Case Study

Council chooses IGEL thin clients to improve management and reduce time and cost

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"The staff like the IGEL thin clients because they are reliable and quick and easy to use and the IT team likes them because they are easy to maintain and manage," *Rob Wood.*

South Bedfordshire District Council is a local government region in Bedfordshire, England. Its main towns are Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard. The district has a population of almost 120,000 and covers 522km².

The customer

- A UK local government district
- Serving a population of almost 120,000

Ageing PC network was becoming time consuming and costly

In a busy service environment, South Bedfordshire District Council found that maintaining its ageing PCs and network was becoming time consuming and costly. "The council's small IT support team was feeling the strain as the old desktop equipment became unreliable and was unable to run many new software applications," said Rob Wood, Head of Strategic ICT.

In addition to reliability and modernisation, the council IT team also wanted to standardise applications across the organisation. "At the time, many departments were running different versions of the same application and this complexity was adding to the demands on IT team time and budget," said Rob.

Potential information security concerns were also an issue. The council handles the personal details of thousands of residents in order to deliver its services and a desktop infrastructure that allowed the council to minimise risk to data loss or theft was also high on the agenda.

Finally, these changes needed to be rolled out quickly and conveniently, in order to minimise any impact on the council's delivery of services. Considering the challenges, the council decided that replacing its existing PCs with a thin client, server-based computing solution was the best course of action.

IGEL came out best in testing

"The IT team tested several thin client desktop devices but decided upon IGEL because they came out best in comparisons for performance, cost and ease of configuration and deployment," said Rob.

The council chose the IGEL Winestra 4610 XP thin clients for a number of reasons. Some council departments required dual screen support either for graphical displays, such as in Planning and Legal, or for running multiple applications at the same time, such as in Revenues and Benefits. The Winestra offered dual screen support as standard.

In addition, the council had a number of departments with a need to run specific, small applications locally, such as the legal team's large scanner for electronic document management. The IGEL Winestra running Windows XP could meet this requirement using its local processing power rather than running the application over Citrix. "This proved much more useful than some of the thin clients with proprietary operating systems because they could only run applications over ICA/RDP and not locally," said Rob.

The 350 IGEL thin clients and a few remaining laptops and PCs now run in a server-based computing environment attached to 12 Citrix Metaframe version 4.0 servers publishing a variety of standard desktop and line of business applications. Applications include Office 2003, Internet Explorer, Project, Visio, PDF Writer; line of business applications for managing Benefits, Council Tax, Housing Management, Finance, time management and document management; various web-based applications; and GIS

The challenge

- Faster deployment of applications
- Support for dual screen requirements and local running applications
- Reduction in hardware related support calls
- Quicker resolution of support calls with IT Staff not having to leave their desks.

systems for mapping, boundary checking, modelling, land and property development.

"The Citrix server farm was set-up with areas dedicated to specific council departments," said Rob. "First we created test environments and user piloting schemes. Then once we were satisfied that everything was working correctly and we had approval from the senior department heads, we would roll-out the new desktops to entire department teams."

"The deployment went to plan, quickly and efficiently. The joy of the IGEL thin clients is that once you have established the profile you want for each unit, it is very easy to roll-out to large numbers of people very quickly."

Benefits clear to see

The benefits of the new desktop infrastructure have been clear for all to see. The council is now able to deploy new applications much faster by using the IGEL Remote Management Suite software bundled free with every IGEL unit. Using the software, the council's IT team can simply update the new user profile and roll-out new applications centrally without ever having to visit the desktop.

The IT team has also seen a reduction in hardware related support calls, a reduction in workstation visits and a quicker resolution of support calls with IT staff not having to leave their desks. This additional time and money saving has allowed the IT team to respond more quickly to ad-hoc requests from the business for new user setups or temporary training rooms. Office moves have also become significantly easier as there is no longer a need for a user's equipment to follow them around.

"The staff like the IGEL thin clients because they are reliable and quick and easy to use and the IT team likes them because they are easy to maintain and manage," explained Rob. "We now also have much better transparency on user requirements and application licences moving forward."

IT security has also been improved because the IGEL Universal Desktops are locked down, preventing users inadvertently downloading or adding unsafe files or applications. The IGEL units also offer protection against data theft because all data is stored at the central server farm, meaning that if stolen, the IGEL thin clients contain no important information.

Expanding responsibilities

Moving forward, South Bedfordshire District Council will be merging with two other councils in 2009 to form the new Central Bedfordshire Unitary Authority. Due to the success of the South Bedfordshire District Council deployment of IGEL thin clients and server-based computing, a similar IT desktop approach is being planned for the new unitary authority.

The solution

- IGEL Remote Management Suite for standardised remote administration of all IGEL models
- IGEL XP Winestra thin clients (Universal Desktops) with standard dual screen support and the ability to run small, local applications

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