

Enabling smarter, more convenient and productive working at a West Midlands council

Case Study:

Connect Express helps a West Midlands council design and install a completely integrated voice, video and data IP network that supports unified communications, video conferencing and application streaming.



Business Challenge

Rationalise telephone systems, provide for hot-desking and upgrade the core network to create a completely integrated IP network that supports smarter, more productive working.

Industry Sector

Local Authority

Solution

A new Cisco IP telephony, core and wireless network infrastructure designed and installed by Connect Express.

Business Benefits

- Improved building utilisation with hot desking and home working
- Less travel as video conferencing is introduced
- Improved responsiveness by routing calls to a number of devices
- More convenient connection via wireless 'touch down' points
- Reduced cost with a single license per user for all functionality

About the Customer

Part of the West Midlands that's famous for its industrial past, the area is fast becoming a progressive modern community. The borough is centred around a main town but also includes five other smaller towns, plus numerous villages. And whilst some areas are densely populated, over a third of the borough is open park and farmland.

Urban regeneration programmes are transforming the borough with revitalised shopping, leisure, cultural, and industrial areas that are attracting visitors for short leisure breaks.

Property rationalisation

Like many councils, the borough is constantly looking at how it can provide greater value to its citizens. One of the council's major initiatives was its property rationalisation programme, which also provided the perfect opportunity to re-evaluate its phone systems. The organisation was running two different telephone systems and, on the oldest system, it was very difficult to make moves and changes. Plus, as part of its smarter working initiative to improve productivity, the council wanted to introduce hot desking and home working.

Trusted partner

The organisation had a long association with Connect Express, so it was natural for the council to ask its experts to take a look at its requirements and suggest a solution. "Connect Express has been a trusted partner of ours for a number of years and we'd always found its people to be highly knowledgeable and flexible," says the Network Manager.

Connect Express had several meetings with the network team to fully understand what it was trying to achieve and design a system that would not only meet the council's immediate needs but give it additional opportunities in the future. The final solution Connect Express came up with was based on Cisco technologies.

Greater flexibility

One of the council's existing exchanges was from Cisco and there was already a major investment in phones and expertise. The exchange ran the automated payment system and had already been used to successfully trial hot desking in one area.



Why Connect Express

“The people at Connect Express are responsive and flexible, they have proved they have the technical expertise, they understand our organisation and what we already have, and everything they have done for us has met our needs and worked as they said it would.”

“The bottom line is that we’ve worked with Connect Express for eight or nine years and they have never let us down. That is saying something.”

However, the council did actively look at other companies, including the supplier of its other PBX system. Connect Express arranged for the network team to visit Cisco to learn about its technology roadmap and have demonstrations of its solutions. It quickly became apparent that selecting Cisco solutions not only protected our existing investment, it also gave us greater flexibility for the future,” explains the Network Manager. “Plus, Connect Express was able to negotiate a very good price.”

Highly flexible

With the solution chosen, the council asked Connect Express to implement it. “We could have deployed the solution ourselves,” says the Network Manager. “But we know the consultants at Connect Express have the in-depth expertise needed. They are also highly flexible in the way they work and they always make sure they train our people as they go along. So it made sense for them to do it, so we could focus on other projects.”

Significant difference

Today the first phase of the project has been rolled out and the council is pleased. It has installed around 1,500 phones, which covers around 2,000 people hot desking. It has also put in Cisco handsets and routers for about twenty home workers. Today the council can provide all its employees with voice mail and extension mobility. In addition it is looking at video conferencing and unified communications. The solution is already increasing both collaboration and productivity.

Core upgrade

As the phone system was being replaced it became apparent that the council’s underlying network would need upgrading to provide greater resiliency in the LAN Infrastructure.

