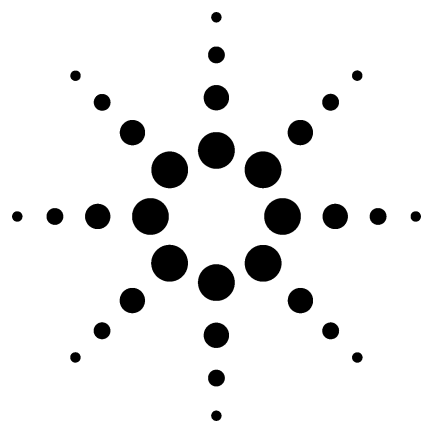# Remote Access Can Increase Laboratory Productivity

Technical Overview

Introduction

Computer and communication technologies have made possible a highly efficient means of resolving laboratory chemical analysis problems. Agilent Technologies offers remote access as part of its chemical analysis service and support contracts. Remote access gives Agilent professionals who provide technical assistance by telephone an alternate means to isolate and resolve hardware and software problems. Direct access to a customer's computer allows fast problem identification and resolution, keeping instrument uptime high. This is particularly important when samples require quick turnaround, as in the environmental industry where hold time is critical, or for routine QA/QC for production processes. Direct access also overcomes difficulties in explaining the nature and source of problems.

Resolving Instrument or Software Problems Within Minutes

Agilent experience shows that 30 to 40 percent of service calls do not require parts. By having remote computer access to a customer's gas chromatography (GC) or GC/Mass spectrometry (GC/MS) system, Agilent technical professionals can solve analytical problems quickly, maintaining high laboratory productivity without the delay inherent in an onsite visit from a customer service engineer.

At one U.S. agricultural laboratory, printing problems were seriously impacting laboratory productivity. Traditional means of troubleshooting (deleting temporary files, reloading disk utilities, resetting printer drivers) were unsuccessful. By logging onto the system remotely, an Agilent technical professional immediately saw that the analyst had been deleting files from the wrong directory. The system had over 200 temporary files, causing the printer lockup. Another discovery indicated that the printer had an incorrect dpi default setting, which was easy to correct.

In another instance, a newly networked PC was not communicating with the laboratory MS. The remote technical professional then transferred the appropriate configuration files to his PC. He found several problems in the system.ini and config.sys files that were overlooked. He fixed the files and transferred them back to the customer, who rebooted the system and found that the problems had disappeared.

An analyst at a film-making company was getting error messages about pressure problems at the front and rear injection ports of the GC. The remote technical professional logged onto her system and determined that, although the pressure set points were reasonable, the actual values displayed on the screen were 0, indicating a system shutdown. When the remote professional instructed the analyst to check the cylinder regulator, they found that an extremely high 450 psi of helium was being delivered to the GC. The GC started working properly when the analyst set the pressure to a more appropriate value.

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Hundreds of examples involving incorrectly-loaded software, incompatible file formats, and hardware configuration problems are common, particularly when system operators are not computer experts, seasoned chromatographers or schooled in MS. They know when something is wrong, but may be unable to pinpoint the source of the problem.

With little or no action from the customer, the technical professional can access the problematic system, look at data, and check and change settings—in many cases resolving hardware or software problems within minutes. Remote computer access troubleshooting saves time-consuming disk exchanges, laborious fax transmittals, or an on-site visit from a customer service engineer. The technical professional can also download a user's data and perform troubleshooting without tying up the user's PC—another productivity feature.

The remote access setup allows in-house technical staff to be more productive by enabling them, from a remote location, to check system status or to stop, modify, and restart a run.

Taking Advantage of Remote Access

The best time to establish remote access capabilities is when setting up a laboratory, because the service requires a dedicated analog telephone line. For some analytical systems, users also need to purchase an Agilent Remote Access Kit, which includes a faxmodem, serial cable, all necessary software, and installation instructions.

When purchasing an Agilent chemical analysis instrument or system, remote access users need to decide whether they want a modem or a local area network (LAN) connection. Currently, most users select a modem connection.

Using Remote Access to Solve Instrument Problems Quickly

The first use of remote access requires an account with the Agilent Customer Assistance Center. Obtaining an account merely involves filling in a user profile that includes the appropriate electronic address and telephone numbers. The profile can be completed online in a matter of minutes.

Should a problem arise, users call the Agilent Customer Assistance Center to speak with a technical assistance professional. If remote access is appropriate for problem solving, the technical professional dials up the user's system. All the user has to do is to set the system to receive a Remote Support call and press the tool button Wait for Call.

Ensuring Security

Agilent remote access services are highly secure. Administrators of the customer's system can assign access privileges by specific functions (such as, print, read, write) and by data (such as, by drive or directory). The software also offers inactivity cut-offs, session time limits, and locks that prevent local tampering, when remote access is activated. Global security mechanisms protect phone book listings and access definitions. Moreover, systems administrators can hide directories with sensitive information from remote users.

A user site can be configured to monitor various communication channels (including dial-up, network, and direct cable) and to answer inbound remote access calls. Redundant options for connections increase service reliability.

Three different forms of callback (fixed, roving, and pass-through) increase security.

Availability

There are no additional charges for remote access assistance; this is included in Agilent service and support contracts. However, special services, such as customizing a system, incur a separate cost.

For More Information

For more information on our products and services, visit our Website at: www.agilent.com/chem

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