



Connect Distribution simplifies hosting infrastructure

Connect Distribution

The Connect Distribution group specialises in component and accessory distribution for both white and brown goods. In addition to distribution, the group manages warranty and insurance repair contracts, by using a network of independent service providers linked via web-based software.

The group currently handles over 1.4 million product lines, with a database of over 16,000 active customers. As well as providing ready-made websites for retailers, the business also processes over 180,000 stock lines per month online, runs over 100 spare parts' websites, and handles repair care for over 40 clients. The business started trading in 1969 and is currently set to exceed a turnover of £60 million annually.

The UK's largest brown and white goods distributor sees online business grow as it deploys Claranet's managed application hosting service

The challenge

The Connect Distribution websites are accessed daily by a high number of customers who depend on the sites to order, track and manage various stock lines. Customers place high levels of trust in the company to ensure real-time visibility of stock and distribution, which is hugely dependent on the reliability and management of the hosted applications underpinning the websites' functionality.

In the 2009 financial year, Connect Distribution experienced an exponential increase in consumer traffic to its websites, and recorded 27% growth in its online business. Following this success, the business began developing its consumer services and strengthening its repair care offering. However, this online expansion also raised significant challenges in terms of the management of the business' hosting platform and its increasingly complex applications.

Andrew Button, Systems Designer at Connect Distribution, said: "Before our expansion into the consumer and service sectors, our business customers had intensive, yet relatively predictable, usage patterns. However, as the diversity and number of visitors to our range of sites increased, we were faced with unexpected capacity demands, and began to experience outages that could have negatively affected our entire customer base."

"In addition, the skills and resources of the IT team at Connect Distribution were being sorely stretched," said Button. "When faced with large traffic spikes as a result of a customer's successful marketing campaign for instance, we'd have to manipulate and re-engineer the existing platform ourselves to achieve our required performance demands. This meant our system was increasingly complicated and difficult to support. So we urgently needed to simplify our hosting infrastructure, and find a way to improve our website support."

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The solution

Connect Distribution had been using Claranet's hosting and connectivity services for some time and in 2009, it approached the managed service provider to explore how it could better leverage the partnership. Button commented, "Our in-house team was limited in terms of its ability to provide 24/7 support to the websites. So outsourcing more of our hosting work to Claranet seemed a natural progression. In the face of steadily increasing capacity demands and service complexity, Claranet's managed application hosting service was of tremendous interest to us because it was capable of supporting our business growth strategies." As such, the company decided to upgrade to this hosting service.

Claranet put together a managed application hosting solution that, as Andrew Button explained, "ticked all our boxes. Claranet also ran technical workshops with us to determine how their team could cater to our needs. Together we devised key boundary markers in terms of responsibilities for maintenance and support."

By choosing Claranet to provide their new hosting platform, Connect Distribution were able to implement a highly innovative application hosting platform. The key benefit for Connect Distribution was Claranet's ability to supply an integrated networking, hosting and management platform. "Throughout this period of change, we had been keeping an eye on the hosting market, and it was clear that Claranet's offering was superior to their competitors and met all of our demands. One attribute that attracted us was its provision of a single Service Level Agreement (SLA). This allowed us to negotiate an overall uptime guarantee that was inclusive of every service element. Many other managed service providers insisted upon separate SLAs for the firewalls, the services and the networking. We were able to alleviate the stress of managing multiple SLAs with the integrated platform from Claranet," explained Button.

The benefits

"With the new platform, we now have a much improved structure in terms of how we work. New websites and applications can now be deployed quickly and easily, as well as guaranteeing levels of service previously unattainable due to the limitations of an in-house team. We have eliminated the need for heavy involvement of the in-house team in maintenance upgrades and patching by utilising the support and expertise of Claranet."

"This technical expertise continues to provide an invaluable benefit that the business has continued to draw on as it navigates its way through a range of regulatory standards, including PCI-DSS. The Claranet team is clearly expert on PCI-DSS. They have continued to offer us best practice advice and solutions, which they know match our business requirements and support our need for compliance. In our workshops,



their expertise has helped us to collectively generate ideas that address the key issues we are currently facing and simultaneously support our long-term business strategy."

“ *With a reliable, scalable and robust platform now in place, we're confident that our customers will also realise the benefits of the increased performance and usability that Claranet has provided.*

Andrew Button, **Systems Designer at Connect**

The future

Connect Distribution has ambitious growth plans for the future. "The managed application hosting is giving us unparalleled uptime and flexible capacity management, setting us free to focus on our financial targets. Furthermore, as a business that manages fluctuating amounts of capacity, we needed the option to be able to adopt virtualisation to maintain a competitive advantage. This allows us to further enhance and develop the platform and attain new levels of flexibility and responsiveness. This potential next step has been made possible by the simplified structure and improved performance provided by Claranet," concluded Button. ■

For more information about Connect Distribution, please go to: www.connect-distribution.co.uk