

Winckworth Sherwood is a medium-sized London based law firm operating in around 16 sectors including local and central government, private and public sector, transport and infrastructure, leisure and entertainment, and education. A comprehensive range of legal services support these sectors including employment, commercial and property, dispute resolution, PFI projects, intellectual property/IT and outsourcing.

Established 200 years ago, the firm keeps up to date with new developments not just in legislation, but in technology reflecting their core values of being a modern, unified, and adaptable firm. Winckworth Sherwood was based in Westminster until a year ago, when the firm moved to new premises at London Bridge. In addition to their new premises, Winckworth Sherwood also has branch offices in Oxford and Chelmsford.



 excell



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Excell's SIP Solution Provides Major Benefits to Law Firm

The Challenge

The major challenge was to seamlessly move an expanding business to a new building combining the two London offices. A key element of the challenge was to select a secure telecoms system which would provide reliability, flexibility and deliver a high level of resilience. In addition, the new system would have to cater for the needs of the firm's home worker population and fit in with the firm's overall disaster recovery [DR] strategy.

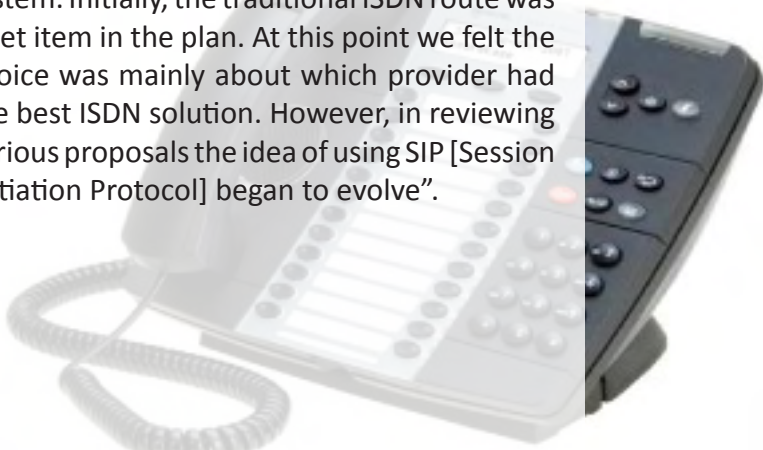
Winckworth Sherwood were more than satisfied with their existing Mitel 3300 system and use of ISDN30 circuit. Part of their challenge was to utilise this kit and other expensive legacy equipment in the new solution and implement their DR strategy.

Christel Aguila, Head of IT explains, "One of the key things brought about by the office move was the opportunity to look at the entire infrastructure. We reviewed our print facilities, wide area network and telecoms, including existing suppliers some with whom we had a long term relationship. The challenge was huge but the new modern premises presented us with the opportunity to introduce a more robust and resilient IT infrastructure. For the IT team, this was our first office move experience. In the height of a recession and with a few months of planning left, informed pragmatic decisions had to be made quickly and we were very much dependent on consultant input, our own research, and talking to other people who had gone through this experience. Four months to the move, we were still undecided on the technology and infrastructure for our telecommunication system. Initially, the traditional ISDN route was a set item in the plan. At this point we felt the choice was mainly about which provider had the best ISDN solution. However, in reviewing various proposals the idea of using SIP [Session Initiation Protocol] began to evolve".

Ashvin Patel (Ash), Infrastructure Manager, continued, "When the target date to move to a new building was decided, the partnership gave us an almost blank sheet in terms of selecting the technology for our future infrastructure. The new infrastructure would have to support future expansion and provide us with resilience and a disaster recovery facility. It wasn't a case of getting the cheapest option, we had a mission to get the best product and most cost effective solution that would meet our long term business needs. After narrowing down SIP providers, we spoke to Excell".

The Solution

The plan was always for a solution based on ISDN30 with DR provided from a remote site in Bracknell. Christel recalled, "Although it was late in the planning stage, the idea of using SIP still challenged me to do further research. Even Tom Vesey, the firm's Partnership Secretary and Head of Support Services inquired about the possibility of an Asterisk PBX with skype for SIP! Ashvin then embarked on a series of investigations, speaking to various suppliers again including BT, our existing supplier. Although ISDN30 was their main recommendation, their SIP alternative packages did not tie in with our DR plans; the costs were still high and the negative feedback about voice quality from different elements was an increasing concern. We felt that with the right bandwidth and configuration, the solution would work. SIP might not have gained full acceptance particularly within the legal industry, but it had the potential to offer us business advantages, hugely drive down our planned DR investment including monthly costs".



