

Charity's MPLS network grows as they do



Improvements to Look Ahead's network have helped them with their mission of helping people move forward with their lives.

At a glance

Challenge

- Reduce connection costs
- Create a scalable, robust network
- Speed up connectivity
- Hit tight installation deadlines
- Implement a DR system
- Improve staff efficiency

Solution

- Semi-managed network
- Tailored connectivity for each site
- MPLS with QoS
- Co-location
- DR from one of the data centres
- Fast order process

Benefits

- Network mirrors company growth
- Better staff productivity and services
- Significant cost savings
- Agility to add or remove sites
- Reduced downtime
- Much faster connectivity
- Improved remote working

Why they use hSo

Service delivery

Having been let down by their previous network supplier, Look Ahead turned to hSo. As they found hSo's service delivery process refreshingly fast and painless, the relationship progressed.

Chris Piper, Look Ahead's IT Manager says: "From our first visit to hSo's office, we had constructive meetings to plan the MPLS. We were impressed how hSo managed the network themselves so effectively. They've carried out service delivery very well and still do."

Account management with a personal touch

Chris continues: "We have a dedicated account manager: someone who actually understands our needs. With larger suppliers, you're sometimes just a number."

UK-based 24x7 support

hSo's Network Operations Centre (NOC) is a big draw for Look Ahead. "It's important to us having 24x7 support and knowing they work efficiently with engineers. At any time, we can reach someone familiar with technical know-how and all our info to hand. As they're all UK-based, there aren't any language or time zone issues either," says Chris.

"We have a dedicated account manager: someone who actually understands our needs." Chris Piper, IT Director, Look Ahead

Challenge

Look Ahead work with local authorities and health trusts to provide support, care services and accommodation to people with a variety of needs. Their personalised services help people across South East England move forward with their lives.

Look Ahead's connectivity was slow and expensive. Due to growth, they needed a scalable, robust network and a secure, managed Disaster Recovery (DR) environment that was similarly scalable. It was also an opportunity to improve staff efficiency and increase flexible working.

Deadlines were demanding. The nature of their work creates a high site turnover. Decisions to renew or open new sites are normally sudden, leading to a mere 4-6 weeks for new sites to be linked up. Budget constraints and the size of Look Ahead's IT resources would be other challenges to overcome.

Solution

hSo started replacing the under-performing lines, selecting appropriate connectivity for each type of site – from ADSL to high-performing dedicated fibre-optic circuits.

Co-location hosting was set up in an hSo data centre, which became both Look Ahead's DR centre and primary network point. All DR tests have been successful, giving them peace of mind. They effectively use it as a warm site, with live equipment real-time replicating from their primary production system.

Since then, hSo have put MPLS connections into nearly 100 Look Ahead remote locations. hSo have also provided phone services. The MPLS network has QoS (Quality of Service) built in, allowing calls to be prioritised.

"Despite the challenge of getting network carriers in to get everything configured & tested in time, hSo managed the delivery really impressively," says Chris. hSo sped up the process for future orders by setting up a fast order process. Chris adds: "Our orders are immediately actioned and everything's always correctly installed & configured in time."

It's a semi-managed network, which may become fully managed. Chris continues: "hSo keep us in the loop, providing regular reports flagging any issues. They

handle all the maintenance too. It lets us retain overall management but have a reliable central point of contact. Rather than being caught in a chain of different suppliers, we know our hSo account manager will understand what we want and sort it out."

"Despite the challenge of getting network carriers in to get everything configured and tested in time, hSo managed the delivery really impressively."

Benefits

hSo have guided Look Ahead through substantial growth by devising a solution that grows with them. The charity has gone from 80 sites to 135 in 5 years.

The robust MPLS solution has saved them about £60,000 (without even accounting for its scalability). The agility to add or remove sites without major infrastructure changes or other disruption allows Look Ahead to upgrade connections with minimum fuss, whenever required.

hSo's multi-carrier access has helped provide Look Ahead with optimal connections. MPLS has minimised Internet downtime too. Dramatically faster Internet access brings many benefits. Before, they only had an 8 Mbit/s Internet connection from their London head office, serving the whole organisation. Now, they have a 50 Mbit/s connection.

Many more staff are online, including remotely, helping boost flexible working about five-fold. Now they can easily connect to the Look Ahead portal from home via a laptop or netbook. And naturally, they can achieve much more online too. Regarding telephony, increased bandwidth has enabled VoIP roll-out and for hSo to implement SIP Trunking soon. Overall, Look Ahead have been able to broaden and deepen their services, ultimately reaching and improving more lives.

About hSo

hSo is a carrier-independent network service provider. Our managed services span inter-site and Internet connectivity, telephony and data centre solutions, including cloud and virtualisation. To find out more, visit www.hso.co.uk or call us on **020 7847 4510**

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