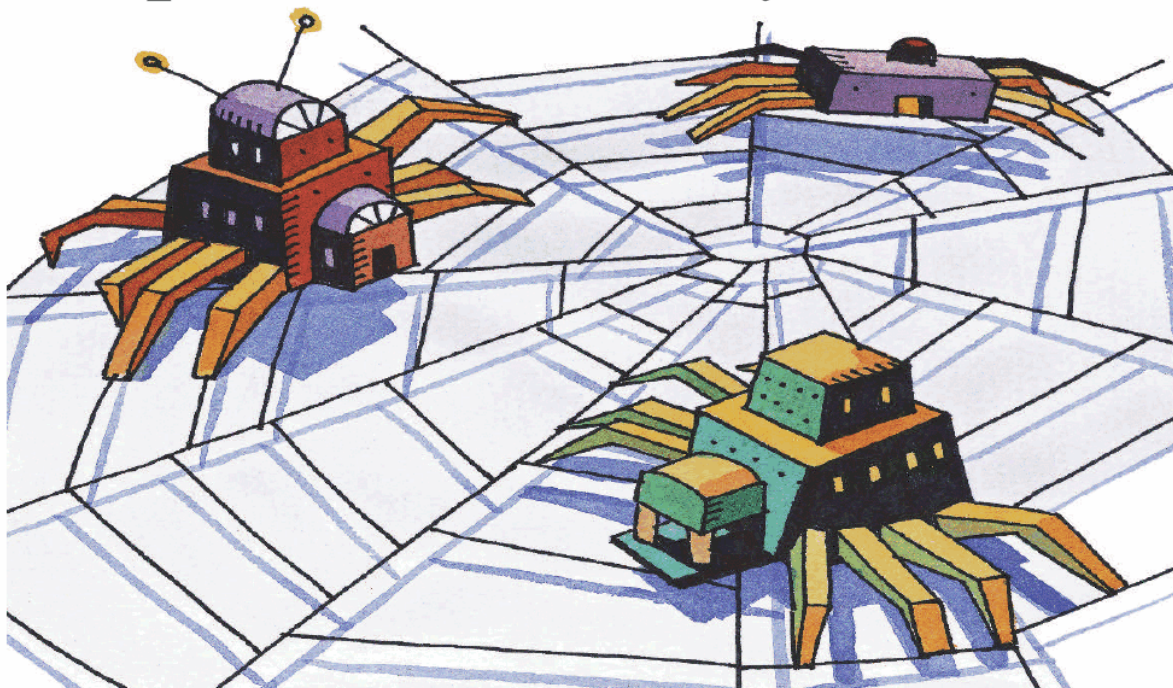


Networks Focus

INFRASTRUCTURE Ubiquitous enterprise connectivity has long been envisioned as a possibility, and with Brand Communications' Apollo system, it could be a reality

Ubiquitous connectivity has arrived



Steve Broadhead
Opinion



KEY POINTS

- ▶ Ubiquitous enterprise mobility has been a technological vision for a decade
- ▶ Analysts such as Forrester advise companies to plan for a multi-network future
- ▶ Brand Communications has developed Apollo, a ubiquitous mobility technology
- ▶ Rigorous testing has showed the technology to maintain connectivity

Have you noticed how often the word "convergence" has cropped up in IT conversations throughout this decade?

Whether it is voice and data, local area network and wide area network, fixed and wireless, or wireless and mobile, there is convergence going on there. Or not. Analysts still talk about the idea of ubiquitous enterprise mobility – for an employee to be always connected wherever and whenever – as something that will happen, not something that has happened.

Seamless connectivity

Take Forrester Research, for example, an analyst firm that follows this space closely. Forrester sees the combination of public cellular and Wi-Fi technology as the harbinger of a new mobile network that will

The system is built around a client-server architecture, so it can scale, but equally it works in a small business scenario – ideal for a wireless or mobile operator to wrap up in a managed service offering

be a combination of short-range unlicensed technologies operated by user companies and their IT staff and carrier-based systems for connectivity outside the enterprise.

I do not have a problem with this concept. I travel around England a lot on both rail and road networks and see and suffer from the shortcomings of existing mobile networks. My problem lies with analysts talking about this as a "going to happen" event when the technology prevails.

