



Five: Claranet simplifies hosting infrastructure

About Five

Five is a commercially-funded national television network in the UK. It began operating in 1997 and is owned by RTL Group, a division of Bertelsmann and the largest commercial broadcasting company in Europe. Five broadcasts a broad range of popular programmes, including British Commissions Hotel Inspector, The Gadget Show and live Europa League Football as well as CSI and the Australian soaps Neighbours and Home & Away.

In 2007 channel bosses began to think seriously of how best to capitalise on the burgeoning market for online video. Research, as well as the broadcaster's initial tentative forays in to the field, had already identified there was a substantial audience for long-form video streams supported by advertising.

Hence Five created a new unit, the Digital Media Group (DMG), and tasked it with creating new ways of reaching its audiences and developing additional revenue streams online.

The challenge

The first issue to confront Five's Digital Media Group was the unwieldy nature of the company's web-hosting infrastructure. It discovered that different departments had been charged with launching websites, which meant that Five had employed many different web-hosting providers, each with their own applications, operational procedures and standards. This was clearly an uneconomical way of working. It also made little business sense and meant too much time was being spent on day-to-day administrative headaches.

If the company was to innovate and expand its online consumer offering, Five first had to rationalise its hosting and management providers. Its first priority: to find the right supplier.

The solution

"We had a very clear idea of what we needed," says François Chabat, Technology Manager at Five. "Our goal was to be able to focus on progressing our digital media strategy without having to worry about day-to-day upkeep. We knew we would be placing a high degree of trust in our chosen provider and would need to ensure they had the capabilities to work closely with the DMG to ensure our hosting infrastructure evolved in line with our growing digital media plans."

Five initially sought tenders from its existing roster of technology providers, but quickly opened up the process to other hosting companies. Interestingly, Claranet was not already a hosting provider for Five, but on looking at its credentials and abilities, Five soon realised the benefits that Claranet's experience and outlook could bring.

"We found Claranet to be the most flexible and technically advanced provider. Even more importantly, it was able to offer a range of value-added services and benefits that none of our current providers could. We were extremely impressed with their credentials and the scope of their technical support. It was clear to us that they were at the forefront of managed application hosting."



Five: Claranet simplifies Five's hosting infrastructure

Driving innovation

Five has since outsourced technical aspects of its hosting and application management to Claranet. This has freed up the broadcaster's online team to concentrate more on strategic activity such as developing a growing portfolio of new online offerings.

For instance, in addition to the company's core website - <http://www.five.tv> - and a corporate site, Five launched a suite of video-intensive vertical portals aimed at precise demographics. For instance, FiveFWD - <http://fwd.five.tv> - which is targeted at young male fans of cars and gadgets, utilises content from two of Five's key TV brands: Fifth Gear, a motoring programme, and The Gadget Show, a weekly technology review. A second vertical, Holy Soap - <http://holyssoap.five.tv> - is intended for female fans of soap operas and carries full-length episodes of Neighbours and Home & Away; while a third - <http://milkshake.five.tv> - is the home of the broadcaster's key pre-school programming offering.

The result

Hosting and first-line application management for all these sites has been outsourced to Claranet. By doing so Five has been able to improve operational efficiency, simplify management and realise cost savings with economies of scale. As in part a result of these efforts, the number of monthly unique visitors to Five's portfolio of websites increased by 28% in 2009 to an average of 1.83 million - and rising.

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François Chabat - Technology Manager - Five

According to Mr. Chabat: “Claranet provides a one-stop outsource solution that has proven to be the most effective way to operate with a small internal technology team. We recognise that we don't hold the internal skills to manage all the applications we use to underpin our websites – and we don't want to either. By placing these tasks with Claranet, we now have the most cutting-edge applications in operation, looked after by highly qualified experts. The internal team has been given back the freedom to focus - so much so that we don't even manage the first point of call for technical support queries, which is unusual! Ultimately, outsourcing everything works best for our business model.”

The content vertical sites are also, says Chabat, a fruitful advertising channel for Five. However to drive online users and advertisers to these sites, the DMG needs to stay on top of producing fresh, high quality and relevant content. To ensure new content is supported, constant changes to Five's hosted applications are required. Furthermore, with businesses looking at more video advertising, the need for site amendments to be made as and when capacity requirements change is increasing.

With Claranet responsible for the day-to-day management of all this, Five is able to quickly and easily update content, amend sites, and ultimately ensure it maintains its audience growth and, in turn, its advertisers.



The future

A step change in consumer viewing habits, which has more people viewing TV content online, is fuelling development at Five and placing further demand on the channel's hosting infrastructure. Having the right foundations in place to support online growth and variations in capacity demand is therefore more important than ever. With Claranet responsible for managing and hosting its applications, Five easily cope with additional traffic and readily add more functionality and content to its sites without placing extra burdens on staff.

As the popularity of Five's sites grows, it will continue to look at new ways in which to drive technology innovation to ultimately deliver the highest quality experience for users, while maintaining costs and making better use of resources. To that end, Five is working with industry leading vendors like Claranet and exploring the benefits of new technologies, such as virtualisation.

“Virtualisation is at the forefront for where the hosting industry is going and Claranet is certainly leading the way in this regard. We look forward to continuing our work with Claranet as our digital media strategy evolves,” concluded Chabat. ■

For more information on Five and any of its affiliate sites please go to: www.five.tv