Flexible managed connectivity delivers **high performance** IT and network services

The Background

As a leading provider of building, design and specialist engineering services, Clugston has an annual turnover of over £100 million, and employs 500 people across the UK.

The Challenge

Clugston needed to improve its services, in particular hosting and WAN, to ensure that essential network connectivity was maintained in a constantly changing business environment – and do so at a controlled cost. Head of IT Alf Spencer explains further:

"We employ six people in IT, so we simply couldn't provide the level of resource and technical skills we wanted in-house. We knew we couldn't retain all the systems and resources needed – from redundant power supply to security, backup, and so on. We couldn't create a data centre at the level we wanted and would end up spending too much time simply keeping the lights on. You already have a never-ending list of things you want to achieve in IT. That's why we wanted a specialist partner."

Alf contacted eight suppliers with a 'wish list' covering both flexible WAN and hosting as a one-stop-shop. As a construction firm, the WAN is key – extending a reliable network to new sites and provisioning connectivity fast, ensuring connectivity at all times and decommissioning fast. Delays on a site can be extremely costly, with potential penalties running into tens of thousands of pounds.

Daisy was already known to Clugston, having previously provided break/fix maintenance for its HP hardware, and had also been approached regarding a Citrix platform. Alf continues:

"Everyone relies on communications, like conferencing and access to electronic drawings, or producing A3 printouts. Daisy was the only organisation that convinced us it could partner to deliver a complete solution, covering WAN and hosting – with a single point of contact for WAN and server support, and the geographical reach to meet the needs of constantly changing locations. We see hosting and other managed services as a way of tapping into the depth of technical resource presented by an organisation like Daisy – something we'd struggle to match in-house. But when you go elsewhere, you want to be sure they are genuine specialists."

The Solution

Daisy delivered a new wide area network and a fully hosted secure infrastructure, to support the high performance delivery of essential applications. This included designing, implementing, managing and supporting a hosted infrastructure and WAN, to underpin back-office applications – covering a business-critical WAN, with robust connectivity between the data centre, head office and multiple sites.

The three-year contract started in 2010, with preparatory work including alternate communications links running into all locations. All physical servers were moved from the previous data centre to Daisy over one weekend, with the Daisy-hosted infrastructure going live on schedule. To enable building sites to access and use essential systems, each one needed a reliable WAN connection to Daisy's Birstall data centre – and this is now monitored and managed using Daisy OneStream technology.

Although the total number of sites remains relatively constant, new installs or decommissions are required almost monthly. This places higher demand on implementation and project management expertise than a standard WAN, hence the decision to outsource. Network and hosting operations are monitored and managed around the clock, and in application support, Spencer's team handles user calls, with the ability to escalate certain issues to Daisy if required. Alf explains further:

"We have improved connectivity and performance, with more resilience built into communications links – for example, two ADSL lines into each site. We handle line-of-business applications support ourselves, for our computer-aided design system, procurement and ERP systems. But working with Daisy means we've actively enhanced support in certain areas, such as the Microsoft SQL platform that our ERP system uses."

Eighteen months after the initial migration, Clugston opted to migrate onto the Daisy Virtual Shared Platform (VSP) – again successfully carried out over a weekend, following several months' preparation. The Clugston platform is still based on Citrix thin client, delivered over a managed WAN, but now hosted on the Daisy VSP. Alf continues:

"The VSP removes unnecessary hardware and maintenance costs, and frees our people to focus on what's important. Working with Daisy gives us peace of mind knowing that our data and services are secure, and professionally looked after and backed up. If issues arise, we work them out ensuring we have the consistent performance and connectivity we need to run our business."

The Result

Clugston now has access to high performance IT and network services, with professionally managed hosting in a secure facility. This is coupled with reliable WAN connectivity to multiple sites, minimising downtime and potential impact on operations. Working with Daisy gives Clugston access to wide-ranging skills and resources that it cannot match in-house, including hands-on support for things like ad hoc project services as required. Alf concludes:

"We face ever-increasing demands as the pace of technological change increases. In my role, you have to satisfy the business with new technologies and approaches, and organisations like Daisy help us to do that. They have a 'can do' attitude, and we have access to high quality people with the skills we need. Daisy people understand our environment and what we want."

Since the initial migration to the Daisy VSP, the construction division has been joined by Clugston Distribution Services on the shared platform – and the construction team is now also considering a disaster recovery solution from Daisy.