

Software for Ministry

PO Box 1415

Cleburne, TX 76033

817-219-1243

www.softwareforministry.com

Remote Access FAQ's

These notes provide a basic explanation of what is involved to enable remote access to your CMD data. The specific instructions for making remote access work will be provided in another document. The goal for these pages is to give you a basic understanding of what remote access is, why it may be advantageous for you to use it, and generally what you will need to do in order to make it work. Some working definitions first will be helpful.

Definitions

Remote access: With CMD 2009.2 and later, you can access the actual physical CMD data you regularly use on your church computer, from a remote location – virtually anywhere – in a secure manner. **This access includes the ability to view, add, delete, modify, and print names and information from CMD just as if you were on-site using the computer that hosts the CMD data.**

Thus, **remote access is completely different from merely backing up your data on one computer and then restoring it on another one in different location.** Remote access means that everyone can use the same physical data, so there are **no concerns about keeping data in sync** when you backup from one computer and then restore to other locations.

Server Software: There are two types of software servers: local and remote servers. **Local Server** software is designed to operate a database on an individual computer. The local server is also adequate for small peer-to-peer networks where traffic is low or infrequent. **Remote Server** software is designed for greater network traffic, when faster network access to the data is desired, or for when access to data away from the physical location of the data (such as a church office) is desired.

What are the Hardware Requirements for Remote Access of Your CMD Data?

- 1) The computer on which the data is **stored** must have an always-on, fast connection to the internet. Of course, this computer must always be turned on as well!
- 2) The CMD data can be stored on a physical hardware server, stored on a single computer, or stored on any peer computer in a peer-to-peer network.
- 3) The computer accessing the data remotely must have a fast connection to the internet.

What are the Software Requirements?

- 1) All computers, whether local or remote, must be using the same CMD version (2009.2 or later).
- 2) VPN (virtual private network) software **must** be used to create the **secure pathway** between the remote computer(s) and the computer hosting the CMD's data. We have tested a VPN solution that is simple to setup, requires virtually no maintenance, and is **free to non-profit organizations**. Info on how to download and set up this VPN is detailed in the setup instructions. For now, just note that **you control who can become a member of this VPN**, and that you can remove members from it at any time.
- 3) The **Advantage Database Server** (the formal name of the **Remote Server** software) must also be used. This remote server software is from the same company that provides the data engine that's been used in CMD since 2000. There is a cost for the **Remote Server** software.

Why Is There An Extra Cost for the Server Software?

Data engine providers must earn their profit somewhere! One of the things that tipped me toward the Advantage Database, was that they provided their **Local Server** for free, charging only for their **Remote Server** software. Every copy of CMD that is downloaded or received on a CD includes the Advantage **Local Server**. That's what powers CMD's data engine. CMD could not operate without it.

Because Advantage has made their Local Server available free, I have been able to keep the initial price of CMD lower than my competition with a similar feature set because I have not had to figure in a cost basis for **Remote Server** software that most churches would never need, either because their church's network is perhaps only two or three computers and not heavily used, or CMD is used only on a single computer.

However, times and needs are changing:

- Increasing numbers of CMD users use the program on a network
- Most churches now have computers that have a fast connection to the internet
- Many pastors, church secretaries, treasurers, and other staff members have computers at home or work with a laptop that they can travel with
- Many churches want to give local church ministry leaders access to their church's data
- Most users would rather work with the actual data rather than a copy of the data to ensure that they are working with the most recently updated data

For these and other reasons, requests for the ability to access CMD data remotely have greatly increased. Using the **Remote Server** makes it possible.

What is the Cost of the Remote Server Software?

The cost for this **Remote Server** is based on the number of **concurrently-connected** users for which you wish to provide. Here are the current prices (USD):

1-User Remote Server \$159
2-User Remote Server \$269
5-User Remote Server \$650
10-User Remote Server \$1240 (higher counts quoted on request)

Remember, these users represent **concurrently-connected** users. This means, for example, that if you have 10 users to whom you have granted access to your CMD data, and you purchased a 5-user **Remote Server** license, any 5 of your 10 can be connected at any one time. So the number of users you need to purchase for will not need to be the total number of users to whom you will give access to your CMD data. This total concurrent number includes those accessing CMD on your network locally and remotely at the same time.

