

Mercedes-benz

Business



Company: ntl Customer: Mercedes-Benz Submitted by: Nelson Bostock

Communications As a manufacturer of prestige vehicles, selling globally across more than 200 countries, Mercedes-Benz has an unrivalled reputation for quality. The British arm of the organisation, Mercedes-Benz (UK) Limited, employs over 900 people and supports thousands more through its 200-strong dealer network. This part of the company promotes, markets and distributes all Mercedes-Benz products within the UK, as well as providing high calibre support to its customers. John Teckkam, LAN architecture specialist at Mercedes-Benz (UK) Limited recalls: “ The degree of downtime was having an unwelcome effect on our revenue. Overall, we have seen our network availability increase dramatically through our relationship with ntl, with commensurate beneficial effects upon customer service.

“” We knew what we needed in terms of hardware and LAN to WAN configuration, but previously we had been let down by poor involvement on the support side. This is where we knew ntl had the edge.” John Teckkam, LAN Architecture Specialist, Mercedes-Benz (UK) Limited. To underpin this activity, the organisation needed an IT network to match the quality of its products. At its UK headquarters in Milton Keynes, the network is critical to the company’s business processes, just one minute of network downtime can have immediate effects on profitability. With this in mind, Mercedes-Benz (UK) Limited has developed a long-term relationship with ntl, which began in the early nineties.

It evolved as they jointly explored new ways to reduce network downtime and allocate extra bandwidth as the Mercedes-Benz user communities grew in size.

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Carrying a partnership ahead

Until its involvement with ntl, the Mercedes-Benz network consisted of a shared Token Ring linking the administrative buildings at the Milton Keynes headquarters, which then fed out to the satellite offices – from Barnsley to London – via a Bay Networks router. This topology offered little protection against failure at a single point. John Teckkam explains why ntl appealed to the company: “ At that time, what was important to us was the service and support side of things. We knew what we needed in terms of hardware and LAN to WAN configuration, but previously we had been let down by poor involvement on the support side. This is where we knew ntl had the edge.

“” The other critical areas where Mercedes-Benz recognised and valued ntl expertise were in proactive network consultancy and end-to-end support. These qualities still impress John Teckkam: ntl is always willing to help out. I can’t remember the number of times I have rung to ask their consultants a testing question. They always work extremely hard to find the answer for me.”

Accelerated network capability

The upgrade to the network infrastructure began with the installation of a Nortel Networks Centillion switch at the core of the network, delivering extra bandwidth and offering switched 16Mbps to strategic areas.

The legacy router was migrated to the periphery, and its chassis was upgraded to a Nortel Networks System 5000 allowing switched connections to the servers. It is this bandwidth enhancement provided by the Centillion switching technology which has now allowed Mercedes-Benz to move to a

backbone of ATM. The sourcing of hardware from one vendor means that Mercedes-Benz now has a standardised network with much more resilience, and, because of its excellent relationship with Nortel, ntl was able to offer favourable terms for the hardware. Last, but not least, close consultation at every step of the infrastructure upgrade ensured that all hardware and cabling in the network is guaranteed Y2K compliant.

Steering away from risks

Since the upgrade, Mercedes-Benz has seen the downtime – which inevitably used to affect its day-to-day business – decrease significantly. For instance, the transport department used to be linked to the main administrative block by an outdated and unreliable fibre connection.

John Teckkam comments: “ The team would not be able to process orders if the network was down, so we clearly needed something more resilient.” ntl installed a separate network for the transport department with a single router connected to dual fibres. This system has been a model for the gradual migration of the network from a shared Token Ring infrastructure of 200 users, down to segmented network elements per floor. Such risk minimisation is a key area of ntl expertise, and there are further plans to take the user groups working from a single switch down to as few as 20.

Fuelling the benefits

ntl has been able to offer Mercedes-Benz information and advice at every step of the way.

John Teckkam continues: “ What I do is to look at the various options then simply sit down with someone from ntl and talk through the ideas on what
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would work best.” Additionally, John Teckkam acknowledges that the monitoring of the network, carried out internally with end-to-end support from ntl, has also become considerably easier. “ The upgrade has enabled us to better monitor what is going on in each of the discrete areas of the network. If there is a problem, we now know that it will only affect a limited number of users.” ntl also delivers an ongoing maintenance and support contract to Mercedes-Benz, which provides the benefit of a four-hour response during office hours. To meet an increased business requirement the contract has recently been broadened to cover the same hours, but now seven days a week.

The extra mile

Summarising, John Teckkam said: “ In financial terms, our business with ntl is substantial, but I’m constantly aware of the fact that I get an awful lot from them in return. In ntl we effectively have a ‘ virtual team’ of consultants, engineers and analysts at our disposal. The extra level of service and their knowledge of our network are something that I couldn’t put a price on! ... they really do ‘ go the extra mile’.”