

Liberty Living

Student housing provider gains cost-effective communications platform

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About Liberty Living

Liberty Living, the Brandeaux Student Funds brand, is the fastest growing student and key worker accommodation provider in the UK. Providing over 10,000 beds in 14 Cities, Liberty Living works in conjunction with Universities and other representative bodies to provide modern, attractive and affordable accommodation to the growing student and key worker population in the UK.

Understanding the Issues

The exponential growth experienced by the higher education sector, is a challenge that Liberty Living has successfully capitalised upon. With a team of three IT personnel, managed by Grant Robertson, the department is responsible for an IT infrastructure that supports 150 employees across 20 sites throughout the UK. "The challenge we face is how to manage a widely distributed network of offices throughout the UK. We can't get out to manage them face to face as often as I would like, so we rely on good, solid uptime from our wide area networking providers to be able to do the majority of our work remotely." says Grant.

Network availability is critical for Liberty Living's IT users and students who require 24/7 access to core, e-based company applications, such as a web portal and ecommerce systems which enable students to book and pay for accommodation on line. Providing a cost effective, communications infrastructure which is readily available and meets service levels and user expectations is critical for the IT department. Prior to the relationship with Star, Grant and his team were responsible for managing 11 sites. Liberty Living became involved with Star in May 2006, following the acquisition of a company called 'Dom@ain', a student accommodation provider who was already being supplied with an MPLS

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Grant Robertson, IT Manager, Liberty Living

solution from Star. The acquisition of Dom@ain happened swiftly and resulted in an additional 7 sites, which needed to be integrated into Liberty Living's WAN infrastructure. This needed to be done effectively, whilst maintaining service levels and working within the constraints of the existing resources used to support the network of sites.

Addressing the Issues

Each of Liberty Living's existing 11 sites had a firewall and connection to the Internet supplied by Easynet and Vodafone. The additional seven sites gained through the Dom@ain acquisition had a single, centrally managed firewall and connectivity solution that provided; remote management, connectivity, secure hosting and customer infrastructure within an MPLS network.

With the challenge of managing a vast network and the requirement to create a single, manageable and secure infrastructure, Liberty Living proceeded to evaluate the MPLS service provided by Star. This, coupled with a move to new premises persuaded Liberty Living to transfer their existing 11 sites to the MPLS service. "Star performed well with the 7 sites we had, so we decided to move all our other sites into the MPLS network as well as asking Star to provide our new premises with high speed Ethernet connectivity to the Internet." says Grant.

Liberty Living's vast MPLS infrastructure now consists of Ethernet; back up leased line circuits into their head office, with the remaining sites utilising a mixture of ADSL and SDSL connectivity with a centrally managed firewall which protects the entire hosted and customer premise infrastructure. Combining both security and connectivity within the MPLS

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service has enabled Liberty Living to consolidate the administration of their office locations into a single, central and remotely managed network, reducing the amount of time needed to supervise their infrastructure.

The Benefits

Like other companies who have implemented an MPLS solution from Star, Liberty Living has been able to benefit from some cost reductions. With a small ratio of IT staff, the key benefit for Grant and his team is the ease of management of the MPLS solution. This has freed up their time to spend on other business priorities. "We are no longer having to maintain 11 separate firewalls and we aren't paying 11 times the licensing costs, per year, for a firewall." says Grant.

Speaking of the relationship with Star, Grant says "You know you are going to speak to a call centre in the UK the account manager is always available either in person, on the phone or by email."

Looking to the Future

Grant and his team are continually monitoring the technology market, looking for innovative ways to cost effectively scale IT infrastructure alongside business growth whilst also maintaining and improving service levels. "We are looking at introducing things like VoIP networks, to cut down on the costs we have with traditional analogue and ISDN systems which provides Internet access and landlines for students. In a nutshell, it's trying to provide a service without being a service provider."

For more information about Liberty Living visit: www.libertyliving.co.uk

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