● REMOTE ACCESS

NetSupport 24-7

PRICE 50 remote control connections/ unlimited chats, £100 exc VAT per month

UPGRADE Included in price

SUPPLIER NetSupport 01778 382270

INTERNET www.netsupport247.com

VERDICT Say goodbye to the trials and tribulations of telephone IT support – hosted remote support services don't get much easier or better value than this.

Anyone who's been unfortunate enough to call an IT support line will know how easily this can turn into a deeply disturbing experience. These services are rarely out of the media and for all the wrong reasons. So it's hardly surprising that many organisations are turning to the Internet and hosted remote IT support services as they look for a more cost-effective alternative.

NetSupport 24-7 is one of the latest to emerge and looks to offer an impressive range of features for the price. Even better is the fact that you can evaluate the service without being pestered by sales staff. Providers such as GoToAssist won't even let you near the product until you've been contacted by a sales representative, and we've found that the process can take up to two weeks.

NetSupport 24-7 is almost entirely web based, which means you don't need to load any utilities on the operator's system. In contrast, Netviewer one2one (*see issue 134, p172*) needs a small consultant tool to be initially downloaded and accessed via a Desktop shortcut. After logging on to the NetSupport 24-7 site, the administrator
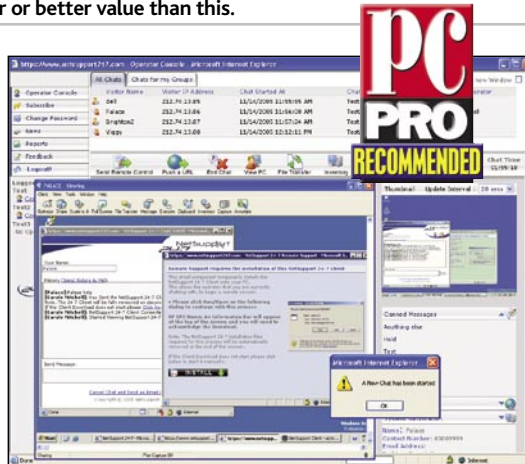
The operator console only displays users who've requested support from their group.

creates new operator accounts and decides what privileges each one has. The service automatically emails each account and requests that the new operator register on the main website, after which they're transported to their personal screen for their account.

A URL for end users to request support from needs to be supplied, but the service also creates HTML code that can be pasted directly into your own website. This provides one of a selection of buttons that a user selects to initiate the support process. A key feature of NetSupport 24-7 is that it aims to avoid phone calls completely by starting in a chat

mode. Language support is far superior to the competition, since the service can be presented to users in any one of 26 languages. Security is good too, as all access is via HTTPS and you can choose from four levels of encryption for screen transfers. Only those systems that have requested support are displayed in the Operator window. Their systems can't be accessed while in chat mode, and you can also decide which functions operators are allowed to access.

After hitting the Support button, the user can be presented with a customisable questionnaire, asking for details about them and their problem. They then appear in the operator interface, and clicking on the entry starts up a text-based chat session. If the problem can't be resolved, the operator can push a small utility to the user's system to give them remote-control access. The utility is only installed in memory and all traces are removed once the session is complete. The user also has complete control over the process, as they have to accept the download and can end the session at any time. It's worth noting that the utility is based on the NetSupport Manager client, so you get plenty of useful features, including file transfer, hardware and software inventory, and screen-annotation tools.

Hosted remote services are a rapidly growing market and NetSupport 24-7 is one of the slickest offerings we've yet seen. It's easy to deploy and use, provides plenty of reporting facilities and offers a pricing structure that will suit a wide range of businesses.

DAVE MITCHELL

PC PRO RATINGS	
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆
OVERALL	★★★★☆

REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 onwards.