

EXCLUSIVE

NetSupport Manager 12

Feature-rich and intuitive, NetSupport Manager 12 is an ideal IT support partner

PC PRO
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NetSupport Manager (NSM) has consistently delivered some of the best remote support features on the market. NSM 12 arrives with a clutch of new tools aimed at making an IT support technician's life easier.

At its foundation, NSM provides centrally managed remote control, file transfer, text or two-way audio chat and recording facilities, plus detailed hardware and software inventory. This latest update adds a variety of tweaks and improvements.

There's a freshly designed console interface with a new quick-connect toolbar and more useful client icons. The new client interface has had a facelift, too, making it more informative and easier to use. On first contact with the central console, a geolocation feature works out the location of the client and adds the information to its inventory. Meanwhile, the new PIN Connect server feature speeds up support connections to clients over larger networks – the

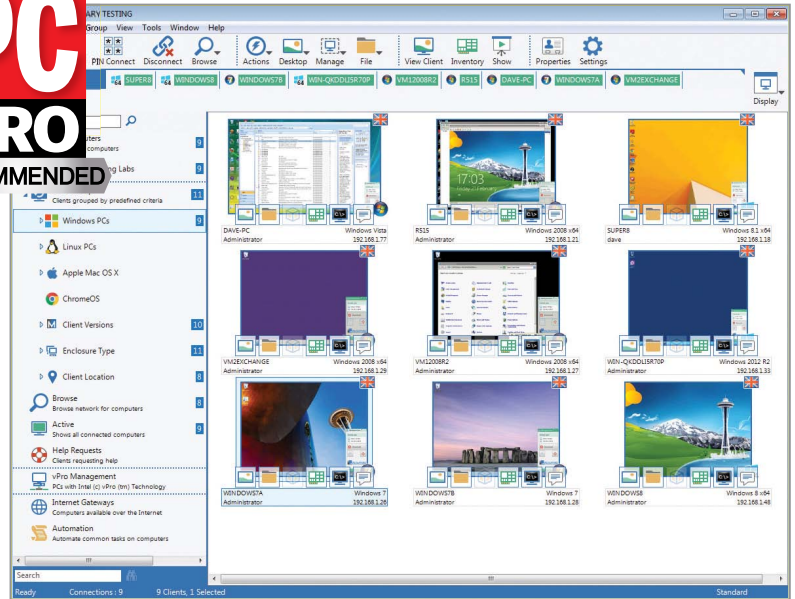
technician and user simply enter the same unique PIN and a connection is created.

Dedicated iOS and Android apps are now available, and remote control has been extended to Chrome OS devices. Both Windows 8 and 8.1 systems are fully supported too. For our testing we used physical systems and Hyper-V VMs running Windows Vista, 7, 8, 8.1, Server 2008 R2 and Server 2012 R2.

Installation remains simple: load the NSM Control component on a management station, and the Deploy tool makes light work of scanning the network and pushing the client to selected systems.

The Deploy tool permits silent installations, or the use of different profiles for groups of hosts, and you can decide whether users can interact with the client. In our tests, we installed the client on each system in less than a minute.

The new console is a breath of fresh air. It's easy to use and provides a tree view to the left, which shows off NSM's



▶ The Control interface offers easy access to all clients, and can group them for you

auto-dynamic grouping function. This sorted all our Windows clients into groups based not only on their OS, but also on whether they were 32-bit or 64-bit versions. It also attempts to organise clients by physical platform type; while this was reasonably accurate in some instances, successfully identifying our rack servers and desktops, it wasn't aware that some were virtual machines, so we had to populate the VM group manually.

Group members are displayed in the main window along with a quick-access toolbar of icons underneath their thumbnails. These can be used for swift access to remote control, file transfer, remote command prompt, chat and inventory tools.

The geolocation feature identifies the country and puts a flag in each client's icon. It isn't particularly precise, however: it uses the termination point of your broadband connection – in our case, around 60 miles north of our offices.

The PIN server can be installed on the NSM Control or another system if required. You can also install it later on and use the Deploy tool to send out a new client initialisation file with the IP address of the server.

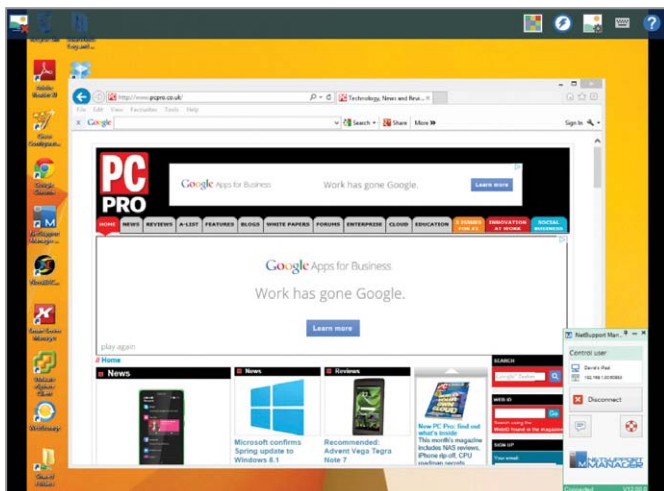
It's simple to use since either the client or Control can request a PIN. The recipient then enters the number from their side and a connection is made.

During our testing, the new iOS app worked well. Installed on our iPad, the main screen provided views of currently and recently connected clients. Selecting a client brings up a menu at the bottom where you can select view or chat, send a message and view the inventory. It's also possible to remotely control a client, and a tutorial is provided on how to scroll around the client's screen with finger-pinches and screen-swipes. A menu at the top provides options for colour depth, chatting and rebooting, level of access and bringing up the virtual keyboard.

As with version 11, vPro support is provided and you can have a separate group for systems with this enabled. We tested with a Dell PowerEdge T20 server and were able to access its AMT web interface directly from the NSM Control and use AMT commands to power it off and on, reset it, or boot into its BIOS.

NetSupport Manager 12 makes one of the best remote support tools on the market even better. The range of support tools is unmatched and, since the price per seat is a one-off fee rather than a subscription, it's great value for money. **DAVE MITCHELL**

OVERALL ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★
FEATURES & DESIGN ★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★



▶ The new iOS Control app can be used to browse the network and remotely control clients