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Client Company Synopsis

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) is a non-departmental public body that promotes high standards and skills for professionals and volunteers who work with young people in the UK. The CWDC provides training, certification and resources for a wide range of roles — nursery school staff, registered childminders, social workers, foster carers, education psychologists, to name a few. Much of this work involves interactions with partner organisations such as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) or the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA), which is responsible for the schools workforce.

Project Brief

Since it was established in 2005, CWDC has experienced rapid growth. This breathtaking growth trajectory would put a strain on any IT department. Under the supervision of Head of IT & Facilities Chris Baron, CWDC's IT team has managed to keep pace with the expansion.

However this hasn't been without its challenges. In particular, Baron inherited inadequate and unreliable network infrastructure, which had initially been set up by an external consultancy.

CWDC has three primary sites: its head office in Leeds, a smaller office in London and a data centre at Hemel Hempstead, which is the centre of the network and the disaster-recovery location, should the Leeds infrastructure fail. To deliver messages effectively into local authorities, CWDC employs a large number of home workers across all of England — a field workforce which also includes subject-matter experts, such as early-years specialists or social work experts.

To connect to CWDC systems, home workers dialed into a virtual private network (VPN) using their domestic internet service. With so many different service providers and variations in service quality, the approach proved to be unreliable, and the CWDC's voice-over-IP (VOIP) solution worked poorly across these lines. The IT team was spending an inordinate amount of time solving these problems, not to mention the frustration and lost productivity of the home workers.

Even more critical, the connectivity between the Leeds and London offices failed regularly.

"The line was going down all the time — every few weeks — and the response we would get from the provider was very poor," Baron says. "Resolving the problem each time could easily take a day or two."

A Strategy for Dependable Connectivity

In summer 2006, Baron decided it was time to look around for an alternative supplier. He discovered Fluidata on the internet and was attracted by their cost-effective offerings. The initial contract with Fluidata was for two 2 Mb/s SDSL lines to run in parallel with the existing line.

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"Within a matter of months, it was clear that it just worked — we didn't have any problems," Baron said. "Whenever we spoke with Fluidata, we got the response we needed from consultants who knew what they were talking about."

In spring 2007, CWDC dropped its contract with the original SDSL supplier and, around the same time, moved its London office location. Baron decided to upgrade its London-Leeds connection to Purefluid, which combines SDSL with ADSL technology to provide faster download and upload speeds.

As the organisation grew, more and more home users led to increasing support calls, largely due to the fact that an array of domestic ISPs were providing users' VPN connections. In an attempt to reduce the level of support, the CWDC team standardised on a single internet service provider and Fluidata's VOX product, which delivered a low-contended 800 Kb/s connection to the Leeds office.

"But even then that wasn't fully reliable," Baron says. "We then looked to Fluidata again, and just at the right time they came up with a private wide-area network (PWAN) solution. This was the right solution, and we've now been on PWAN for about three years."

Outcomes

The PWAN eliminated the need for a VPN, and standardised all of CWDC's connections on Fluidata and allowed thin-client applications to be used by key workers from their Leeds office. Fluidata lines were put into each of the home workers' homes. This had a dramatic impact on reliability, and calls to the service desk were reduced by a remarkable 70–80 per cent.

Since then, the Leeds office was upgraded to a leased 10 Mb/s fibre line in June 2008 with DSL failover to increase upload performance for remote workers. This was subsequently upgraded in February 2009 to 100 Mb/s and in April 2009 CWDC started hosting with Fluidata in Hemel Hempstead, centralising key systems into the core of the network.

To provide high quality services to the children's workforce a smooth-running and dependable IT infrastructure is important. Chris Baron is the first to admit that PWAN is a relatively expensive solution, but through the reduction in service calls and technical interruptions for CWDC staff, the PWAN is easily paying for itself.

A telling fact is that CWDC's IT department is among the highest-rated of any governmental organisation in the UK, according to standardised user-satisfaction surveys.

"We're also one of the cheapest in terms of percentage of turnover spent on IT. Low spending plus high satisfaction — although the PWAN is more expensive, it is actually helping to keep our costs to a minimum."

You can view the CWDC website on: http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/

Further details on Fluidata's products and services can found online at www.fluidata.co.uk or by calling one of our Account Managers on 0845 868 7848.