



Convergence – the key to flexible working?

Dan Cole, product director, THUS

Next-generation network (NGN) solutions have the power to fundamentally change the way we work. The technological revolution in the workplace pours information into our lives and we are faced with the challenge of using this information effectively.

The wide variety of public sector organisations and the range of disparate services they deliver further compounds this information challenge. Whatever strategic policy direction has already been taken around information management, utilisation and dissemination, it will remain a fluid process subject to the needs of data security and the continuous process of evolution in the capacity of connections and the diversity and location of connection devices.

The solution is convergence – bringing voice and data onto one fibre line and increasing the ways in which centralised applications can be accessed swiftly and securely by employees or clients, wherever they may be. The reduction in network costs inherent in a single converged network is only a beginning – an NGN is a whole new network bringing a raft of benefits and a range of opportunities.

While deployment of an NGN should be part of an organisation's wider strategic plan, it remains a key building block for business change. The scalability and flexibility of the right NGN solution will make organisations such as housing providers more cohesive

and bring benefits through centralisation and virtualisation, as well as providing the ideal platform to expand the range of flexible working options.

The notion of work/life balance is not about working fewer hours; instead flexibility is the key to maintaining a happy, healthy and productive workforce focused more on achieving strategic goals and meeting organisational objectives than on the vagaries of commuting, travelling to meetings or ensuring that their home life is organised with military precision.

Whether from home or on the road, employees equipped with the correct technology, connectivity and access to centralised applications will contribute more effectively and efficiently, and manage their workload practically, while travelling or around the needs of being a parent or a carer. Given the right converged solution and appropriate and secure access technologies, the office network can come to the home, or the hotel, in the field or at the client meeting; to wherever it needs to be to enable the employee to contribute most effectively.

With the right technology in place, organisations can increase employee diversity, making it easier for single mothers or people with disabilities to be part of the workforce. In this target-driven world, converged network platforms can make a real contribution to achieving an organisation's key goals and make a genuine commitment to enhancing the social fabric of our communities.

In terms of front-line service delivery,

converged networks open up new horizons, supporting the idea of taking the service to the client and overcoming physical and geographic barriers to fully maximise engagement with excluded groups of all kinds.

Taking a wider view, network convergence addresses the green agenda. As well as reducing the volume of commuter traffic gaining efficiency through employees reducing their travelling time, and reducing costs through increased voice and video conferencing, network-enabled remote and flexible working allows housing providers to introduce hot-desking, thus streamlining their office estate.

The benefits of convergence can be far reaching and can result in a more productive workforce, enable better work-life balance, reduce organisations' carbon footprint, streamline IT management and enhance workplace collaboration. There are no end of positive outcomes apparent, so where is the catch?

It clearly involves physical and organisational adjustment but perhaps more challengingly, real and significant changes in attitude and behaviour that can only be achieved by strong leadership and a genuine commitment to cultural change from the top of an organisation.

A single, converged network will make companies greener and leaner, staff more efficient and organisations more effective in all aspects of what they do. The challenge for IT managers is to make this happen now.

Dan Cole is product director for THUS.



West Whitlawburn Housing Co-operative has launched an innovative fibre-optic communications network from Occam Networks for its residents.

Supplied through reseller Fibre Options, WWHC is using Occam's BLC 6000 multi-service access platform with gigabit passive optical network capabilities.

Paul Farrell, director, WWHC, said, "We believe that there is huge potential to be gained for

our community in developing a next-generation communications infrastructure that is future proof and will offer our tenants more than 'triple play'. Digital exclusion compounds social exclusion and we see the provision of superior broadband as a critical component of improving the quality of our residents' lives."

WWHC's network uses many of Occam's integrated tools to provide the core communication services as well as services

designed to improve the lives of its users from a single platform. These include home help alarms via a VoIP service, CCTV over fibre optics to ensure evidential quality video and the capacity for access to community-generated video content.

With its new network in place, WWHC now plans to develop a community portal for residents to access voluntary and statutory services from their own homes.