

Remote communication & collaboration made easy with Star

Introduction

Bowman Riley Architects, a leading architectural practice, was established in Skipton, North Yorkshire in 1968 and has grown to become a highly skilled and committed team of 50. Working with clients across a range of sectors including commercial, education, social housing and retail, Bowman Riley Architects has established a reputation for high quality, innovative design solutions with an award-winning combination of experience and creativity.

IT Services Through Partnership

Jane Dewar, the Practice Manager at Bowman Riley Architects, is responsible for the financial management of the company, as well as managing the company's IT operations. Bowman Riley Architects outsources as much of the IT function as possible in order to keep quality high, costs low and not be subject to a skills shortage by always having to hire highly qualified IT staff.

Supporting Business Growth Without Spiralling Costs

Jane begins, "The very nature of our work involves high-level design that generates large graphic and CAD files. This means it's essential to have a communications and network backbone that can transmit information quickly, irrespective of whether one of our practice members is working from the office, at a client's site, or from home. As you can imagine this can present

some challenges. Having the right partners who can provision the suitable systems to handle this level of communication and collaboration is essential to our business operations."

As Practice Manager, Jane is also determined that any new IT solution must be balanced between performance and cost. As the company has grown in recent years, and the requirements have evolved, she demands that the company must be able to meet these changing needs without adding numbers to the existing headcount.

Connecting Two Offices

The company operates from two sites in Leeds and Skipton and the issue of connecting the two offices presented new challenges for the company. Jane adds: "The size of CAD files, often with large images embedded in them means that we place large demands on our network. We regularly send attachments that are anything from 10-20 MB per file and upwards and this requires a connection that can support this activity." Using Star's NetStarIP network, based on MPLS technology (Multi Protocol Label Switching), Bowman Riley Architects now has the facilities required to send and receive large files between offices.

The benefit of NetStarIP has given the business the ability to meet a number of key challenges. The added network capacity means that the two sites can, in effect, work as one office, and have centralised access to all their data by working from one data server. With an MPLS network to support them, Bowman Riley Architects can now also take advantage of VOIP communications between the two offices.

A Flexible Workforce

NetStarIP has also enabled Bowman Riley Architects to implement secure, remote access to all applications and data in order to better support the business and provide more flexible working practices for staff. The company is now better equipped to deliver an improved service to their clients. The practice's architects manage a varied workload of high level projects and are often required to be on-site with clients for three or four days at a time. This means it is essential that they can connect to and update centrally-held CAD files, as well as being able to email colleagues and clients.



Importantly the system has to be user friendly as Jane comments, "Increasingly, our team need their laptops with them, wherever they may be working, as you can't look at CAD files on a PDA. We also have to remember that our staff don't have IT specialist skills so we must ensure that whatever system we select is simple to use and requires minimum support."

Star provides the facility for staff at Bowman Riley Architects to work remotely from any location and at any time, simply by using any Internet enabled computer with a web browser. They get full access to all their applications and data as if they were working in the office. Jane expands, "With our old system I was managing support calls as users needed to do a complex 'connect' exercise, which often resulted in them not bothering to use the system at all as it was overly complex. Now they just need to get on to the Internet and from there it's a straightforward process to securely connect to their applications and centralised files, which means we can be more responsive to our customers."

Future Proofing Business E-mail

Bowman Riley Architects now uses Star Business Email that is integrated with 'Newforma', a project information management system. This system streamlines the search and filing of documents and emails relating to specific client projects to improve internal management processes. This provides the team at Bowman Riley Architects with access to a fully supported, secure and feature-rich email solution at a predictable monthly cost and delivered as a fully managed service, without the need for any capital expenditure.

This also meant that Jane doesn't have to worry about the daily management issues of keeping the system in optimal running condition or worry about storage, back-up, business continuity and disaster recovery.

Using Star Business Email has meant that Bowman Riley Architects has not needed to employ additional IT support staff. To manage their systems in house, Jane estimates that they would have needed as least another two or three dedicated IT staff. The nature of the business means such a team would need to be on 24 hour standby, which is a level of service they simply couldn't replicate in-house. Jane says, "As the Star solution has built-in redundancy and guaranteed up-time, we also have the peace of mind that our staff could still communicate and access email from anywhere if we suffered a disaster at head office."



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