ComputerWeekly.com

Case study: How law firm Thomson Snell & Passmore uses Silver Peak to optimise Citrix

Cliff Saran

Law firm Thomson Snell & Passmore is using Silver Peak WAN acceleration to support a migration from Windows XP, Office 2003 and Exchange 2003 IT infrastructure to a new cloud-based service running the latest Microsoft software.

The 200-year-old law firm previously ran a legacy Windows and Exchange environment to support 188 staff across two UK offices. To modernise its IT, Thomson Snell & Passmore has implemented a cloud-based IT infrastructure using Citrix, run from a 2e2 datacentre in Reading.

David Bennett, head of information systems at Thomson Snell & Passmore, said when he joined the firm a year ago, it was running a Microsoft Office architecture, and it was running out of capacity.

The datacentre is connected to the two offices via a multiprotocol label switching (MPLS) network from managed networks provider MDNX, with multiple links for redundancy should a connection fail.

Doubling network bandwidth

Initially, the firm dropped in a standard network without Silver Peak to support all its users. Using the compression available in Citrix, Bennett was able to reduce network traffic by 20%.

Since running Silver Peak he said it topped 45% compression and pushes on average 6MB of data on a 20Mbps line per hour. The perceived network throughput using Silver Peak doubles the bandwidth, making the 20Mbps link feel link a 40Mbps link, he added.

Moving from fat client Windows XP to a cloud-based model has improved the performance of the desktop PCs, which still run Windows XP, to access the Citrix thin client environment. "Feedback from users shows the performance of the PC is quicker than when we were running fat clients." In particular, application start-up and printing performance has improved, he said.

In addition, applications have proved to be stable. "We can provide a constant level of bandwidth and we now have quality of service on the line," Bennett said. This means the network is engineered so that applications do not hog bandwidth.

Cloud benefits for SMEs

As a smaller organisation, Thomson Snell & Passmore is seeing the benefits of cloud computing. The project, which began in November 2010, has been live for 12 weeks, following a 40-user pilot.

Bennett said migrating to a cloud service has allowed the firm to consolidate its software from 70 applications to 12. It has also rationalised the number of suppliers to just two.

All the firm's data is backed up, its IT infrastructure is resilient, plus the cloud allows Bennett to support remote access for 100 users.

He said cloud computing makes sense for smaller organisations. "The cost of moving to the cloud for a large firm is incredible. But in a smaller firm, it is a good way to do a technology refresh, and you get disaster recovery and remote access. We can stay current [in terms of IT]. We have effectivity built from the bottom up using the latest technology, without compromise, moving from an old Microsoft 2003 infrastructure," he said.

Had Thomson Snell & Passmore taken an in-house approach, the end result would have been built using components from the 2003 infrastructure, with 2010 products bolted on, leading to a more complex system.

Bennett said there was no reluctance in the business to moving into the cloud, and the technologies he selected to build the infrastructure were mature. "None of the products we chose were left field. The pilot proved the networking and server configurations. Citrix has been around for a long time - and has proved it can work."

Under the contract, Thomson Snell & Passmore has the ability to swap out components of its infrastructure. While its telephony system is run in-house, Bennett is looking at moving this to the MDNX datacentre, which is housed in the same building in Reading as the 2e2 datacentre, where the law firm's cloud infrastructure is hosted.

"We can connect the two halves [2e2 and MDNX] together," he said, which would enable Thomson Snell & Passmore to run VoIP as part of its cloud service.

http://www.computerweekly.com/news/2240106531/Case-study-How-law-firm-Thomson-Snell-Passmore-uses-Silver-Peak-to-optimise-Citrix?vgnextfmt=print