Swinton improves application performance for 2,500 sales advisors

There aren't many other industries where competition is as intense. Insurance brokers today compete against a rising number of cut-price online comparison web sites, as well as established providers of insurance services. In this environment, and especially in an uncertain economic climate, cost-efficient business operations are an imperative.

The UK's largest high street broker, Swinton needed to improve application performance for 2,500 employees based at branches all over the country. Rather than replacing its existing Wyse thin client terminals, the company selected Ericom's PowerTerm WebConnect RemoteView solution. This strategy led to a massive improvement in the performance of a vital new business application and a saving of over £400,000.

> *Ericom's software has more than doubled the life of our thin clients, significantly increasing the return on the original investment made in them.*

Rob Davidson
Head of IT infrastructure
Swinton

INDUSTRY
Insurance

CUSTOMER
Swinton

PRODUCT
Ericom® PowerTerm® WebConnect RemoteView

CHALLENGES
- Improve the performance of a new revenue-generating application
- Extend life of 2,500 existing thin client terminals
- Minimise IT expenditure

SOLUTION
- Deploy Ericom's PowerTerm WebConnect Remote View to centrally deliver applications to the existing thin clients

BENEFITS
- Response time for revenue-generating application improved from 7.3 seconds to 0.5 seconds
- Life of existing thin client terminals doubled
- Investment in Ericom solution saved over £400,000

With 442 branches and two call centres, Swinton is the largest high street insurance chain in the UK. It has over 3,000 employees, of whom around 2,500 are based in branches and call centres. These agents use thin client terminals with embedded web browsers to access insurer policy information, contact lists and a direct debit application via the company's intranet.

Swinton wanted to make better use of its customer information to track policy renewal due dates and then present this information to the branches as leads. An in-house development team therefore created a new lead management system using ASP.net and Ajax technologies. However, when deployed, this new solution consumed most of the available bandwidth in the company's existing lines to the branches. In addition, the solution overloaded the company's thin client devices, which were already three to four years old and did not have powerful processors. "The thin client devices that we had across our entire branch network effectively became end-of-life because of this new application," explains Rob Davidson, Head of IT Infrastructure at Swinton.

Due to the poor performance issues, Swinton's sales advisors didn't use the new lead management application as much as they should have. "The system was virtually unusable because it took so long to display the list of leads and refresh the pages," says Davidson. "As a result, we weren't optimising our leads and making the most of our opportunity to win more business."

A cost-effective option
Swinton recognised that it had to resolve this situation and investigated several possible solutions. At first, the company considered replacing its existing Wyse thin terminals with new thin terminals that incorporated faster processors and Internet Explorer version 6. "We found, however, that this option didn't give us a massive improvement in performance," recalls Davidson. "Our ASP.NET/Ajax-based application was still too much for the thin clients to handle. The deployment of 2,500 new thin clients nationwide would also have been very costly and disruptive to the business."

Next, Swinton investigated a solution based on Citrix technology, but this option was quickly ruled out on the basis of price. "The per-connection license cost was very expensive for a company of our size. I don't think that I would ever have got the budget approved!" says Davidson. "Citrix would have cost four times more than our investment in Ericom solutions."

Swinton also ruled out other Terminal Server solutions. "We wanted a solution that would present users with a seamless window and carry out load balancing across a number of servers at the back end," explains Davidson. "Ericom met these requirements and was the most cost-effective option. It cost around one third of the amount that we would otherwise have had to have spent on replacing our existing thin clients and saved us more than £400,000."

" *We wanted a solution that would present users with a seamless window and carry out load balancing across a number of servers at the back end. Ericom met these requirements and was the most cost-effective option.* **"**

A significant increase in performance
Swinton selected Ericom's PowerTerm WebConnect RemoteView, a server-based computing solution that provides flexible and secure access to applications via thin clients and personal computers. The implementation of PowerTerm Web Connect was carried out centrally using Swinton's existing terminal management software.

At the time, Swinton had two different types of thin terminals in its estate, one of which Ericom supported and the other which it didn't. Ericom therefore developed the required client software specifically for Swinton.

As soon as PowerTerm WebConnect went live, the company's new lead management system started to ▶▶

deliver the sub-second response times that users needed. "Performance improved from 7.3 seconds to display a screen to just 0.5 seconds," reports Davidson. "That kind of performance improvement doesn't go unnoticed by users."

A stronger sales position

Employees in Swinton's branches all around the country now use the new lead management system as a part of their daily routine. As a result, the company has a far greater opportunity to increase revenues from sales activities.

"Sales advisors can make sure that they are contacting the customer at the right time, when they know that an existing policy is about to expire, and they can capitalise on opportunities to cross sell other insurance products," says Davidson. "We are now in a much stronger position to prioritise leads and optimise sales."

PowerTerm WebConnect is used by every one of Swinton's 2,500 branch employees to access central applications and vital sales documentation. In addition, all of the company's direct debit transactions are set up using an intranet-based application that is delivered via the Ericom solution.

A higher return on investment

By deploying PowerTerm WebConnect, Swinton has managed to defer the replacement of all its thin clients. "This would have been a fairly massive investment and a big logistics exercise," says Davidson. "Nearly two years after implementing Ericom, we still have the same thin client devices in the branches, and I estimate that they have another

Personal Lines Broker of the Year 2008

Swinton Group was named Personal Lines Broker of the Year at The British Insurance Awards 2008. It scooped the accolade at an awards ceremony held at the Royal Albert Hall, two months after announcing record end of year profits and its seventh year of consecutive growth.

Swinton was praised for its personal approach to customer service and the company's successful strategy of integrating online growth and call centre support with its extensive network of high street branches. Over the past year, Swinton has successfully demonstrated how it responds to the demands of customers for products relevant to their needs, coupled with top quality service.

18 months of life left in them yet. The Ericom software has more than doubled the life of our thin clients, significantly increasing the return on the original investment made in them."

Swinton has recently completely overhauled its intranet and upgraded many of its intranet-based applications to include more content, graphics and calculator tools. "If we didn't have PowerTerm WebConnect, the intranet improvements that we could have made would have been very

limited," believes Davidson. "We are now able to deliver richer centralised services with a consistent and predictable use of bandwidth."

He concludes: "The Ericom solution doesn't cause us any headaches; it just sits there and keeps going."

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