

Case study

Client → NICE
Industry → Healthcare

NICE setting an example for network resilience



NICE's committees use video conferencing to help them produce guidance that is used throughout the UK's health and social care sector.

At a glance

Challenge

- Staff are spread across several sites
- Improve connection reliability
- Minimise telephony costs
- Support extensive video conferencing
- Ensure value-for-money for taxpayers
- Replace N3/Transition Network

Solution

- High-capacity MPLS WAN
- Connect via multiple carriers and paths
- SIP trunking replaces ISDN30
- Low-latency gigabit network with QoS
- Video conferencing & SIP reduce costs
- Health & Social Care Network access

Result

- Cross-site collaboration over WAN
- Sites have ultra-reliable connectivity
- Free site-to-site calls, lower call charges
- Video conferencing works reliably
- Over £150,000 saved so far
- Able to access required records

Why NICE switched to hSo for its data network & telecoms

NICE's team in Manchester was growing, triggering a move to a larger office. This created a perfect opportunity to review NICE's data network & telecoms setup in both Manchester and London.

NICE was looking to accomplish several key objectives:

- **IT Integration** – run both offices as one despite their distance
- **Resilience** – reduce disruptive faults and underpin DR plans
- **Scalability** – support future growth without costly investment
- **Collaboration** – facilitate use of video conferencing and VoIP

NICE evaluated proposals from potential suppliers, selecting hSo's for its close fit to NICE's needs and its value-for-money.

hSo delivered a high-capacity QoS-enabled WAN, with each site connected via multiple carriers, with telephony via SIP trunks.

NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

NICE is an executive non-departmental public body of UK's Department of Health and Social Care, tasked with providing guidance and support to help improve outcomes for people using NHS, public health and social care services.

NICE produces robust evidence-based guidance and advice, develops quality standards, and provides information services for commissioners, practitioners and managers across the health and social care sectors.

The organisation has 725 staff, largely based at two large offices in London and Manchester, with 200 staff working remotely on a typical day.

As NICE's needs have continued to evolve, hSo has adjusted the solution to accommodate multiple office moves, growing bandwidth use and the replacement of N3 with the Health and Social Care Network (HSCN).

"Our hSo account manager is very responsive. I know I can pick up the phone, I can send an email, and I will have a response as quickly as is possible... Other telecoms providers are more bureaucratic."

– Barney Wilkinson, Assoc. Director of Procurement & IT, NICE

Enabling Video Conferencing

NICE runs on committees, with 40-80 participants contributing to the development of new guidance. Getting everyone in the same room is challenging, so NICE uses video conferencing extensively. This lets staff at its offices and visiting experts collaborate without wasting countless hours travelling.

To guarantee reliable video conferencing, hSo created a resilient WAN with high throughput, low latency and low jitter, suitable for real-time video, audio and remote-desktop use.

Underpinning Core Operations

The WAN underpins almost everything NICE does. It carries the phone calls of 725 staff and lets staff upload guidance for use by NHS medics. NICE relies on the WAN to access online training, cloud services, personnel records and to provide internet access for staff and visitors. Around one in four staff work from home, using the WAN's bandwidth to access virtual desktops hosted on servers in NICE's offices.

Saving Significant Sums

"As a government-funded body, we're acutely aware of the need to secure value from all our suppliers. hSo's solution has given us significant savings," commented Catherine Wilkinson, NICE's Acting Director of Business Planning and Resources.

NICE was able to reduce (and then eliminate) its ISDN30 circuit rental charges, slash its outbound call charges, and make free phone calls between its London and Manchester offices.

The WAN's plentiful bandwidth lets NICE use its 42 video conferencing suites simultaneously, cutting travel costs and reducing staff travel time.

Barney Wilkinson estimates hSo's solution has helped NICE save over £20,000 per year, over the past eight years, as a result.

Staying Connected at all Times

"Meetings [with video & audio conferencing] are absolutely vital to what NICE does. Anything that interferes with their smooth operation, the entire organisation hears about it pretty quickly. Therefore we try to make sure everything's resilient," said Barney Wilkinson.

To achieve a high level of resilience, hSo connects each office via multiple underlying network operators (carriers), with each connection taking a separate physical path and connecting to hSo's core network at a different data centre. Each circuit has its own separate router, at NICE's request.

The result is a highly-reliable WAN that is not dependent on any single network device, carrier, path or data centre.

Switching from ISDN to SIP and from N3 to HSCN has meant NICE's traffic is no longer tied to specific circuits or locations. If a circuit goes down, NICE's phone calls, HSCN data, inter-site traffic and internet traffic continue to flow unimpeded over the WAN, with end-users oblivious to any problem. This means fewer complaints and distractions for NICE's IT team.

To add further resilience, hSo connects to the Internet, the phone network (PSTN), carriers and HSCN at multiple sites.

Supporting Business Continuity

NICE replicates data between sites, over the WAN, so the London and Manchester offices can act as full disaster recovery sites for each other, with server apps and telephony unaffected.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, almost all NICE staff were told to work from home, causing a surge in traffic to NICE's on-premise virtual desktop infrastructure. The WAN's ample capacity meant over 570 staff were able to access VDI servers simultaneously and make & receive phone calls via SIP.

Replacing Outdated N3 with HSCN

To access staff records and certain NHS SBS finance services, NICE had to connect to NHS Digital's Health and Social Care Network (HSCN), the mandatory replacement to N3.

NICE was able to do this over its existing hSo WAN as hSo is an HSCN consumer network service provider. NICE's N3 IP addresses were smoothly transferred to its new HSCN connections outside of business hours to avoid disruption.

"With N3 coming to an end, we had to move to HSCN, and hSo helped us do that in the speediest, most cost-effective way possible."

– Barney Wilkinson, Assoc. Director of Procurement & IT, NICE

About hSo

hSo is an accredited managed service provider delivering connectivity, cloud, telephony and IT security services to UK organisations.

hSo is a Health and Social Care Network (HSCN) consumer network service provider and a registered supplier under the UK Government's Network Services 2 and G-Cloud procurement frameworks.



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