

A disadvantage of the phone is that there is no detailed record of the conversation. After each phone call, the technician should record the details of the call in the support ticket. However, it isn't easy to note every detail accurately, so errors or misunderstandings are bound to creep in.

- » **Email:** This is a common and useful means of communicating with the help desk. Just set up a support mailbox using an easy-to-remember name like "Support" or "Help," and connect your technician's Outlook profiles to the support mailbox. Then support technicians can monitor the support mailbox and respond when new help requests are received.

One of the major advantages of email is that it creates an accurate record of correspondence. Emails can be attached to tickets, so technicians can quickly review previous activity on a ticket.

- » **Online chat:** An increasingly popular way for users to communicate with support technicians is through online chat. Many users prefer chat to email because it's more responsive, and prefer chat to phone because chat is less intrusive. Support staff often prefers chat as well because the lag time between messages allows them to work on more than one issue simultaneously. Win-win!

As an added bonus, a transcript of the chat can be copied into the ticket, preserving a record of the entire conversation.

Many chat services are available that lend themselves to use by support staff. One I'm fond of is Slack (www.slack.com). In addition to simple chats, it offers video chats, screen sharing, file transfer, and many other features that can be useful to support teams.

Using Remote Assistance

One of the most annoying aspects of providing technical support for network users is that you often have to go to the user's desk to see what's going on with his or her computer. That's annoying enough if the other user's desk is across the room or down the hall, but it's almost unworkable if the user you need to support is across town or in a different city or state altogether.

Fortunately, Windows includes a handy feature called Remote Assistance, which is designed to let you provide technical support to an end user without going to the user's location. With Remote Assistance, you can see the user's screen in a window on your own screen, so you can watch what the user is doing. You can even take control when necessary to perform troubleshooting or corrective actions to help solve the user's problems.