiple systems, each with a unique remote

monitoring and management process, or no remote monitoring process at all, require too many resources, and a great deal of overhead to manage. In addition, the learning curve to manage multiple remote systems can be steep. This is without even taking into account broader issues relating to event correlation or the creation of summary and status reports.

Whether we look at infrastructure, Program Logic Controllers, or specialized remote equipment, there is a significant need for consolidation using tools that can provide a single view of multiple roles while leaving specialized tasks within pre-existing functions.

To function as a single source remote management platform, the following elements are required:

- **Equipment agnostic** – ability to manage a broad spectrum of device types, operating systems, and hardware specifications.
- **Network friendly** – use network and firewall compliant communication methods.
- **Open interfaces** – connect to various processes and systems without the need for redevelopment.
- **Multi role** – a single source tool is most effective when it provides discrete access to multiple groups based on their area of focus.
- **Reporting tools** – create role or deployment-specific views and reports.

As governments face the challenge of increased service delivery expectations and decreased budgets, automation and remote operations can reduce expenses and improve service delivery. However, a unifying system for remote management of disparate systems is required if governments want the new remote systems to be as effective as possible, both in terms of operation and in cost.

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*About the author: Bevan Hayes is the Director, New Business & Strategic Marketing with Esprida Corporation, an innovator and leading software solutions provider of remote management intelligent device applications.*



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