



Buzz Networks shows that what's good for its network is good for the business

With a base of approximately 10,000 business-to-business customers, telecoms firm Buzz Networks knows that system resilience is core to successful operations.

When network and Active Directory issues began affecting customer service, Buzz Networks called in Pro Drive to stabilise existing systems and develop the strategy for a major restructure. Upgrades including Microsoft XP and Windows Server 2003 have delivered a fast, reliable network, enabling staff to deliver high quality customer service and support business growth.

Formed in 1997, Buzz Networks is an independent, licensed telecoms operator with its roots in non-geographic telephone numbers.

Routing millions of inbound and outbound minutes every month across 150,000 active numbers, Buzz Networks has multiple switching POPs (point of presence) throughout the UK that need to be interconnected, as well as with its network operations centre in Kingston upon Thames. With rapid business growth, the firm's wide area network (WAN) was becoming increasingly unstable, and by 2005 the

Active Directory (AD) and all the POPs throughout were corrupting.

"System failure was a considerable issue," explains Terry McMahon, CTO at Buzz Networks. "Because of the way our switching is designed, the telecoms system was self-sufficient but there were problems on the service side, for example with the customer database, management information and reporting systems, which meant that our customer support services were inadequate."

Buzz Networks depends on technology to support its core products, and for this reason, the infrastructure as a whole is mission critical.

The issues were beyond the capabilities of the incumbent IT support and some attempts by other firms either failed to resolve the issues or even made the situation worse.

This is where Pro Drive took up the challenge.

Stability and structure

The immediate need was to resolve problems with the AD, caused by underlying WAN issues.

The first thing Pro Drive did was to stabilise the existing WAN by installing and correctly configuring Cisco devices. In addition, it supplied VPN tunnels and designed the system to be resilient. McMahon recalls:

“Once this first phase was complete, and we had achieved a period of stability, they then basically rebuilt the AD structure, removing legacy domains and adding our infrastructure into the AD so that it replicated properly.” After this initial project, Pro Drive continued to provide ongoing IT support, and three years ago undertook a major upgrade from NT switching equipment to a new XP system, and migration of around 20 existing 2000 Servers to an AD based on Windows Server 2003.

“The key caveat for Pro Drive managing the whole process was that there could be no service disruption, and they were very successful at doing this,” says McMahon.

Speed and reliability

Prior to the overhaul, IT issues were a hindrance for staff and liable to adversely affect customer service, recalls McMahon.

“Accessing customer details was very slow and frequently timed out, but the new systems have significantly increased speed and reliability, providing virtually instant access,” he says.

“With multiple paths into the POPs and resilient hardware, if one system fails, another kicks in, delivering uptime of 99.999 per cent.

This enables our team to do their jobs properly and to deliver a high degree of customer satisfaction.”

Resolving the AD problems has freed resources and reduced administration, not least because Buzz Networks staff are focused on their jobs rather than dealing with system issues.

What is now accomplished routinely is also good for business - for example, reliable printing from the billing application, over WAN, has enabled timely and accurate invoicing.

Having a well-designed infrastructure has also brought direct benefits to customers, including integration of SIP-based services, and additions such as dedicated web servers/sites for users of Buzz Networks’ non-geographical number service.

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Confidence brings growth

The new systems have given Buzz Networks confidence in its network infrastructure, knowing that it works and performs to the highest level.

This has enabled it to push forward with growth plans and has provided a solid footing for the business.

“It goes back to our requirement for resilience,” comments McMahon. “We can report this to customers so that they have confidence too and can see that there are no concerns about system or service issues. In that sense it’s a good selling tool.”

Having successfully completed major projects, Pro Drive continues to provide ongoing general support for the network and infrastructure.

“We’ll spend up to 30 minutes resolving any issues ourselves,” explains McMahon.

“But if we’re unable to do so, our time is better spent focusing on the business and our customers so we simply hand things over to Pro Drive to action.”

Strengthening relationship

McMahon says that the relationship with Pro Drive began with its Technical Director, Dan Suttle.

“Initially we spent quite a few nights working through the IP infrastructure and this built up our confidence to work together.

Since then, other team members have been brought in and trained up, and the relationship has gone from strength to strength.”

He also believes the key to success has been Pro Drive’s excellent knowledge base.

“The engineers know what they’re doing but if there’s ever any uncertainty, they put their hands up, research it, test it all out, and we’re not used as guinea pig.

I appreciate this honesty because any pretence leads to frustration when it doesn’t work. Pro Drive always come to do a job for us equipped with the knowledge and expertise to complete it.”

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