

Hanley Building Society

Building society secures data and application responsiveness with Star's communication services

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About Hanley Building Society

Hanley Building Society has a long and illustrious heritage dating back more than 150 years. Based in North Staffordshire, the mutual building society has four branch offices spread across the region and offers a range of mortgage and financial services to its customers. In 2009, a move of its Stoke-on-Trent head office prompted a review of its data communications by Computer Systems Manager, Ian Stone.

A Mandate for Change

Although the office move only involved relocating a short distance up the road, it offered the opportunity to re-evaluate the Society's requirements for the next five years and beyond, to ensure that they provided optimum value for money and the scalability to accommodate future growth plans. The Society was using leased lines with an ISDN back-up facility, directly linking the head office to each of the outlying branch offices and agency partners. The main usage of the communication lines involved transaction processing between the branches and the central data centre, which houses the corporate database and back-office processing for a number of critical applications.

Managing Data & Application Responsiveness

Ian and his team decided that they wanted someone to deliver a fully managed and secure communications solution that would easily scale to meet future demand. The remit was for a service that linked each of the branch offices with head office, providing built in redundancy and resiliency.

"The fully managed virtual firewall is managed 24/7 by Star's team of security experts which we can access and control remotely without having to deal with the burden of its day-to-day management."

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**Ian Stone, Computer Systems Manager,
Hanley Building Society**

On researching suppliers Ian found that there were many managed service providers available that could provide most of what he was looking for, but he also felt it was imperative to work with a partner he could trust, and perhaps one with an existing track record. Star was already providing the building society's internet services and Ian knew that as they owned their own data centres, Star had a great appreciation for the management of communication networks and the importance of keeping applications responsive and with maximum up-time. This background of relevant experience as well as the trust built up with the Star team over a number of years led Ian to work with Star again to design and roll out a solution that he felt was appropriate for the Society and its needs.

Partnership Offers Peace of Mind

Reflecting on the benefits of the new communications infrastructure, complete with a hosted firewall for security, Ian professes to be very satisfied with the new solution: "We were looking to solve some very real and important business issues with this project, so it was not simply a cost cutting exercise. The main drivers for this change were resilience and scalability, which we simply didn't have before on an effective or cost efficient basis. However, like any new solution the Society considers, this one also had to prove cost effective with increased efficiencies wherever possible."

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Ian offers some advice from his experience: "I would advise anyone considering a similar move to ensure that they are very clear about their objectives, then to research the market carefully before inviting a number of providers to discuss your needs in more detail and offer a solution. But most of all it is critical to find a partner with the right specialist skills so they can provide a level of consultancy that you must be willing to listen to and consider. We found it enlightening to take advice on approaches that we simply hadn't initially considered, because we didn't have the skills in-house to do this on our own, so taking advice from someone you can trust is critical to success. In our own case we feel the partnership with Star meant that the solution we chose was a richer and more appropriate one than what we had in mind when we first set out. We now have a more complete service with enhanced levels of security and a single service level agreement covering everything from one provider."

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A Stronger Business Model Based on Technology

According to Ian: "For a business like the Hanley, who cannot operate without a communications network, the move to Star's managed service gives our senior executives the peace of mind that they can deliver a continuous service to our customers. Even in the event of some unforeseen disaster that closes one of the branch offices we could have our people operational and working in no time at all. This coupled with the day-to-day operational improvements we have achieved means we can better support the business objectives defined by the management team."

Ian concludes: "From the standpoint of the IT support team we now have much greater confidence in the resiliency of the communications network and have substantially eased the internal process of network management. We also have the many advantages of a fully managed virtual firewall which acts as a barrier between our business and the internet, keeping all threats away from our business critical systems. This is managed 24/7 by Star's team of security experts which we can access and control remotely without having to deal with the burden of its day-to-day management".