

What is a VPN and will SoftLINK work over a VPN?

Summary

Does SoftLINK work over a VPN and if so, what does my VPN require in order to allow SoftLINK to work properly?

Details

What is a VPN?

Virtual private networks (VPNs) provide a secure bridge across a wide-area-network (WAN) - such as the Internet - that connects two or more local-area-networks (LANs).

What does SoftLINK require of a VPN?

SoftLINK is able to function across a VPN provided some basic requirements are met. These requirements are similar to those imposed by a basic LAN:

- **General connectivity**
If the networking is not structured such that the tutor machine can reach a client via the VPN (or vice-versa), then SoftLINK will not operate correctly with that client.

- **Discoverability**
SoftLINK can use several different methods to find clients, the most popular among VPN users being subnet browsing. Simply ensure that the VPN network is reachable and enter the correct subnet information into SoftLINK's browsing settings:
 - From the Tutor's School menu select Configuration
 - On the left side, click Network and Wireless Settings
 - On the right side, click Settings under the Browsing header
 - Add any subnets outside of the primary subnet to the dialog box, then click OK until you are back to the main window
 - SoftLINK may ask to restart or rescan for students. This will be a good test of the settings you have just changed

- **Stable hardware & proper configuration**
Issues that can affect a "normal" network can also affect a VPN. Incorrect routing, packet filters (firewalls), and hardware problems all have the ability to prevent network traffic from reaching its destination.

How do I know if it's working?

One way to demonstrate that a VPN is functional is to try a NetBIOS computer browse. If machines from the other side of the VPN show up in the list, the VPN is connected and routing traffic. Note that

the reverse is not necessarily true; if no VPN machines appear then it is *possible* that the VPN is not configured correctly, but it is by no means certain. Regard this check as a shortcut method: if machines appear, the VPN is connected; make no other assumptions.

There are also lower-level networking tests such as “ping” requests you can use to determine connectivity. Most importantly bear in mind that the VPN itself does 99% of the networking and therefore will be the go-to to fix 99% of the problems. Regardless of whether you use a VPN, wireless technology, or a plain vanilla LAN, SoftLINK requires a functioning network.