But that wasn’t the only reason for upgrading. The core Local Area Network (LAN) was having to cope with an increasing amount of application and video streaming. The data centre Storage Area Network (SAN) only had a four gigabit connection and, as part of its disaster recovery plan, the organisation had entered into an agreement with another council whereby each council would have a back up SAN at the other’s data centre. To cope with all the changes that were happening the SAN needed to be put onto the core network, with a 10 Gigabit backbone and 1 Gigabit to the desktop.

Core upgrade

Once again the Network Manager turned to Connect Express to help him. It made sense, as he explains. “With some suppliers you feel like you are kicking an elephant,” he says. “The people at Connect Express are responsive and flexible, they have proved they have the technical expertise, they understand our organisation and what we already have, and everything they have put in for us has met our needs and worked as they said it would.”

The solution Connect Express and the council chose was based on Cisco Nexus and Catalyst switches. Choosing Cisco was a safe decision. It protected the organisation’s existing investment and understanding. The Network Team was also convinced of its reliability. The existing core Cisco network had lasted nine years and they wanted the new network to meet their requirements for a minimum of five years.

Connect Express worked with the Network Team to define the new architecture, bringing in experts from Cisco and other organisations to validate the design of the core network and the connection to the SAN. Experts from Connect Express also physically built the new network, helped with the testing and trained the council’s staff. Today the new core network is in place, with a bridge to the old network, and the Network Team is gradually migrating connections to it.



“It’s a brave manager that updates the core LAN and telephony at the same time,” says the Network Manager. “And I have to say it was quite nerve-wracking, but thanks to Connect Express it all went smoothly.

G-Cloud security

A key consideration of the new network was ensuring compliance with the security requirements of the Government’s G-Cloud programme. Without it, the council would not be able to run its benefits service. “The requirements for compliance get tighter and tighter each year,” says the Network Manager. “As we refreshed the network Connect Express helped us put in place access control and defence features that will help us maintain compliancy for the next five years at least.”

More convenient WiFi

Connect Express has also helped the authority put in place a more convenient wireless network, both from IT’s point of view and how employees use it. All the access points are now controlled centrally. As a result, the Network Team can very quickly deploy access points wherever they are needed, including on the Wide Area Network (WAN).

Social workers used to have to use 3G dongles to access the systems they needed. With the new wireless network the Network Team has been able to create ‘touch down’ points for them, with network and phone access. It’s a much more convenient solution.

Continuous improvement

Connect Express’ involvement at the authority is ongoing, with more improvements planned to make working at the council even smarter. The Network Team is testing video conferencing and single number reach, and looking at leveraging its new wireless network to allow employees to connect with their own devices. Consultants from Connect Express are also helping the organisation look at how it can move from ADSL connections to SIP trunking, which will provide the council with greater redundancy. Plus they are working with the Network Team to design its disaster recovery facilities.

“The bottom line is that we’ve worked with Connect Express for eight or nine years and they have never let us down,” continues the Network Manager. “That is saying something. Add in the technical expertise, the fact that its people are flexible and understand our business, and that their prices are good value and I can’t see any reason why we would want to stop using them.”

“It quickly became apparent that selecting Cisco solutions not only protected our existing investment, it also gave us greater flexibility in the future. Plus, Connect Express was able to negotiate a very good price for us.”

Primary Cisco products used

- Cisco Presence
- IP Manager Assistant
- Mobility and Single Number Reach
- Unified Communications Contact Centre Express
- Cisco Unified Workspace Licensing
- Cisco WebEx
- Cisco Unity
- Cisco Nexus and Catalyst switches
- Cisco Prime LAN Management
- Cisco Secure Access Control Server
- Cisco WLAN Controller and Lightweight Access Points



About Connect Express

Founded in 1997, Connect Express specialises in high quality network design, implementation and support. Our services cover the full lifecycle of today's high performance networks, including design, consultancy, hardware supply, installation, implementation, project management, maintenance, training and support.

Today's networks are the glue that binds organisations together, which means they must be highly resilient and secure. We understand this and are passionate about working closely with our customers to design, deliver and maintain superior network solutions that enable them to meet their business goals, today and tomorrow.

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