



Business Services

Customer Story Business Services Industry

Accounting firm improves client service, saves time and improves its bottom line with PowerTerm WebConnect



“PowerTerm WebConnect honestly does make such a difference to my business. My employees and I are more efficient, more profitable and more content.”

Sinéad O’Neill
Chartered Accountant
S. O’Neill & Company

In the business services sector, the two most important resources are people and time. People are fundamental because they determine the type and quality of service that a business can deliver. Time is precious because it directly affects the amount of money that a business can earn.

S. O’Neill & Company is a firm of chartered accountants in Northern Ireland. Like many other companies in the business services sector, it invoices its clients based on the time spent working on projects — so any wasted time equals lost revenue.

Company owner, Sinéad O’Neill was wasting an hour or more every day, waiting for files to synchronise between her laptop and the company network. In addition, both she and other employees were making extra journeys to the office when it would have been more time-efficient to work from home. Following the implementation of Ericom’s PowerTerm WebConnect RemoteView, the business saved time, improved the work/life balance for employees and doubled its income.

INDUSTRY

Business Services/Accountancy

CUSTOMER

S. O’Neill & Company

PRODUCT

Ericom® PowerTerm® WebConnect RemoteView

CHALLENGES

- Reduce wasted time to increase the proportion of billable hours
- Remove the need to synchronise laptops with the company network
- Maintain document and information control while working remotely
- Eliminate the need for extra journeys to the office
- Facilitate flexible/mobile working for employees without compromising security

SOLUTION

- Deploy Ericom’s PowerTerm WebConnect RemoteView
- Allow employees to access files and applications from their home computers

BENEFITS

- Less wasted time, leading to a 100% increase in income
- Better document version control, due to no longer having to synchronise computers
- Fewer journeys, particularly out of hours
- Improved employee productivity
- Greater employee satisfaction from flexible working and an improved work / life balance
- Improved client service

“Without effective IT systems we would be left behind”

Since founding her own accounting firm in 2006, Sinead O’Neill had steadily grown her client base and successfully expanded her business. Now, she has nine employees and a strong local reputation. However, like many professional women, she has to balance the demands of her work and clients against the needs of her family. With very little time to spare, she has to make sure that she — and her employees — work as efficiently as possible.

A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME

Historically, accountancy involved a lot of paperwork and manual calculations. Today, however, everything involves IT. There are specific financial software programmes for different types of tax calculation and a far greater dependence on the Internet. “HM Revenue is moving more and more of its business online, and accountancy firms like ours have to be able to follow suit,” O’Neill says. “Without effective IT systems, we would be left behind.”

S. O’Neill & Company is dependent on a large number of different applications, some of which only run in a SQL server environment. Different employees often work with the same applications and contribute to the same financial reports, so version control is very important for the business. This is not a problem when everyone is working in the office, on the office network, but it becomes a major challenge when employees work remotely.

Whenever O’Neill worked from home or from a client’s office using her laptop, she would have to synchronise it with the office network both before leaving her desk and on her return. Then, if a colleague had opened or used a file in any way while she was out of the office, O’Neill would have to spend time comparing document versions to

make sure that no changes were deleted.

“In the mornings, it used to take me around half an hour to synchronise my laptop with the network, and then I would have to do that again at the end of the day, so that I could work from home that evening,” says O’Neill. “I was wasting at least an hour a day. On days when I replicated my laptop before and after client meetings as well, I would waste even more time.”

There was also the issue of disaster recovery. While the most up-to-date version of a file or tax computation was on O’Neill’s laptop, there was no back up of it.

A CHANCE MEETING

O’Neill found out about Ericom via a chance meeting. She was visiting one of her clients and struck up a conversation with the client’s IT support provider, who happened to be visiting the office at the same time for a different meeting. O’Neill briefly explained her IT challenges and was amazed to learn that there might be a very easy way to resolve them.