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Excell provided Winckworth Sherwood with two options: The first was aligned to their initial plan of using traditional ISDN30 circuits. This would include a DR plan such that any system failure at the Primary site at London Bridge would be taken care of by the backup system at the DR site in Bracknell via the existing MPLS [multiprotocol label switching]. The second option Excell offered was the SIP model incorporating the existing Mitel 3300. This solution would deliver key DR features that far outweigh the capabilities of ISDN 30, for example, DDI's/main numbers can be re-directed to multiple destinations whether it be home workers, mobiles, DR site, etc. A DR plan can be put in place in the event of a failure, calls would automatically re-route to those destinations ensuring business continuity. Using SIP technology on fixed data networks and DSL, the DR solution would also reduce telecommunication expenditure.



Collaboration: Do something amazing

The Excell Factor

“Looking back” said Ash, “We had a number of proposals from major suppliers offering ISDN and SIP. Although Excell had relatively little experience in the legal sector, we chose them because they were the only supplier we talked to who were fully committed to a SIP solution. They also had the SIP experience that gave us the assurance that they were competent and confident in their ability to meet our requirements and deliver what they promised. Excell were also very good at coming back to us, to make sure that we were comfortable with the technology we were choosing and our queries were always answered”.

A key factor in favour of Excell was that the level of compression they use in their SIP implementation guarantees a good level of voice quality which is at least as good as ISDN 30.

“In addition to voice quality” commented Christel, “We also had a number of other critical questions to resolve eg: “How much bandwidth will we require? Will we move all of our infrastructure to SIP or leave the branches as they are? How do we provide our manual/online faxing service? What sort of resiliency can a typical SIP solution provide? How will

this affect our existing Internet providers, will their pricing plans stack up? What sort of guarantees will we get should it fail on day one? What type of commitment and support will Excell offer?”.

A teleconference was set up between the team and Excell’s most senior people who explained exactly how the technology worked. Christel said “They understood our fears of coming out of our comfort zone into something completely new despite being advised to “not go there” until the technology was proven and mature”. Excell invited the Winckworth Sherwood team to a demonstration of SIP, where they showed the full capability and flexibility of the system. Excell also gave a live demonstration of the voice quality provided by their SIP implementation. It was during this demonstration that it became clear to the Winckworth Sherwood team that their DR requirement could be delivered by SIP technology, eliminating the need for a second phone system in Bracknell which had been part of the original DR strategy, thus considerable cost savings could be made.

“Not only did we save money by not investing in a second system at Bracknell” explained Ash, “But the SIP system meant that we did not have to provide staff with new handsets at home in case of a disaster, so we also gained more cost savings in terms of handsets and licenses”.

The requirement to support home-workers was easily met by Excell’s call management portal which enables a member of staff to make calls from home as if the call is being made from the office.

Implementation

To meet Winckworth Sherwood's tight schedule, the hardware installation in the new premises and the configuration of the SIP system had to be accomplished within a month. In reviewing the project, Ash commented, "The pre-planning with Excell and their relationship with Mitel, meant that by day three of the start up, I could say, yes, that's a job well done. At the end of the day when you feel that everything has worked out so brilliantly, you just think it was great considering there were so many other challenges we had to face alongside getting telecoms to work".

Benefits

Excell, with Mitel, has provided Winckworth Sherwood with a unified communications system which offers maximum flexibility, easy management options, good voice quality and a simplified DR facility. After the initial teething problems, twelve months on, there is no difference in the voice quality between the old ISDN 30 and the new Excell SIP solution.

A key benefit of Excell's SIP solution was that although Winckworth Sherwood had been advised that it was not possible to keep their existing phone numbers as London Bridge is on a different exchange, the SIP solution enabled the firm to keep their original phone numbers.

The solution gives staff the ability to divert calls to their Blackberries or other phones, using the Call Management Portal (CMP) which is accessed either by an Outlook toolbar or via a web portal.

Christel added "It's all good providing all the functionality and systems to staff, but education and awareness is also always an issue. We set up "contactpoint", our firm's online emergency page for staff. This allows them to access our "how to" pages online from home or whilst on the road. This covers all other DR related guides from accessing emails to using the Call Management Portal. Our intranet was also revamped to place emphasis on all the new business continuity services provided which are usually not given much notice until something happens".

The SIP solution has reduced system downtime as calls are diverted at the SIP trunk rather than at the new building's PBX, so even if there is a problem with the building, the system can be diverted by Excell. The Excell SIP system provides multi-level password security enabling the network manager to tightly control access to the system, thus increasing security.

"We are pleased," said Christel, "that we pursued the use of SIP and that we have ended up working with Excell who worked hard with us from project initiation through to implementation. To date, they continue to work with us to improve customer and account management services which is very important to us".

The success of the IT office move implementation is also attributed to having the full support of senior management who took a very proactive involvement in regular office move meetings and in understanding what it was the IT team were trying to achieve.

The Bottom line

The overall infrastructure investment has provided Winckworth Sherwood and their 300 staff with more than double the bandwidth, further resilient lines for the branch offices and a more robust network and telecoms infrastructure. Christel concluded, "Firms can benefit from even the smallest savings. As a result of going the SIP way, DDI call and maintenance charges have reduced by at least 25% in the first year. We also have a better relationship with our telecoms supplier".

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