



Claranet helps BETE with home working

BETE

BETE Ltd is a small UK business with a big difference: all of its employees work from home. The company, a distributor of industrial spray nozzles and other fluid handling components, employs eight staff and has an annual turnover of over £1m. Yet, excluding its warehouse, it does not have a central business premise. Instead, employees work from home and access the corporate network over the internet.

BETE has always been forward-looking when it comes to IT. While many organisations pay lip service to supporting employees working from home, BETE has made it one of the defining characteristics of its business. The money saved from renting business premises can instead be ploughed back into the business, giving the company a major cash flow advantage at a time when many small firms are struggling to keep their heads above water.



The challenge

BETE's business model depends entirely on ensuring that its employees have ultra-reliable access to critical business applications and data. Until 2011, the corporate network consisted of servers hosted in a third party co-location centre, which employees accessed from their homes over a Virtual Private Network (VPN) that was run over twin ADSL connections: one for voice communications, the other for data. This service relied upon different providers for the connectivity and hosting. Claranet provided and managed the ADSL connections, while a separate co-location provider hosted BETE's servers. Although the arrangement had been working reasonably well, BETE had some serious concerns about a service that relied on two separate providers, as BETE's Marketing Manager, Ivan Zytynski, explains.

"When you rely on the internet for every aspect of business operations, reliability is paramount," said Zytynski. "When you have two providers, one for the internet connection and the other in charge of the hosting, there is an inevitable lack of accountability for overall service availability. If the network goes down it's pretty much impossible for the customer to pinpoint what's gone wrong, and naturally there is a degree of 'blamestorming' between the hosting and network providers. For us, it doesn't matter who is at fault. All we care about is that as soon as we lose availability, our entire business is offline and we're losing money.

"When we came to review our IT contracts however, there were other important issues that we needed to resolve. Our server estate, though relatively small, was based on owned physical servers hosted in the co-location centre," continued Zytynski. "This provided us with no capacity to respond to changing demand. If this occurred, we had no option but to invest in extra physical servers. Meanwhile, each ADSL line at our employees' homes required a dedicated firewall, an extra expense that we wanted to eliminate.

"While we were happy with the individual hosting and networking services we were getting, it was clear that we would gain greater reliability, accountability and flexibility by consolidating these services under a single provider."



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The solution

BETE approached its network provider, Claranet, to implement an integrated hosting and network service to keep its employees connected to critical line-of-business data and applications. Claranet proposed its Virtual Data Centre (VDC) service – an award winning Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) offering that enables users to provision virtual compute, storage and networking resources at the click-of-a-mouse. Claranet's VDC enables BETE to host its line of business applications in a virtualised environment, with the majority of BETE's hosting estate migrated from physical servers to virtual machines residing on Claranet's enterprise-grade hosting infrastructure. Claranet takes full responsibility for monitoring and managing the individual components, as well as optimising the performance of the applications themselves.

Claranet's VDC holds BETE's customer relationship management (CRM) system, stock control software and e-marketing applications. It also holds BETE's remote desktop services (RDS), which are critical for enabling remote-working staff to access applications and data over the network. One of the key advantages of Claranet's VDC is that it provides BETE with a "burst" capacity of extra RAM for periods of high demand. With the previous set-up, BETE could only add extra capacity by purchasing and provisioning a new physical server in the co-location centre; a time-consuming and costly process.

A further benefit of Claranet's VDC services is that it is integrated with Claranet's own core MPLS network. This enables BETE to upgrade and simplify the networking component of its service. The old ADSL lines connecting employees' homes to the network were replaced by migrating to Claranet's own MPLS backbone which, because it does not touch the public internet, removes the need for separate firewalls or encryption at each site. It also ensures that BETE only has one provider responsible for the availability of the entire service, a critical consideration when one entrusts the entire business to the cloud.

"The money that we save on renting, heating and running an office means that we can invest in the very best IT and networking services on the market," said Zytynski. "When your business utterly relies on service availability, as ours does, you simply can't compromise by using anything but the best. Of all the providers, Claranet stood out because of the quality of its infrastructure, including its fully-integrated MPLS network, as well as the fact that they obviously understand the imperative of maximum uptime to our business."

The results

Since moving to Claranet's hybrid cloud hosting and integrated MPLS network in mid-2011, BETE's homeworking employees have experienced near-total availability. "It's just incredibly reliable," explained Zytynski. "By any realistic standard of measurement, we have had 100 per cent uptime. Frankly, you would not expect that level of reliability with a traditional business model of in-house, premises-based IT; to get that from a remote working platform is quite astonishing."

"Getting towards zero downtime was certainly the number one priority when re-organising our IT, but there are also a number of other important benefits," continued Zytynski. "Moving our applications into a virtualised environment has given us the flexibility that we need to meet changing demand quickly, without the need to purchase expensive physical servers that would spend most of their time lying redundant. This solves any capacity issues before they occur, and makes it easy to plan for business growth. If we want to deploy a new app for example, we don't have to worry about whether our current servers can handle it, as we can simply upgrade the allocated RAM."

"On the networking side, the integrated MPLS is faster and more reliable than the old ADSL connections; crucially, it also removes the need for multiple firewalls and encryption. We are saving 10 per cent on encryption alone, as well as enjoying the benefits of much simpler network management. It has taken a whole layer of complexity out of IT."

Ivan Zytynski
BETE - Marketing Manager

"At BETE, we want to run a company that really is different from others; where staff can enjoy working from their own homes and to their own flexible timetables. While some firms might be scared of homeworking because of the difficulties of monitoring staff, our employees have all responded wonderfully to the trust that we have placed in them. It's the same with Claranet: they have earned our trust, and we plan to move all of our remaining physical hosting onto Claranet's virtual platform within a couple of years," concluded Zytynski. ■

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Claranet offers and the benefits these deliver,
go to: www.claranet.co.uk**