To quote from a Forrester Research report released last year, "Although the widespread availability of systems coming from familiar suppliers is at least five years off, understanding what makes up the ubiquitous infrastructure and how to plan for the multi-network future is a must for enterprises looking to

realise returns on IT investments happening now and during the next five years."

Brand Communication's system

So what about systems from unfamiliar suppliers? There are a handful of companies across the world trying to solve the ultimate "always connected" conundrum, and one of these – mobile technology supplier Brand Communications – most definitely has ubiquitous enterprise mobility technology right now.

I know this because we were testing the Apollo product range from this UK-based technology supplier at the end of 2007. It works really well. The system is built around a client-server architecture, so it can scale, but equally it works in a small business scenario – ideal for a wireless or mobile operator to wrap up in a managed service offering.

For proof of concept, we put together a test-bed that was simple, but equally reflected what could be a national or global deployment – the building blocks are the same, → continued on p32

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→ continued from p30
 just bigger and there are more of them. Although spreadsheets full of statistics tell one story, often the seeing, or in this case hearing, is believing routine works best.

Putting the system to the test

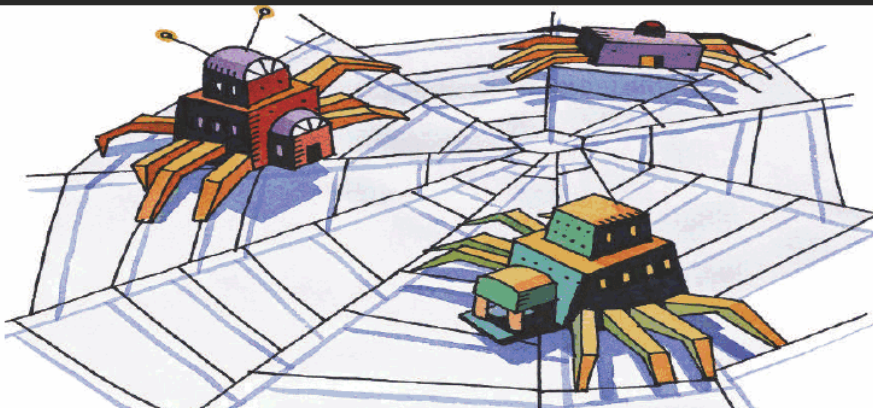
So we did a “physical” proof of concept, setting up a soft phone to dial into the speaking clock, turned the speakers up and listened hard, while monitoring the connection at the same time.

We dialled in via the Lan-broadband connection, having also enabled a wireless Lan (to broadband) connection and a GPRS connection via a PC card we installed.

It is important to note that, from a user perspective, all of this is transparently handled by Brand’s Apollo client and can be pre-configured in seconds. So the user just uses the laptop or personal digital assistant.

Limits of the connection

Once we had the conversation going with the speaking clock from our initial connection via the Lan-broadband route, we pulled the Ethernet cable out. Our speaking clock did not miss a beat as the wireless Lan



Three delivery routes: Apollo maintains connection by seamlessly switching between Lan, wireless Lan and GPRS links

We continued to randomly re-enable, disable, pull out cables, plug them back in etc... we could not get the system to fail

instantly picked up the connection, as instructed to in the client profile we configured.

So far so good, but what if we disable the wireless lan – now the system has to reconnect across a different – mobile – broadband connection, the GPRS network?

You can probably guess what is coming. Once more, the speaking clock did not fluff a single line.

This stuff really works. We continued to randomly re-enable, disable, pull out cables, plug them back in etc, until we got bored, because we could not get the system to fail.

● Steve Broadhead is founder and director of Broadband-Testing Labs
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Event in a nutshell

Event Dates	7 - 8 June
Team Walkers	4 - 6
Support Crew	2
Fundraise	£6,000 per team
Difficulty	Very Demanding
Mountain	Target Time
Ben Nevis (1,344m)	5 hours 30 mins
Scafell Pike (978m)	4 hours 30 mins
Snowdon (1,085m)	4 hours
Driving Time	10 hours
Total Target Time	24 hours

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