



Getting better results from better connections

Case study – BTnet dedicated internet access

When four schools in Hampshire decided to join together to become a Multi-Academy Trust, they needed a network that would help them save money and share resources. What they didn't expect was that it would be so much faster and more manageable too.

GFM is currently made up of four schools – Bay House Academy, Brune Park Community School, Gomer Junior School and LWS Academy. Their goal is to provide better opportunities to all their students by combining their skills and resources. But to do this they needed a reliable network that could handle up to 4,000 users on different devices, as well as desperately needing to cut costs.

After working out the total cost of their existing networks, they approached their BT Local Business to see if there was a cheaper solution. BT suggested using a BTnet dedicated leased line internet access to create one private network for all four schools. It halved their costs, gave them a much faster connection and more control over the system. And it was all done to a very tight deadline.

“The main focus was about money,” says Ross Evans, Network Architect at GFMAT, the company hired by GFM to help them choose the right network. “We needed to save money for the good of the Gosport and Fareham learner.” A shared network has meant huge savings and the schools can share administrative resources, and know that staff and students can work wherever and however suits them best.

Case study profile

Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust
Education sector
Four schools, with up to 4,000 students between them

Challenge

To reduce costs and provide a fast, reliable network that could cope with multiple classes using various resources. To have more control over the network, and to keep it safe for the students.

Solution

A BTnet dedicated leased line internet access for lower costs, more control and much faster speeds. A specialist Smoothwall Firewall was implemented for monitoring internet use throughout GFM along with a point-to-point Short Haul Data Service to connect the sites together.

Products

BTnet dedicated internet access with a 1Gbps connection
Smoothwall Firewall solution
Short Haul Data Service (SHDS) point-to-point connection

The challenge

Each school was paying their local authority separately for network access, plus individual firewalls. “All four schools were each paying £56,000 a year, just for their broadband,” explains Ross. “And one site was paying them £165,000 a year just for their equipment.”

The schools also wanted more control over the system and the sites they could access. “The internet was monitored by Hampshire, and if you wanted to unblock a site, you’d have to wait days to do it,” says Ross.

They planned to share information, software packages and equipment like 3D printers – but that needed better connection and faster speeds. “We couldn’t take advantage of resources from any other school, because the line was only 100Mbps,” says Ross.

The timeframe was a key factor too. “We had to give notice to Hampshire right at the beginning of the year to say we definitely didn’t want their line from 31 March,” explains Ross. “They told us it wasn’t possible. BT told us it was.”

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Ross Evans,
Founder and CEO of Real Essential IT Solutions.

The solution

Ross spoke to Robert Bartlett, a BT Account Manager, who worked alongside a team of experts including ICT Consultant Matt Heron and Ivan Brooks, a Data Specialist. They recommended putting a 1Gbps BTnet dedicated leased line internet access circuit into Bay House Academy, with a Short Haul Data Service (SHDS) running to the other schools nearby.

They suggested a star diagram set up: “I liked that because it gives you the option to do anything you like. You can share anything, and sit anywhere,” says Ross. It would give them a Virtual Private Network with enough speed and capacity to cope with the demands from the schools – along with a very real business saving.

The costs of the network are now being split between the schools over the term of the five-year contract. “The total annual cost, like for like, has gone from £56,000 to £26,000,” says Ross. “Plus the monitoring is at about £8,000 a year.” The equipment for Brune Park is now attached to the virtual infrastructure at Bay House Academy. “That cost’s gone from £165,000 to around £20,000 a year – that’s the biggest saving,” he says. Another joining school, with about 240 students, was about to buy a £5,000 server when the new network was agreed. “Now they don’t need to because we can just piggy-back them onto ours,” says Ross.

Robert also suggested a Smoothwall Firewall security solution, that was configured for up to 4,000 users spread across the various sites. With this, the schools are in control of their own settings, and can make any changes instantly. They can also see the way the students’ devices are used. “The internet monitoring can tell us that a particular child went onto a particular website, and did a particular thing at a particular time. And then it’ll issue a report on it, so this is a hundred times better.” explains Ross.

And despite worries about timing, the work to replace individual network access was finished on time. “It all went according to plan, even where network access was local authority supplied” says Ross. “Some work was even ahead of schedule, so I was really pleased.”

“Compared with what we could pay and what we could get elsewhere, it was a no-brainer. It was ten times as fast for half the price.”

Ross Evans,
Founder and CEO of Real Essential IT Solutions.



The future for GFM

With the newly-formed GFM now connected and sharing resources, they're already thinking about the future. "There are plans for more academies and schools in the local area to join us," says Ross. "And there's the capacity in the system to do that."

They'll be putting in a resilient failover circuit too, so if something happens to the Gosport exchange, the network can be run through the Portsmouth exchange instead.

And the team have even come up with a way to make money by selling on the service to other local schools, by adding more Short Haul Data Services to the network and link to other sites. It gives the opportunity for smaller schools in the area to get the benefit of a high speed, safer network.

"I knew that we needed a leased line, and I knew that BT could do it. Gomer School has gone from almost unusable to 'wow'. I'm really happy with how it's gone."

Ross Evans,
Founder and CEO of Real Essential IT Solutions.

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