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3/Com/USR Adds Its Own Software to U.S. Robotics' Remote Access product line – Part II

3Com, in the past few weeks, announced that the U.S. Robotics remote access product line would ship with 3Com's/USR's internally developed software code, which replaces the Livingston software that U.S. Robotics had licensed previously. The new code ships immediately and existing customers can upgrade their systems via software.

Analysis/Selling against USR's new software code

Some key industry observers say that one of the reasons U.S. Robotics put itself on the market earlier this year was a lack of routing and remote access software impacting their long-term viability as a stand alone entity. U.S. Robotics was licensing code from Livingston, but when it started to compete against Livingston for ISPs, the relationship between the two companies soured. When the license was due to expire last year, U.S. Robotics sued Livingston. The two companies settled out of court, and Livingston granted U.S. Robotics a one-year extension, which is due to expire later this calendar year. This would leave U.S. Robotics without a remote access offering. In essence, US Robotics has lost control of a critical technology piece and will have to struggle hard and bear customer dissatisfaction before it is back on track!

U.S. Robotics had been developing routing and remote access internally to keep its remote access offerings alive. But, this would still leave an installed base of two totally different code base. So USR needed 3Com to lend a hand in getting USR out of some potentially serious trouble.

U.S. Robotics just disclosed its plans on when and how it will replace the Livingston code on the Total Control Hub. This upgrade will not be easy for the company and its customers because it will require introducing a new operating system that brings with it new features, lost features, different installation and management interfaces, and new interoperability issues with existing networks.

Here is what a leading Industry analyst had to say about the software changes - If you think upgrading to 56 Kbps is difficult for U.S. Robotics' Rockwell-based competitors, "you ain't seen nothing yet." U.S. Robotics will have to execute extremely well and do a lot of hand holding in accounts to make this a smooth conversion.

Bottom Line: This new software changeover is going to place an enormous burden on 3Com/USR technical support and customers alike. The instabilities associated with the new software and confusing mix of the different versions should present a big opportunity for Ascend — the proven alternative !!!

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