



Bomgar Box B100

Troubleshooting is tough. Remote troubleshooting is worse. Web-conferencing products, such as GoToMeeting and WebEx, provide some capabilities that can smooth the process out, but support isn't their primary purpose. Bomgar (formerly NetworkStreaming) takes a different approach. The company supplies several dedicated remote-support appliances for businesses of various sizes. The Bomgar Box B100, which I tested, eases the job of customer-support representatives (CSRs) in small businesses by letting them quickly establish connections to customers' machines, and over 12 to 24 months it can be less costly than comparable solutions.

The B100, a sleek device the size of a ream of paper, can either connect directly to an Ethernet port on a PC with the provided crossover cable or attach to your network as an appliance. Plug it into a computer on your network that your CSRs can access, perform some basic configuration and administration through the PC's Web browser, and you're ready to go. I got started in less than 10 minutes. Any number of support techs can log in as long as you have the proper number of licenses (at \$1,695 per user).

User setup is easy, and you can tailor individual permissions to allow file transfers with customers, access to session files, reporting, and team management. Once you've created users, they can log in to Bomgar through their Web browsers and download a small (less than 500KB) client that installs in a matter of seconds and lets them manage incidents in their personal queues as well as those in the general queue.

The application connects to your specific Bomgar device via standard TCP/IP ports that corporate and personal firewalls rarely block, bypassing a common headache with remote-support tools. All session traffic is then secured with the 256-bit Advanced Encryption Standard from point to point, securing your data in transit from theft by an outside party.

BOMGAR IN ACTION

At the start of a session, the support tech has viewing rights only, but the customer can share a keypad or mouse control with the click of a button. Multiple tech personnel can participate in a single session and can smoothly transfer and escalate sessions to each other. Support providers can communicate with clients and each other (individually or as a team) using an instant-messaging interface that securely stores communications on the Bomgar Box.

Customers can easily end support sessions by clicking a big red X button. When a session ends, the client software uninstalls itself, but the customer can retain a transcript of the text messages and, if session recording is enabled, a Flash movie of the assistance. The support features are easy to use, and they help quickly move sessions from communicating about a problem to actually solving it. The product proved efficient and effective when I used it to fix a problem on a remote computer.

The system helps support administrators, too, by giving them the tools to organize their staff better and letting them



assign CSRs to teams according to their areas of expertise. Customers opening support requests can select the problem type and have their requests routed to specialists in that area. The appliance also lets representatives send canned responses to people reporting common problems and lets technicians give presentations to customers.

The Bomgar Box offers other options that facilitate support. Reverse Connect, for example, lets reps show their screens to customers. Allow Pushed Sessions to Fallback places any accidentally dropped support sessions back into the general queue. Reporting capabilities are simple; they can incorporate an end-of-session survey, and they come in handy for tracking daily activity or performance by a team or individual.

The Bomgar Box doesn't provide a way to initiate phone support sessions or record them, though—the system logs only online sessions. This isn't a major concern for many small businesses, but those requiring such a feature will need to find another solution. Also, although the customer client software runs on PCs with Microsoft Windows 95, Vista, or Server 2003, Macintosh computers need OS X 10.3.9 or better to run it. CSRs must have Windows 2000, XP, or Server 2003 PC. The Bomgar Box hosts sessions and stores their data, but the B100 contains only a single CPU and hard drive, so to avoid performance problems, larger support staffs will need the \$1,995 B200 appliance.

Still, small businesses will find this effective desktop support solution easy to implement and manage, and much less costly than a managed service over time. First-year start-up costs seem roughly equal to those of other products. GoToAssist, for example, starts at \$300 monthly per named user (only that specific person can use the license, where Bomgar licenses are per seat). After a year, Bomgar becomes cheaper than GoToAssist. WebEx starts at just \$150 monthly, but places various constraints on usage.

With the Bomgar Box B100, I expect users will get the service they deserve faster, and the system has the added benefit of letting them retain a video record detailing what was wrong and how it was fixed. Managing tech support may never qualify as fun, but Bomgar removes a lot of communications obstacles and delivers a brilliantly effective solution.

—Robert P. Lipschutz

BOMGAR[™] Bomgar Box B100

Bottomline: The Bomgar Box B100 gives your small business a cost-effective, secure, elegant hardware solution for remote customer support that can help you make a great impression on customers.

Pros: Simple to set up and use. Good security. On-site desktop session and chat recording.

Cons: Limited support for non-Windows clients; no phone integration.

