

Highway motor insurance

[Business](#)



Company: NCD Customer: Highway Motor Insurance Submitted by: Berkeley PR International

Changes in the insurance sector over the last decade have impacted the business on all levels. Increased sector competition and regulatory changes have meant that IT has borne the weight of this 'Insurance revolution' as old IT administration systems struggle to cope with the increasing demands being placed upon them. When Highway decided to audit its IT systems early last year it became apparent that the old insurance administration system would soon be obsolete.

As a rapidly expanding insurance company unhappy with their high desktop maintenance and support overheads, the company started to look for alternative ways of managing its 800 employees spread over eight locations within the UK. Key factors when choosing an alternative were reducing PC hardware maintenance costs and making upgrading and rebuilding an easier task. For the support team, having to visit each remote site in order to make changes was becoming tedious, costly and time consuming. The company was therefore looking for a way of centralising support and lowering capital costs and depreciation. It was imperative to source a system that was user-friendly, but more importantly it had to be flexible in order to meet the ever-changing requirements of Highways rapidly evolving industry.

The old VAX VMS based system with dumb terminals at the front end was difficult to modify at the speed necessary to keep pace with these changes. There was also growing end-user demand for Microsoft applications, e-mail in particular. Highway has had to take a very strategic approach to the way they source and implement a new system. It is vital that the whole process transpires seamlessly so the business is not affected adversely by the

changeover process. Instead of having all computing resources located on the desktop, a thin client infrastructure concentrates software applications on a central server which can then be accessed by thin client terminal or PC acting as a thin client.

This centralised environment means that upgrading is made simpler as it only occurs at the server end instead of each individual desktop. With no hard drive, users cannot download unauthorised software. This significantly improves network security because software enhancements can only be added by authorised personnel at a central point. These factors bring down support costs. Initially, Highway looked at a number of thin-client solutions. After careful consideration they decided to go with Network Computing Devices, (NCD), choosing a solution based on NCD ThinSTAR windows-based terminals operating from a Microsoft Windows NT Terminal Server and NCD ThinPATH Connect software.

With the help of NCD, Highways implemented an extensive pilot programme to check the system's viability. The benefits of greater speed and efficiency became apparent straight away. It was really the potential cost savings that swayed the company's decision and NCDs ThinPATH software. This software, adds a feature-rich set of enhancement to Microsoft Windows Terminal Server for example, load balancing, remote management and desktop mirroring can be added as and when they are needed. Highway took the view that it was best to locate the servers centrally and run the key software over a wide area network (WAN). Since the bandwidth used was less than direct calls to the database they were confident that this was the way to go.

Changing over to the new system couldn't have been easier. Highway needed a phased roll-out so that the new thin clients could run the old system before being converted over to the new one. This way network performance did not need to be affected. If the company had forced a big-bang approach to a project of this size it would have been problematic for all concerned. Now whenever a desktop terminal needs replacing an NCD ThinSTAR is installed in its place.

NCD ThinPATH Connect software has been particularly useful during the migration process as it enabled the thin clients to run as dumb terminals. This meant the front-end hardware could be in place well before the back-end was switched over. Overall deployment was very straightforward, the only tricky bit being configuring the Microsoft Terminal Server which requires a certain amount of expertise. The biggest job was unpacking the terminals when they arrived. Once this was done all that was needed was to plug them in, ping the server and then download the configuration files.

The team got the installation process down to an average installation time of six minutes per terminal using in-house IT personnel. Highway will have all the hardware in place by the end of this year and from then on all the new Oracle-based administration software will be installed. Having installed the new system Highway will then have a solid IT platform from which to move the business forward. IT will enable them to drastically speed up the administration process and increase productivity.