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Case Study

Kennesaw, Georgia stays mobile and saves time with SonicAdmin software

“It’s a top-notch product...

a significant time-saver.

SonicAdmin frees me up to do the big things, such as disaster planning and technical demos.”

Teri Chambers

Technology Director/Manager

City of Kennesaw, Georgia

• **Small staff, big job**

Kennesaw, a suburban metro area approximately 20 miles northwest of downtown Atlanta, is located in the heart of Cobb County, one of the fastest growing counties in the nation. Kennesaw is keeping pace: its population jumped from 20,000 in 2000 to 30,000 in 2004.

As technology director/manager for almost two years in the city of Kennesaw, Teri Chambers knows how population growth has an impact on city services – it’s her job to support city personnel so that service delivery appears seamless.

More than 200 people are on the city’s payroll, and more than 125 of them use PCs. Thirty BlackBerry® devices are used by the city’s high-ranking officials – the city manager and senior city staff, council members, emergency and senior communications staff, department heads and IT – and the onus is on Chambers’ department to deliver 24X7 support to users – including the 911 dispatch center and full police department, each with mission-critical requirements.

Chambers and her IT staff of one maintain the city’s BlackBerry Enterprise Server®, two domain controllers, one Microsoft® Exchange Server 2003, and a variety of servers – altogether 10 different types. As intricate as the network is, the simplest of problems were the most time-consuming to fix.

“The number-one problem is users locking themselves out of the network,” she says. “If users keep entering their passwords incorrectly, after the third try they’re out. If they blow the third try the system assumes a security precaution and locks the accounts.”

Chambers might get called at one of four city offices, on the road or at home, but she regards any situation when a user is locked from using the network as an emergency. “Someone needs a password reset or an account unlocked, or I might have to create new users or respond when an employee leaves unexpectedly,” she explained. “Timing is so critical. I’d have to find a computer at a remote location and invariably I’d have a problem getting to one.

"I can't always log on wherever I am, so I might have to walk to another office or even drive to City Hall," she says. "It's not unusual to walk into a remote office to get a job done and have four more people grab you and say, 'While you're here, could you do something for me?' People really do forget about the demands of technical support."

A solution at her fingertips

Job demands also siphon away any time that might otherwise be set aside for research and evaluation. "We don't really have the time to look around and we can't evaluate what's out there to keep up on the cutting edge of technology," Chambers says. "I would really like to have more time in a day to evaluate new products."

Ironically, her lack of spare time led to an eye-opening discovery. "I said out loud one day, 'I wish I could do network administration on my BlackBerry device.' Greg Brown from Sprint® was in the room – he's responsible for our communications and he's also our BlackBerry rep – and he said, 'You can.' It was a conversation stopper," Chambers says.

She logged onto the Avocent Web site and downloaded the demo. Within minutes she learned how Avocent SonicAdmin mobile systems administration software worked with a BlackBerry remote network.

SonicAdmin software is a complete network and server administration utility that allows system administrators and support workers to connect securely to the network and diagnose and repair problems from a BlackBerry device. The ability to perform day-to-day maintenance, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, is important to keep systems up and productive.

Convenience of quick response

"I'm able to do the log-on and disable or enable on my BlackBerry device and it takes only five minutes," Chambers says. "It's a top-notch product. My assistant tells me all the time she loves it. SonicAdmin is a significant time-saver."

"One night I was home around 5:30, which doesn't happen often, and I got a page on the device that someone had locked themselves out of the account," she says. "I couldn't get to the computer in my home office, so I used the SonicAdmin tool to do what I had to do to fix it remotely. When I looked at the user profiles, I saw that the account was disabled and with one click, I unlocked it. They were back online within five minutes."

Responding to the problem from any location brings systems back online faster and with less effort, saving time and money in the process. "The licensing for SonicAdmin was a nominal fee for technology in the grand scheme of things," Chambers says. "It's still a lot of money for our city, but it created a savings in time. SonicAdmin frees me up to do the big things, such as disaster planning and technical demos."

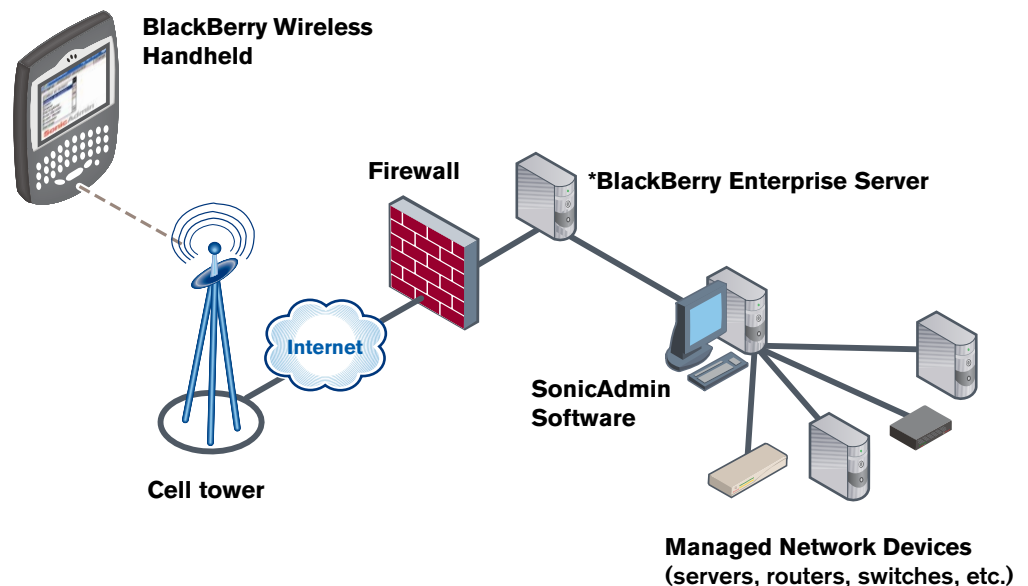
"I can also be proactive; I can anticipate. I noticed one office printer was low in toner and almost out of paper. I called the office and said, 'We've ordered it for you.'"

Kennesaw's IT staff of two is able to respond to more than 125 distributed users because of their innovative use of mobile technology – all it takes is a touch on a BlackBerry device keyboard managed with Avocent SonicAdmin software.

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*BlackBerry Enterprise Server - Required for BlackBerry Wireless Handhelds.