

Calumet

Portrait of a next generation network

Calumet is one of the largest suppliers of professional photographic products in the world, offering traditional, digital and audio/visual equipment, studio and lighting apparatus and so on. Around 12 months ago, while looking to improve its retail outlet, call centre and multi-channel sales support, it realised its comms network would have to be upgraded.

It needed, for example, to provide for multiple Internet connections to give staff access to its online product catalogue, so they could guide customers through the range of goods. Further, although the existing network provided high-quality voice connections, calls were occasionally being dropped. However, the IT team knew a network upgrade would require significant capital investment.

Phil Browning, IT manager Europe, explains: "We had reached a crossroads. Our comms network was almost at the end of its life, and we were waking up to the realisation that a substantial amount of money was going to have to be spent. To complicate matters, we were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with our network provider. As a result, we decided to put the business out to tender."

After fighting off competition from the likes of BT and Cable & Wireless, SwitchIP was selected to install its InPurple – a secure network for voice, data and video over broadband – across each of Calumet's retail outlets and call centres, as well as in its HQ. "It seemed too good to be true. We predicted that we would need to triple the bandwidth capacity on our network in order to provide the kind of voice and data access our employees needed.

"That kind of upgrade would have cost us over £200,000 per year using a traditional frame-relay network, yet InPurple was able to deliver an eight-fold increase in bandwidth, high-speed Internet access, a centrally managed network facility and full network security – all of which still cost £30,000 less per quarter than our original basic network... So, when it came to justifying project costs to our board, we were able to present the initiative as a cost-saving exercise, while also showing that incredible gains could be made in network performance."

When questioned about InPurple's reliability, Browning confesses that he initially needed convincing about the consistency that could be achieved in a broadband environment, but now firmly acknowledges that the product's ATM-based architecture, and SwitchIP's strict adherence to pre-agreed, measurable quality of service standards, enables crystal clear voice and reliable data transmissions.

Additionally, he points out that InPurple also provides good security: "Unlike VPNs and WANs, InPurple only needs a single firewall to protect the entire network. Previously, firewalls had to be installed at each office or site, which increased the number of 'exposure points' at which unauthorised access could occur." ■

Key benefits

- Eight-fold increase in bandwidth
- High-speed Internet access
- Simple, centrally managed network
- Full network security
- Cost per quarter down 85%