Case study

New MPLS network delivers savings of £130,000 to Circle

Housing Association, Circle, consolidates hosting and network infrastructure with Claranet to save £130,000 per annum

Challenge: *Consolidating legacy network connections & multiple providers*
Requirement for: *Centralised information and access, better network performance & visibility, increased security for on-site servers*
Solution delivered: *Consolidated MPLS network to over 200 sites, with greater redundancy*
Tangible benefit: *annual saving of £130,000*

Circle

Circle's team of more than 2,200 staff manages 63,000 homes, and provides a range of responsive care, support and maintenance services for around 200,000 people across the UK. On top of general needs, sheltered and supported housing, Circle's homes include key worker accommodation, shared ownership, market rent and private sale properties. Its mission is to enhance the life chances of its residents by providing great homes and reliable services, and building sustainable communities.

Circle partnered with Mercian Housing Association and Merton Priory Homes on 1 October 2009 and 22 March 2010 respectively. This took the number of its partnerships to 12. Circle and its partners now manage homes across London, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Kent, Surrey, Essex and the West Midlands.

The challenge

Circle was formed when the Circle 33 housing group merged with the Anglia housing group in July 2005. The new organisation had numerous legacy network connections and service providers. In addition, smaller satellite offices responsible for providing housing assistance to elderly people in 3,374 properties were not connected to the network.

With urgent demand from employees and resident scheme managers for greater access to centralised information that would enable them to be more productive, Circle turned to Claranet in 2006 to implement an MPLS network. The new network connected the majority of its sites and delivered enhanced network performance, along with a range of other benefits, such as enabling extensive use of IP-based video conferencing. Also, with Claranet as the sole service provider, the network was simpler and easier to manage.

However, as Circle went on to experience further growth - both organically and through acquisition - it found itself again working with a range of service providers. This, combined with requirements for even better network performance and traffic visibility, meant that in 2010 Circle put out a new tender for a consolidated MPLS network to connect over 200 sites. The tender also prescribed increased security for on-site servers hosting the organisation's websites and applications as an important requirement.

claranet
www.claranet.co.uk

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The solution

Circle is bound by regulations that require a comprehensive review of the market before the selection of a supplier. As such, tender responses from twelve service providers were received and reviewed before Claranet was selected, against high quality competition, as the association's preferred core networking provider.

Claranet's solution was a new network that would link over 200 sites with ADSL connectivity and feed into the core MPLS network. The network would replace legacy point-to-point topology with a hub-and-spoke design, which offers greater redundancy to protect against any points of failure. Additionally, the network would connect twelve offices with diverse routes to provide resiliency, ensuring performance and uptime of Circle's network.

Claranet's solution also involved moving Circle's existing servers to Claranet's data centre facility. By doing this, Circle would benefit from better security and reduced risk, as vital applications and information would be hosted off-site in a more stable, secure environment.

The results

"This was a big project," said James Pitt, head of infrastructure at Circle. "It took 18 months to migrate to the new network. Yet despite the complexity of the implementation, the Claranet team was a dream to work with. What's different about Claranet is that they do what they say they're going to do, when they say they're going to do it. The team is up-front and easy to work with. We have constant access to engineers and project managers, as well as the senior management team." The networking and hosting solution from Claranet has already resulted in tangible benefits.

> **"** *By consolidating our suppliers and upgrading the network, we expect to realise an annual saving of £130,000, which is no small feat."*
>
> James Pitt, **Head of Infrastructure, Circle**

Claranet's network monitoring and analysis service, ClaraCare Vision, will also bring significant advantages to the organisation. According to James Pitt. "With ClaraCare Vision, we can manage bottlenecks and congestion on the network with ease. We can see exactly what applications are causing congestion and where this is happening. This means we can remedy problems far quicker than before, and in doing so, provide a better service to our users."

Pitt concluded by saying: "Claranet have helped us through a significant period of growth, but this is just the first step in our journey. I look forward to working with such an innovative team to face our future challenges." ■

For more information about Circle, please go to: www.circle.org.uk

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www.claranet.co.uk

Claranet Ltd - 21 Southampton Row - London WC1B 5HA - UK
Email : business@claranet.co.uk - Web : www.claranet.co.uk
Tel : +44 (0)845 145 7777 - Fax : +44 (0)845 145 1777