Some things to remember about the **Remote Server**:

- **Faster Access:** A number of CMD users over the years have purchased the **Remove Server** software to make their local network access of CMD data faster and more efficient. Those that use it **benefit from increased speed and stability in their local networked environment**. We use a 5-user license in my own church office.
- **Cost:** While there is additional cost involved, it is for the **Remote Server** software, not for CMD. The costs are reasonable, however, in return for the functionality you receive.
- **Simple Setup:** Setup for the **Remote Server** software is extremely simple. Nothing complicated to set. Basically just run the setup program, enter the serial number and authentication code, and it runs in the background as a service on whatever computer is housing your CMD data. It's basically "set-and-forget."
- The same **Remote Server** that powers faster CMD access on the network in your office **now gives you remote access capability**.

How Do I Purchase the Remote Server?

You must purchase the **Remote Server** directly from me. You can either do it by phone, by check, or by our web site. Once purchased, Advantage creates a unique serial number and authentication code for your installation, which is sent to me by e-mail, which I then send on to you. Included in the e-mail I send on to you are complete download and setup instructions for the **Remote Server**.

Is This a One-Time Remote Server Cost?

Just as we do with CMD, Advantage updates their **Remote Server** software occasionally. Generally they are on a two to three-year update cycle. There is an update cost involved, but it's also heavily discounted as are CMD's updates.

What is the Performance of Remote Access Like?

If you've used the internet for much of anything, you know that there are times you click and then have to wait a few seconds for what you have requested to show up on your screen. This lag time is not a function of your browser (generally!), but rather of the nature of the internet.

There will be some minor delays and pauses when working with CMD data remotely. That's not CMD's fault! It's just the nature of the internet. Large amounts of data are moved back and forth (but it's fully encrypted if you use the VPN software we suggest), so you have to expect some minor delays at some points in the program. However, in our testing, we've found the delays to be minimal, and generally only at certain points. It is surprisingly responsive and quite usable.

So even though the convenience of remote access does come with a slight performance hit, the ability to access, add to, delete, modify, or print your data wherever you are easily trumps the price of the small pauses you will encounter. There is just no substitute for being able to access **your actual CMD data** from your laptop at home or on the road!

More specifically, when I run the tests from home (through my cable modem), I am able to access a sample CMD data file on a server I've set up for this with only minimal delays. The longest delay is when CMD first starts up. I've waited as long as 10-15 seconds for the full CMD blank screen to appear, complete with File Description and Status Bar information.

However, once there, the delays are very small. It took only about 3 or 4 seconds for either the Enter/Modify/Delete Names or Print Names dialogs to appear. Working with them, including modifying data, was barely slower than normal – only an occasional short delay here and there, usually no more than a second or two, and not generally in the normal flow of operation.

In printing a mailing label list of all names, it took perhaps 3 or 4 seconds longer for the "searching" to be completed, but it printed the list to the screen in near normal time.

In other words, performance was amazingly responsive and fast, given that we're doing all this over the internet!

Are You Required to Use Our Suggested VPN Software?

No. If you have a VPN already set up at your church (either hardware- or software-based) you can use it. If your church has access to another virtual network (often a local church will have a computer professional as a member who has access to one), this should work fine, too.

What About Security?

The VPN approach is quite safe. All CMD data traffic going back and forth over the VPN is fully encrypted. You determine who joins the VPN, and you can remove any user at any time. Like any network, you can limit access to resources on computers in the network. Access limits are set on each computer, and are entirely up to you. Most likely, you'd set things up so that the only thing accessible to all computers on the VPN would be the data folder that holds CMD data.

Within CMD itself, you can set up different levels of access, allowing some users access to some items (such as contributions data), while other users can see only other things (such as someone marking attendance). All user names/categories and passwords are in force and work the same way remotely as they do if you are using a computer on-site where the data is located.

Are There Other Options?

The long-range future of CMD may include a browser-based, web-based application. But even if we move to that some time in the future, the Remote Server software would still be needed. So hop on the bandwagon now so that you can start accessing your CMD data whenever and wherever you need to!