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Alf Spencer, Head of IT, Clugston

Clugston builds a network for the future with Vialtus Solutions



With over 700 employees based at a variety of locations across the UK, the Clugston Group has a significant IT infrastructure. 75 per cent of its employees work outside of the head office system and require reliable, secure network access to corporate applications in order to operate efficiently. The construction arm of the Clugston Group has to manage change to their remote access needs, with many working from temporary building sites on a regular basis.

Thanks to Vialtus Solutions, the Clugston Group can now securely connect to the corporate network from any of its nationwide operations. Alongside fast and secure Wide Area Network (WAN) connectivity, Vialtus Solutions provides a resilient, fully managed network and Thin Client hosting solution to ensure Clugston's construction and property divisions can operate effectively when working from mobile locations.

Since implementing the Vialtus solution, Clugston has benefitted from:

- Increased security and prioritisation of data transfer and storage at Vialtus Solutions' world class data centre.
- Reduction in infrastructure costs – hardware, software, maintenance.
- Full business continuity with 48 hour fail-over power.
- Improved management of internal systems with less time spent on maintenance.

ABOUT CLUGSTON

The Clugston Group is a privately owned, limited, group of businesses founded nearly 70 years ago by LG Clugston, the father of the present chairman, John Clugston. The Clugston Group's head offices are based in Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire with regional offices and site operations spread across the UK. The Group has expanded to become a well established organisation with a leading reputation in construction, specialist civil engineering, logistics, property development and facilities management. The construction and property arms of the group work for a range of customers in the public and private sectors.

FOUNDATIONS OF IT

Like many businesses, Clugston experienced a traditional period of growth to its communications and data network needs. The increased use of e-mail and other IT applications, as well as laptops for remote workers, meant that access to the corporate network from all over the UK became fundamental to operations.

In addition to this, with Clugston's construction and property divisions utilising Computer Aided Design (CAD) and other industry standard applications, file sizes continued to increase. More data meant Clugston's legacy network took the strain. "It got to the point where it took two or three hours to download an e-mail with just a 1Mb

attachment in it," explains Alf Spencer, Head of IT at Clugston.

Data transmission, storage and increased remote working meant additional elements surrounding the maintenance of an IT infrastructure were added to the mix. "We were forever sucked into keeping everything going," explains Spencer. "As an IT department, I felt we should be delivering business information and business solutions, not spending all of our time maintaining the infrastructure. We seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time fixing laptops."

Clugston had a large laptop estate of varying age and operating systems.

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It required a solution that cut down on the amount of physical infrastructure which needed maintaining in-house therefore freeing the IT department to regain its strategic business focus.

Due to the size, sensitivity and mission critical nature of the data travelling over the network between construction sites and back to Clugston HQ, connections were required that were both quick and secure. As construction sites vary in location and can number up to 30 at any one time, the network also needed a greater level of both flexibility and scalability to allow employees access for effective operation.

CONCRETE SOLUTIONS

With a focus on using IP technologies to solve complex business communications problems, Vialtus Solutions helps to enhance business performance, enabling efficient mobile working and keeping data secure. Recognising this experience, Clugston set Vialtus Solutions to the task. Spencer comments, "We wanted to dip into Vialtus' pool of knowledge so we could improve our network performance and accessibility whilst scaling down our infrastructure. The aim was to remove the demands of the IT systems away from ourselves allowing us to focus on business issues."

Clugston chose to host its Wide Area Network (WAN) and corporate data in Vialtus Solutions' data centre. The solution consists of fully managed, next-generation network equipment and high grade firewall security. The Vialtus solutions' data centre is manned 24 hours a day by experienced

network engineers and is monitored by a remote site in Uxbridge. A smooth transition from mains power to diesel generators ensures the provision of up to 48 hours of fail-over power for the data centre if operating at its full capacity. At the data centre itself, Vialtus deploys two-factor authentication on key access points, has CCTV and central monitoring for around-the-clock surveillance security.

Vialtus Solutions replaced the legacy system at the Clugston head office in Scunthorpe with a 2x 2Mb fixed link connection, providing access to a private Multi-Protocol Label Switching (MPLS) network. The MPLS network includes integrated firewall protection for added security, allowing for any-to-any point network connections and prioritising network data flow to ensure that the most critical data travels quickly over the network, even when it is congested.

Vialtus also expanded the WAN to Clugston's nationwide operation centres and remote offices. Two Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line (ADSL) broadband lines from Vialtus Solutions are also now available for use at any of Clugston's temporary sites

providing an unlimited data transfer connection at up to 8Mbps and fail-over in case of one line going down.

BUILDING BENEFITS

Since implementing Vialtus' solution, Clugston's has experienced various benefits in its new centralised network. Hosting its corporate data and WAN in Vialtus' fully managed data centre has had a number of benefits. "Centralising all of our data in one place, has helped to control financial expenditure and also reduces the time spent updating and maintaining the system," says Spencer. "It also helps our environmental policy as less hardware requires less power which is also aided by the widespread use of Thin Client terminals and so we save on that basis as well."

Hosting at the Vialtus Solutions data centre also saved Clugston's network security costs. CCTV, two-factor authentication and round the clock central monitoring ensures the tightest on-site security at the data centre. High level firewall protection also secures Clugston's mission critical data when it traverses the nationwide network.



The new network provides employees with a significant step towards business mobility. Accessing company data anywhere on the network is not a problem now, be it on site or at head office, mission critical data is just as accessible.



Alf Spencer, Head of IT, Clugston.

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“Vialtus Solutions’ data centre is perfectly located for us and gives us resilient and trustworthy security benefits,” comments Spencer. “It means that we aren’t constantly maintaining the network ourselves, which achieves one of our original objectives.”

As the MPLS network, installed into Clugston’s head office, comes complete with resilient and robust intrusion protection, it ensures information such as Finance, HR and Health and Safety remain private and secure. The MPLS also means that important data can traverse the network at speed, even when congested, and Clugston are now looking to extend the use of MPLS onto the Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) network.

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Spencer continues, “The higher speeds, unlimited transfer rates and secure firewalls mean more complex CAD planning documents can reliably be sent quickly and securely over the network so we can be as responsive as possible.” Vialtus Solutions has also kept costs down whilst connecting Clugston’s nationwide network because of the low cost routers provided to each construction site.

SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

Having the reassurance of two ADSL lines accessible at any site has removed the threat to business continuity. Spencer explains, “The nature of the industry means that not having access to the company

network for one or two days isn’t an option and so the reassurance of a reliable fail-over solution is imperative.”

“The entire solution has allowed us to free up more time to spend on strategic business IT, rather than concentrating solely on maintenance and installation. Clugston employees can now travel out to a site, quickly and securely log on to the company’s network and access the same data and applications as at any other location. Vialtus Solutions’ aftersales support is also a huge benefit: it provides peace of mind to know someone is always available to solve any issues you may have,” concludes Spencer.

KEY TO THE FUTURE

Following the success of upgrading the network for the Clugston Group, Clugston is potentially looking to work with Vialtus Solutions on more advanced mobile solutions in the future.



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