

Lfcda

Business



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Company: NCD
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International
Many of us do not think about the technological infrastructure behind a fire station when we make an emergency call. But like many businesses today, fire brigades all over the country are constantly upgrading their Information Technology (IT) systems to keep up with technology developments. With 120 IT sites and 3,000 computer users, the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority (LFCDA) has much more to manage than most businesses. Twelve months' ago, the LFCDA also had 140 Microsoft Exchange Servers and 2,000 Personal Computers (PC's) in use across the London area, so upgrading and supporting the systems with a team of four people used to be a never-ending task.

With more complex, higher-memory applications, and increasing numbers of users, the LFCDA needed a new approach. Before the change of systems, when problems occurred, the IT department needed to send someone out to fix hardware or solve software problems on-site. Additionally, with all the desktops running a variety of Windows operating systems (3.11, NT, 95 or 98), each site needed its own customised support which was becoming extremely time consuming and costly." IT is a tool of the business," said Gordon Stuteley, head of IT.

" Without a standard environment, deployment of new applications was extremely difficult." The LFCDA looked at a number of options, including standardising the desktop and thin client technology, but found many did not have enough flexibility to cope with the anticipated future needs. " We needed a modular solution that allowed us to add functionality and new applications whenever necessary and therefore could not view some of the

solutions we investigated as long-term solutions,” said Gordon Stuteley. The most appropriate solution was Network Computing Devices’ (NCD) ThinSTAR Windows-based Terminals. “ NCD spent a great deal of time looking at the systems we had in place and really understanding what was the best fit for us in the short and long-term.

They were able to offer us an elegant and cost-effective package, which complemented the functionality in Microsoft’s Windows Terminal Server, rather than replacing it,” Stuteley continued. The desktops that were already in the fire stations and elsewhere in the organisation were used as thin clients, allowing them to extend the lifespan of their existing PC’s. In common with NCD’s ThinSTAR’s, these remaining PCs will not require ongoing internal upgrades or frequent replacement, as all upgrades and maintenance is carried out centrally. “ This gave us an enormous cost advantage straight away,” said Gordon Stuteley. “ There was no possibility of replacing the 2, 000 PCs in use, so transforming them into thin clients was the right solution,” he continued.

The processing power for the thin clients came directly from the servers, which meant that the overall cost of acquisition and installation of these terminal devices was extremely low. Support was minimised as the team could solve any remote problems from the central office, and not travel to each fire station to give local support. The LFCDA will over time, replace converted PCs to true thin client terminals, which are expected to be more reliable than PCs, as there are no moving parts, and so they should last much longer and not need to be upgraded. A major benefit for the LFCDA, is that fire officers do not have to be in their own station to logon to the system

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anymore. In the past, they had copied the files onto disks when they were visiting another station - now they just have to log on to the central system.

There is also little or no disruption when the IT department wishes to upgrade applications or any of the network, as it is all conducted from the central office. Security is also tighter, as all the data is controlled centrally, stopping any unauthorised software being loaded by the users themselves. Stuteley commented: " We now have the capability to give our users a much more consistent and higher standard of service regardless of their location; they all use the same software and have the ability to access their data from any terminal in the LFCDA. It gives us a ' helicopter' view of the system and total control over our software environment of the software, something that was really needed." The LFCDA deployed 350 NCD ThinSTAR 200's and 2000 seats of NCD ThinPATH load balancing software, which maximises the performance on the thin clients. The IT team is responsible for deploying and supporting over 160 applications throughout the LFCDA, which they now manage very effectively.

Each of the users has to request authority from the IT team to use any non-standard software. This ensures that no one is loading software onto the network when they shouldn't be and gives the team much better software management. " Because of the large number of sites involved, training our users how to use the software often takes longer than rolling the applications out," said Gordon Stuteley. " We are now in a full production environment and will continue to replace old PCs with NCD thin client solution as and when necessary," he concluded.