

## LIVING IT

## HOW TO...

### GO VIRTUAL

As businesses grow, their demands on technology tend to increase, and with businesses seeking to become more "virtual", the challenges for their IT department also intensify. However, making the transition from a bricks-and-mortar company to a virtual one, does not have to be as complicated as it may first appear.

A good starting point is to understand exactly what is meant by "going virtual". From our perspective as a communication service provider, a virtual company is an organisation that does not need staff to be tethered to a desk in an office to run productively and efficiently, and mainly uses the Internet as the basis for its communication needs.

The first and arguably the most important step to take towards a virtual office is ensuring that business processes are set up correctly. To do this, it is important to work closely with your solutions provider to ensure that all the aspects of your business are taken into consideration. This includes looking at the company strategy and direction, as well as a host of other factors such as size, location(s), customer profile, current IT and telephony architecture, and internal levels of technical expertise.

The right communications partner will work with you to take the complexity out of "going virtual", and create a tailored solution, as opposed to giving you something off the shelf. This will include ensuring that your staff has the required connectivity both at home and on the road.

#### CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The next step is to look at which applications are critical to the success of your business and necessary for users to have access to. For example, every employee may need email, Intranet and Internet access. These can all be provided as hosted services, helping you address any issues around scalability, budget constraints and potential lack of in-house expertise and support.

Next, it is vital that users have the correct devices to get their job done, such as laptops, mobile phones, PDAs and BlackBerrys. Different profiles of users may be served best by different devices – a desk based person may not need a laptop while a field sales person could not work effectively without such a tool.

Finally, selecting the right type of network connectivity is key. For instance, it is not enough to say that a user needs to be 'mobile', but by asking the right questions it can become apparent whether a user is served best with a broadband connection, WiFi or 3G. User profiles based on roles and requirements will help define the correct communications solution needed for each individual.



Could you transform your business into one that has no fixed office or location but runs purely as a collection of individuals who work in remote locations? *Falk Bleyl, Head of Business Development at specialist communications and hosted applications system provider, Solution1 explains how you might.*

#### HOME OR AWAY?

Based on this, it is possible to ensure that you have secure access to all the company information, regardless of where it is stored – at your main office, or being hosted by your communications partner at their data centre. The co-location model can provide your company with some immediate benefits, such as faster response times, greater scalability and less dependence on the HQ site.

A hosted application model enables quick and easy addition of further services for your employees such as hosted email and BlackBerry services. Hosted services are also very cost effective due to the per-user pricing, and the fact that there is no need for in-house expertise to run these services.

A virtual organisation tends to have a greater dependence on the communications infrastructure across which it operates, compared to organisations that have most of their staff and applications in a traditional office. Resilience and security must be an integral part of any virtual organisation. This is why it is always best to work with an IT and communication partner who will give you a tailored approach, as off the shelf solutions will not always meet your needs.

Setting up a virtual office is easier to do now than it ever has been. As long as you have the right communications service provider working with you who understands your business needs, you will be able to ensure that you have the right devices, connectivity, services and applications in place to not only run a true virtual office, but increase flexibility, efficiency and performance – and more importantly reduce your costs.