Remote access has been a long-time tool used by many of my clients. It allows scheduling flexibility, extended vacations and the creation of a better work environment to name a few. It is a powerful tool to business owners and employees all over. The catch is, not every solution will work for everyone. I will discuss several that clients use and how each might benefit your specific needs.

For those that take a laptop to work and use that for their daily in-office computer or otherwise have a fully functioning portable system, the best solution is using what is called VPN or Virtual Private Network. With VPN encryption software, you can connect your laptop from anywhere in the world securely to your office network. It is as if you're working in the office at your desk. Although not as fast, in most cases the performance is very comfortable and won't adversely affect your productivity. In most situations, this is my recommended solution since it provides good performance, reliability and the best security.

For those that have special applications that require a significant amount of data transfer, you can use the same VPN along with Remote Desktop built into your office desktop computer. This type of remote access is where you will use your office desktop, but the screen is securely displayed on your laptop. In this case, software like QuickBooks, Microsoft Access and other high data applications perform as smoothly as they would while in your office. This solution requires Windows Professional or better.

An alternative solution is to use a service such as LogMeIn , GoToMyPC , or other online remote desktop service to display your office screen remotely. Depending on the provider, the functionality may be very acceptable and provide all you need. These services range from about $150/yr. to much more depending on the number of computers and people accessing the computers. Since this solution requires a continual connection from your desktop to the internet, it provides a possible gateway for a security breach, and may not be acceptable.

A final solution is to use software like the free VNC system which has many flavors (brands), NoMachine or several other similar products designed to provide direct remote access to your computer. These unfortunately get very technically challenging to install and use, and can have the greatest security risk depending on how they are setup. Further, those based on VNC typically have sluggish screen updates, though this has improved greatly the last several years. This solution however will generally work for all systems and needs where other solutions fall short.

While this is ultimately just scratching the surface of options available for remote access, these are the most common solutions used. Before ultimately deciding on a solution, it is always advisable to contact your IT guy who can best review your specific needs and provide the appropriate solution.