

Wyse ensures Swinton success with thin client roll-out



Swinton is a leading UK high street insurance broker and advises its 1.1 million customers on a range of general insurance products. With over 1800 employees and operating from a network of 320 branches and a call centre, Swinton combines the strength of a major national business with the personal service and customer focus of a strong local presence. As a leading broker the business has long standing and successful relationships with almost all insurance companies and Lloyds syndicates operating in the personal general insurance sector. The company is a subsidiary of MMA Holdings UK plc and in May 2003 acquired the Colonnade insurance

broking business from Provident Financial plc.

The Challenge

The insurance world has long been recognised as a sector that uses technology to provide innovative customer service and competitive advantage. Progressively customers are turning to the Internet to search for and secure the best insurance prices and services. For leading insurance brokers, it is essential that they are able to handle enquiries quickly and efficiently, as well as across multiple channels including the Internet, telephone, fax and face-to-face. With 320 branches across mainland UK, Swinton was looking to

upgrade its entire IT branch infrastructure to allow staff improved access to local and head office applications. The infrastructure upgrade would also allow Swinton branches to further develop the immediacy of their services for customers, with direct online access for Swinton branch staff to head office databases and important external information sources such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

“We needed to overhaul our entire branch IT hardware as part of a £2m enhancement programme,” said Adrian Hazeldine, director of IT and business change. “In the new environment each branch would have

a local area network and be connected back to head office via a wide area network.”

“In the branches, staff had been using the very old Wyse green screen dumb terminals. They have been great workhorses over the years but were limiting what we could do. We knew we had to replace them but the challenge was with what?”

The solution

“The first thing we did was rule out PCs,” said Adrian. Swinton quickly realised that PC’s were not the right choice for them. With 1,500 users in branches around the country accessing bespoke applications, there seemed little need for the complications, power and support cost expense of computers. Added to this, Swinton believed that thin clients were inherently more secure, as they were virus free and access only devices.

“We were great believers in the server-based computing model and wanted an evolutionary approach to our IT infrastructure,” said Adrian. “We quickly decided that thin clients were the way forward.”

Swinton drew-up a design specification for the roll-out and evaluated a number of thin client manufacturers. “We went with Wyse for a number of reasons,” said Swinton project manager Rob Davidson. “Wyse are thin client specialists. It is their business. The quality of their engineering and research and development people impressed us. During the project design stage, Wyse were able to give us detailed technical expertise to allow us to finalise our thinking on the technical environment to be deployed.

“The Wyse management software, Rapport, was also a key factor. It allows us to manage and upgrade our

1,500 units centrally - saving us time and money. As well as these added benefits, they were also competitive on price.”

Wyse Rapport allows customers to quickly and easily implement protocol enhancements made by Citrix and Microsoft to the server-based computing software as well as eliminating the need to physically visit each desktop while keeping up to date, maximising IS staff efficiency.

Swinton began the design concept for the project in January, evaluated thin clients over a two month period and then went out to tender. Using Wyse, they piloted 8 projects across branches in May and rolled out 1500 Wyse WinTerm 8235LE devices from June to September 2002.

The WinTerm 8235LE is a flexible terminal for those who need cost effective access to local Windows applications which cannot be server based. Because the WinTerm 8235LE utilises the Microsoft(r) Windows NT(r) 4.0 Embedded operating system, Windows applications which cannot be server-based can be embedded in the terminal, multimedia applications can be accessed locally, and with local Internet Explorer 5.5, there is full Internet and intranet access with plug-in support.

The Benefits

The roll-out of the Wyse WinTerms has already delivered major benefits. “Our branch staff are still able to run their traditional applications using an emulator window and we have already been able to deploy a number of new applications which are accessed mainly through the thin client web browser.”

“The project was delivered on time and the Wyse plug and play

WinTerms assisted us greatly. Prior to delivery, Wyse tailored the thin client settings to our requirements at the factory, allowing us to take delivery and instantly get the new WinTerms up and running. This flexibility and the willingness of Wyse to assist us in the project design at the outset, really set the company apart from the competition.”

Technical details

- Applications accessed:
 - Local Teamtalk Emulator - access local Unix based applications
 - Internet Explorer 5.5 - access to central applications / intranet content over a Wide Area Network
- Number of users:
 - 1500 WinTerm users
- Wyse WinTerm model:
 - Wyse 8235LE series terminals
 - 64 to 96 Mb Flash
 - 96 to 128Mb RAM
- Network used:
 - LAN, WAN