

Technology

Virtual Private Networks

By Eric Harris

A VPN is a network of two or more computer systems linked together and constructed by using public wires to connect nodes. Computers on a network are often referred to as nodes. Computers and devices that allocate resources for a network are called servers. Networks include LANs (local-area networks; geographically close together, e.g., inside the same building) and WANs (wide-area networks; computers that are further apart and are connected by public networks such as telephone lines, radio waves or satellites).

There are a number of systems that enable you to create networks using the Internet as the medium for transporting data. These systems use encryption and other security mechanisms. Encryption is widely used and is the translation of data into a secret code. Encryption currently is the most effective way to achieve data security. To read an encrypted file, you must have access to a secret key or password that enables you to decrypt it. Unencrypted data is called plain text; encrypted data is referred to as cipher text. These security mechanisms are necessary to ensure that only authorized users can access the network and that the data cannot be intercepted.

The Internet-based VPN is a popular medium for linking mobile employees and remote offices to the corporate network. When it comes to linking trading partners to back-end applications, virtual private network technology is often too costly, unwieldy and insecure for many e-businesses looking to establish an extranet infrastructure. There are some vendors who have developed their products based on the IPsec standard, one that defines a method for secure "tunneling" of communications across the Internet VPN hardware, software and services let trusted mobile employees access internal corporate applications. Some buyers are hesitant of the technology because they do not want the increased risk of outsiders getting behind their firewalls. Such precautions are understandable due to the increasing volume of online payment processing, the

need for secure e-payment methods such as guaranteed checks and advanced fraud screening applications, in addition to other secure e-commerce solutions on the Internet.

VPN technology began as a simple network formed using Internet access to connect a PC with either a home office or a remote location. This technology has advanced so that VPNs have become more complex and the choices have escalated in regard to activation, security and management. Market research indicates that revenues for VPN service worldwide is expected to grow to nearly \$30 billion by 2003, an annual growth rate of more than 80 percent. Expect to see more firms going after a share of that market, helping clients achieve the combination of scalability, cost savings, and reliability they want from VPN services.

The Internet is a valuable resource to find information and advice on how to properly configure and install remote access links, administer and support LAN and WAN connections for remote users, configure security for remote locations, install and configure VPN links, and troubleshoot problematic VPN connections regarding electronic commerce and security products.

Black Leaders

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Political theorists such as Robert Smith argue that the best way for black leadership to combat problems in the 21st century is a two-pronged approach with the charismatic leader and the grassroots leaders of "various segments of the black community coming together to come up with an agenda."

While a new crop of leaders like Muhammad have arrived on the scene, oftenimes these leaders have had a hard time getting the attention they deserve. Or if they do get the attention, the traditional black leadership doesn't openly accept them.

Dr. Ronald Walters, co-author of the book "Black Leadership," says that this isn't surprising.

"Young people are under this misguided assumption," said Dr. Walters. "They complain that black leadership won't accept them and make way for them, and promote them. It is a good assumption that we should have leadership succession, which means that leadership organizations should groom young people deliberately to understand this. But it does not happen this way because, as an oppressed community, there is a lid over black leadership."

He said black leaders tend to stay in positions and in places longer than they should because there was a cap on how far they could rise in the private sector. Older black leaders have viewed the younger ones with suspicion, and they have failed to get out of the way, but he says this is slowly changing.

"We have finally gotten to the point that if you are a black elected official, you can do something else," said Walters. "Kweisi Mfume was a congressman, and now he is head of the NAACP."

From Outside Of The Box

One thing that a limit on black leadership has done is to encourage younger blacks in the hip-hop generation to address issues ignored by the older generation. Or take positions that go outside of the box of the African American community.

This could be seen in the political rise of Shannon Reeves, head of the Oakland NAACP and secretary of the California State Republican Party.

Reeves worked as an aide to the Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1988 while attending Grambling University, and after Jackson was denied his bid, he began to look outside of the Democratic Party. He decided to become a Republican, based on the party's message of self-reliance and its focus on economic opportunity, which, he said is needed in the black community.

"You need more and more blacks that will have a balanced evaluation on political decisions," said Reeves. He said part of his decision was ideological, and the other part was practical, and he said that more blacks would begin to reassess their political affiliations and ideas in the future. "Eis hteen to 40-year-old African Americans will not blindly vote Democrat," said Reeves. "They will look and see what political party has their interests at heart, which can be the Green, Republican, or any other political party, rather than to be blindly loyal to any group."

Charting a new course was also what Conrad Muhammad decided to do when he began his hip-hop ministry. Muhammad was also a campaign worker for Jesse Jackson in 1984, during his initial presidential run. But after the campaign, instead of becoming a Republican like Reeves, he joined the Nation of Islam. In the NOI, Muhammad rose to become the head of New York's Mosques, the one Malcolm X on ce led.

But after 15 years, he decided to leave the Nation. Now he is the head of CHHANGE, which focuses on hip-hop and its impact on youth, and he is at the center of taking on rappers and their lyrics and how they impact the black community.

"I consider a lot of the newer hip hop music criminal," said Muhammad. He recently held a hip-hop summit challenging record company executives and rappers to change their focus and put positively in their music. This has been an issue the black leaders have failed to address, and their failure has allowed Muhammad to have a platform.

"This next group of black leaders will be people from our community who talk about exercising economic empowerment," predicts Muhammad. "There will always be a place for clergy, but I think that clergy has to make sure that it continues to stay relevant."

He said the new black leaders coming up from the hip hop generation will come from outside the traditional ranks of clergy or community based groups; if they do come from these areas, he added, they will have a completely different message than one dealing with civil rights.

This is the situation that Derrick Blasingame spoke to when he ebausted black leaders in Cincinnati after the death of Timothy Thomas. He decided to form his own organization to deal with issues of black youth in the area, and he may be one of those black leaders in the future who move from local to state to national influence to, finally, "the chosen one," depending on the structures and how black leadership looks in the years to come.

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