

Nominee: BETE Ltd/ Claranet

Supporting Vendor: Claranet

Nomination title: Claranet helps BETE with its home work

BETE Ltd is a small UK business with a big difference: its entire workforce works from home. The industrial spray nozzle distributor and has an annual turnover of over £1m, but does not have a central business premises. Instead, its 10 employees work from home, accessing the corporate network over the Internet.

While many organisations pay lip service to supporting home working, BETE has taken cloud technology to its logical conclusion and removed the office entirely. The money saved on renting business premises can be invested into the business, helping cash flow with which many small firms struggle.

Driving force and challenges

BETE depends on employees having ultra-reliable access to critical business applications and data. Until 2011, the corporate network consisted of servers hosted in a third-party co-location centre, accessible by employees over a Virtual Private Network (VPN) run over twin ADSL connections: one for voice communications, one for data. This service relied on different providers for connectivity and hosting. Claranet provided the ADSL connections, while another provider hosted BETE's servers.

Reliability is paramount when you rely on the Internet for every aspect of business operations. With two providers, there is an inevitable lack of accountability for overall service availability. If the network went down, it was difficult for BETE to pinpoint what was wrong. Regardless of who's at fault, when the company lost availability, its entire business was offline and it lost revenues.

Additionally, BETE's server estate was based on physical servers that it owned and which were hosted in the co-location centre. This meant that the infrastructure had no capacity to flex and scale in response to changing demand and as a result, BETE had to invest in extra physical servers. Meanwhile, each ADSL line in employees' homes required the extra expense of a dedicated firewall.

"While we were happy with the individual hosting and networking services, it was clear that consolidating these services under a single provider would bring greater reliability, accountability, and flexibility," said Ivan Zytynski, BETE's Marketing Manager.

Solutions and innovation

BETE approached Claranet to implement an integrated hosting and network service. Claranet proposed its Virtual Data Centre (VDC) – a multi-award-winning Infrastructure-as-a-Service (IaaS) offering that enables users to provision virtual compute, storage, and networking resources at a single click.

VDC enables BETE to host line-of-business applications in a virtualised environment, with the majority of BETE's hosting estate migrated from physical servers to virtual machines on Claranet's

enterprise-grade hosting infrastructure. Claranet is fully responsible for monitoring and managing individual components, as well as optimising the performance of applications.

Claranet's VDC platform holds BETE's customer relationship management (CRM) system, stock control software, and e-marketing applications. It also holds BETE's remote desktop services (RDS), critical for enabling remote-working staff to access applications and data.

VDC provides a "burst" capacity of extra RAM for periods of high demand, ensuring that BETE no longer has to purchase and provision new physical servers in the co-location centre whenever it needs to increase capacity.

VDC is integrated with Claranet's core MPLS network, enabling BETE to upgrade and simplify the networking component of its service. The old ADSL lines connecting employees' homes to the network were migrated to Claranet's own MPLS backbone, avoiding the public Internet and removing the need for separate firewalls or encryption. It also ensures only one provider is responsible for the availability of the entire service.

"The money that we save on office costs means we can invest in the best possible IT and networking services," said Zytynski. "When your business utterly relies on service availability, you can't compromise. Claranet stood out because of the quality of its infrastructure, and its obvious understanding of the importance of maximum uptime to our business."

Tangible benefits

BETE has experienced near-total availability since moving to Claranet's hosting and integrated MPLS network in mid-2011: *"By any realistic measure, we have had 100 per cent uptime. Frankly, you would not expect that with traditional premises-based IT; to get it while remote working is quite astonishing,"* said Zytynski.

Zero downtime was BETE's top priority, but there have been other benefits. Moving applications into a virtualised environment has given BETE the flexibility to meet changing demand quickly without needing to purchase largely redundant physical servers. This solves capacity issues before they occur, and makes accommodating business growth easy. To deploy a new app, for example, BETE can simply upgrade the allocated RAM.

The integrated MPLS is faster and more reliable than the old ADSL connections, and removes the need for multiple firewalls and encryption so that BETE saves 10 per cent on encryption alone.

BETE has reduced its operating costs by £34,000 per year, Zytynski says: *"This includes a net gain of £25,000 from not having to rent and maintain a physical office"* (subtracting the additional spending on IT infrastructure), *"as well as a net £9,000 saving on mileage by eliminating commuting and reducing travel by sales reps."*

BETE has calculated that it also saves 17.7 tonnes of CO₂ per year. *"This includes the savings made by not having to power and heat an office, as well as by significantly reducing annual distances travelled by sales reps because our focus on electronic marketing reduces speculative sales visit. It also factors in the small additional carbon consumption by home-working employees."*

Home working has enabled BETE to employ people from all around the country, and people – such as parents of young children – who might find traditional office hours difficult to keep.

“At BETE, we run a company that really is different. While some firms might worry about the difficulties of monitoring staff, our employees have responded wonderfully to the trust we have placed in them. It’s the same with Claranet: they have earned our trust, and we plan to move all of our remaining physical hosting onto Claranet’s virtual platform within a couple of years,” concluded Zytynski.

Why nominee should win:

- Claranet VDC enables BETE Ltd to sustain a business model to which home working and total reliability of cloud services are integral
- BETE Ltd’s “office in the cloud” enables the company to realise OpEx savings of £34,000 per year and carbon dioxide savings of 17.7 tonnes per year
- With Claranet VDC, BETE Ltd experiences zero network downtime – crucial when the business model depends entirely on reliable remote accessibility
- Claranet VDC’s “burst” RAM capacity removes the need to purchase and provision new physical servers – avoid wasting money on kit that will be largely redundant