CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

Moving to Broadband

By Douglas E. Welch

The computer world has come far since I booted my first Apple IIc back in 1985. Floppy disks held around 140K of data, and bulletin board systems ran at a whopping 300-baud, allowing only a single user at one time.

Today, you and other high-tech careerists work in the realm of gigabytes, terabytes and bandwidth approaching multi-gigabits per second. The great computing distance between our past and today can sometimes make it difficult to understand when yet another leap is required.

Such is the case with broadband today. Your high-tech career requires an understanding of the benefits that broadband—and any future leaps—can provide your clients so that they and your career can benefit.

Beyond the Corporation

Long ago, most of you saw the need for high-speed Internet connections for your corporations or small business clients. The benefits of e-mail communication and Internet searching quickly outweighed the cost of these connections. Still, another reason drove the adoption of broadband connections in business, even if it wasn't recognized at the time.

Just as software has grown in size over the years—requiring more memory and larger hard disks—the size of the data files created by this software also grew in size. In the 1980s, even a floppy disk could hold dozens of documents. These documents, usually containing only text, were small—even minute—by today's standards.

As software added more features, data files began to grow. They needed to include more formatting information, more codes, and more links to other data. Quickly, even before the hardware had quite caught up, it became easy to develop files larger than could be stored on a single floppy. This increase in data size continues by leaps and bounds even today.

This very fact is what is driving the adoption of broadband connections in small offices, home offices, and the home in general. Furthermore, I believe that where broadband was an expensive option just a few years ago, today broadband is becoming more and more a necessity. This is not only for the expanded services that it provides, such as audio and video on demand, but also for the lowly task of keeping up with the increasing size of software and its associated data files and, more important, the increasing use of the Internet to deliver software and firmware updates directly to all computer users, not just those in a large office working for a large corporation.

Making the Move

While you might not be able to move all your clients to broadband connections, you should definitely consider recommending it. While cost is most often the limiting factor, without a high-speed connection, your clients are often cut off from access to the most necessary software updates, such as operating system updates, security fixes and antivirus updates. The necessity of these updates, and their sheer size, should be a driving factor for even the most casual user to upgrade to a broadband connection.

In my own experience, I have had several occasions when updates were made impossible by their size. Without an extremely reliable dial-up connection, downloading multi-megabyte updates is simply not possible. Even when using download utilities that allow for the restarting of interrupted downloads, few home users can deal with the complications of hour-long downloads simply to update their software.

In many cases, users will simply forego these updates, often leaving themselves open to data loss by operating system bugs, security holes, or virus infection. In many cases, the cost of a broadband connection may forestall the higher costs of data loss and recovery, while also providing all the above-mentioned benefits, and more.

Finally, the growing popularity of digital photography should cement the recommendation for broadband in the home. Even my clients who are new to computers often make the leap into computers specifically for this purpose. They want to share their photos, often more than 1MB in size each, with family members all over the globe. Moving these files using only a dial-up connection will quickly lead them to wonder if there isn't a better way.

While broadband providers would have us all believe that audio/video and interactive services are the best use of their high-speed connections, the more basic and necessary uses of software updates and data transfer will be the services that sell broadband to a majority of computer users.

In fact, if you aren't recommending broadband connections to your clients—small, medium and large—you are crippling your ability to assist these clients. They need the benefits to their productivity, and you need to do the best work possible for your client. In this way, your career grows with their satisfaction in your work. ❏