



Case Study



"8el is the rock on which our communications are built. You can't build houses on shifting sand. 8el are also a pleasure to work with: they deliver on customer service, don't just talk about it. Without hesitation I would recommend 8el as a communications company to anyone."

Pat West
Head of IT, WRVS



charity

Business need

To cost effectively upgrade the performance and capacity of the WRVS data network and provide reliable connectivity for remote workers

Solution

A new WAN infrastructure providing significant annual savings, together with scalability and disaster recovery

Situations and challenges

Registered charity WRVS has nearly 70 years' experience in helping people in hundreds of communities across the UK, including familiar activities such as the 'Meals on Wheels' programme and WRVS hospital shops. There are just over 2,400 employees working 'in the field' and around 120 spread across two main offices. This is in addition to the organisation's volunteers, who number over 50,000.

In 2005, Pat West was promoted to Head of IT for WRVS. She carried out a full SWOT analysis and quickly realised that before any further steps could be taken to look at how IT services could be improved, they needed to sort out the foundations; namely the data communications links connecting the main offices and employees.

Said Pat, "At the time, our offices in Milton Hill in Oxfordshire and in Cardiff linked to our then service provider in Leeds, but not directly to each other. So if anything happened to either of the two lines, then Cardiff and Milton Hill couldn't talk to each other. Clearly we needed a structure, that ensured our offices were directly linked, and not via Leeds."

In addition, the only way in which many of the organisation's field staff – responsible for activities such as 'Meals on Wheels' – could keep in contact was via dial-up modem, hardly a reliable means of communication in this day and age.

The 8el solution

The result was that eight different communications providers were asked to tender for the business, but as Pat West said, one company stood out from the rest: "8el was the only one who gave us the information exactly how it was asked for and on time and that was impressive. We then met with the 8el team and they outlined what they could do for us. We were blown away by their enthusiasm and efficiency and said 'this is the company for us!'"

8el proposed a Wide Area Network consisting of 2Mb links in a triangular formation, connecting Milton Hill, Cardiff and the 8el core in Telecity, with the option to expand incrementally to 10Mb as WRVS's business grows. The benefit of a triangulation approach is that disaster recovery or back-up is in-built. 8el also provide additional back-up through ISDN lines and 8el itself has disaster recovery for its network.



About WRVS

WRVS has nearly 70 years' experience in helping people in hundreds of communities across the UK, including familiar activities such as the Meals on Wheels programme, WRVS hospital shops, community centres and events, ward trolley rounds, community transport schemes, emergency services support and the Good Neighbours projects which help over 9,700 people each week.

There are just over 2,400 employees working 'in the field' and around 120 spread across two main offices. This is in addition to the organisation's volunteers, who number over 50,000

www.wrvs.org.uk

WRVS has access into 8eI's core network, which as it is remotely monitored and controlled, helps WRVS to ensure quality control and service continuity.

Pat West commented "It was easy to see exactly what we would be getting, with no small print. The installation process went smoothly and 8eI delivered when they said they would." Initially, the contract with 8eI was for six sites, but over the past three years, this has grown to 29 locations around the UK.

Results

More reliable networking

As soon as installation was complete, WRVS had the benefit of a more resilient system between its sites, but very soon, other advantages became apparent. By having access to a more reliable, higher capacity core network, it became feasible to upgrade all field staff's connections from dial-up to faster and more reliable broadband. Pat West commented "We could not have done that before, because the increased data traffic in the system would have been a problem."

Cost effective service

In terms of the business case, the predicted cost savings were a key factor in the decision making process, and have subsequently been borne out; compared to the previous arrangements, WRVS has reduced its costs by almost 50% per annum, which is important to a charity that in Pat West's words "does not have bottomless pockets."

Proactive 24/7 customer support

For WRVS, one of the most important aspects is having 24/7 remote network monitoring, which 8eI provides from its Network Operations Centre (NOC) in Reading.

"If we've got a problem, 8eI tell us before we know about it and that's important to us. We know it is not realistic to expect 100 per cent perfection from any supplier, but we do expect suppliers to provide good support and react quickly to any issues, and 8eI does that."

Helping WRVS achieve their business goals

The 8eI network has also helped WRVS grow its business with their commercial food team winning a number of local contracts, helped in part by the new communications system. WRVS can present a clear business case to local authorities, because by working with 8eI, it knows exactly how much it will cost to install a link to the 8eI core network at each location.

The faster and more reliable communications system also means it is easier to meet the tight turnaround required for meal deliveries, with just two and a half hours between WRVS getting the information from the local council to delivery, including producing round sheets and getting the information to each driver. In addition, local authorities can have direct access to client information via the 8eI network (using WRVS' own secure VPN tunnel) in real time.

Award nominated network

WRVS foresight and determination to make such radical changes to its existing network infrastructure, has led to a number of tangible benefits. This was recognised when WRVS' was a finalist in the Communications in Business awards in 2006. However, more important is the fact that the work done by WRVS and 8eI mean that today, the charity has a robust network that is able to meet its needs both now and in the future.

Looking ahead

The latest step is the creation of a WRVS disaster recovery plan, which is due to be tested soon. "This would not have been possible without having the 8eI core network in place" Pat West explained. "Having the right infrastructure in place is the most expensive part of a disaster recovery strategy and we've already got that through 8eI."

With access to 8eI/Watch, 8eI's online network monitoring tool as standard, WRVS will also be able to access real time information on their data network utilisation; making it easy for them to map out their capacity planning needs going forward.