The IT support company visited O’Neill’s business a few weeks later and provided her with information about Ericom’s PowerTerm WebConnect RemoteView. This server-based computing solution provides users with secure access to

their work and applications via the Internet. Users can access the system from the office, a laptop, their home computers or any computer with an Internet connection.

One of O’Neill’s previous IT support providers had told her that a remote access solution wouldn’t work for her business, because she had so many software packages. To help convince O’Neill that this wasn’t the case, the IT support provider set up

Employees are able to do more billable client activity each month... and travel less by adopting flexible working practices and more client contact.

a trial system, to give S. O’Neill & Company remote access to three key applications via PowerTerm WebConnect for a two-week period.

The results of the trial were conclusive. “I was quite taken aback by it,” recalls O’Neill. “PowerTerm WebConnect worked a treat and I was very excited about it. Even in just two weeks, my efficiency and work / life balance improved.”

A MORE EFFICIENT WAY OF WORKING

As soon as S. O’Neill & Company was up and running with PowerTerm WebConnect for all of its applications, the company started to realise significant time efficiencies. “I have worked out that I save a minimum of one hour a day by not synchronising my laptop every morning and at the end of every day,” explains O’Neill. “Some days I used to synchronise my laptop before and after client meetings as well. As I couldn’t do anything else on the computer while this



synchronisation was happening, this was a complete waste of my time."

Previously, O'Neill used to come back into the office three or four evenings a week. Now that she can work effectively from home instead, she saves a further hour or two every week due to less travel time.

If one of the firm's clients faces a deadline for an audit, O'Neill and her colleagues can complete computations and reports in the evenings, without having to stay late or go back into the office in the evenings or at weekends. It takes a lot of the pressure away from employees, because they can work more flexibly to meet deadlines.

O'Neill has found that when she and a colleague are working on the same financial report in Sage, they can both access it at the same time using PowerTerm WebConnect, without having to take turns. "If we didn't have WebConnect, one of us would have to work from a copy," explains O'Neill. "Now we can both work on the same file at the same time and all updates are incorporated and visible in real time. It's fantastic."

AN INCREASED BUSINESS TURNOVER

Because O'Neill and her employees can now work more efficiently, they are able to do more 'billable' client activity each month and invoice for a higher proportion of hours worked. O'Neill calculates that her business' income doubled in the first four months following the implementation of PowerTerm WebConnect in November 2008.

"Turnover between December 2008 and March 2009 was double what it had been over the same period in the previous year," says O'Neill. "This was an amazing achievement and, being honest about it, we did this



while working fewer hours overtime than we had in the previous year."

PowerTerm WebConnect also enables the accountants at S. O'Neill & Company to offer a more prompt and efficient service to clients and the Inland Revenue. For example, if someone wants details about a tax computation and O'Neill is on holiday, she or a colleague can now easily connect to the office network remotely, from any computer in any location, to provide a quick, accurate response.

She explains: "Previously, I would have had to have told the client that I would phone them back; I would have had to phone the office and ask someone else to look up the information; then they would have had to phone me back; and I would have had to phone the client back. With WebConnect, we save all those phone calls and provide a better level of service."

A BETTER WORK / LIFE BALANCE

Most of the employees at S. O'Neill & Company have babies or young children. Incredibly, O'Neill herself has four children, who are still only of Primary School age. Following the

implementation of PowerTerm WebConnect, everyone in the business is taking advantage of the ability to work from home when needed, rather than working late in the office.

O'Neill says: "When we reach our busy period and it is necessary to work extra hours, my employees can do so from the comfort of their own homes and don't have to spend extra time in the office."

The advantages of PowerTerm WebConnect are particularly evident to employees during the busy month of January, just prior to the end of the Tax Year. "It made such a difference to us all in January, because we could all work from home," says O'Neill. "Even my husband loves PowerTerm WebConnect! It makes my home life so much easier, and my employees have told me that it makes a real difference to their family lives too."

"Staff are happier and that creates a more settled office," remarks O'Neill in conclusion. "PowerTerm WebConnect honestly does make such a difference to my business. My employees and I are more efficient, more profitable and more content."

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