

Hercules

Business



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InternationalDate: July 2000There is an increasing need for remote workers in the field to have efficient, instant access to corporate information resources and applications – their laptops are their mobile offices. In the complex world of water treatment, customers looking to make their operations more environmentally friendly, as well as more cost effective and productive rely on consultants and salespeople to provide them with the most appropriate solutions. The purer their water, the less furring and corrosion affects their infrastructure. Hercules, the \$1.3 billion manufacturer of chemical specialities is a market leader in supplying industrial water systems to such customers.

Its sales staff, form close long-term relationships with those customers. They provide consultancy on existing water treatment processes, identify where alternative treatment methods might be appropriate and recommend improvements to descaling and defouling processes. In order to provide this level of service and apply their technical expertise, they need a wide range of information to be instantly available at their fingertips, via their laptops. To this end, Hercules has recently embarked on a major upgrade programme, using XcelleNet's Afaría (formally CONNECT: Manage), management solution for the mobile enterprise to deliver faster communications facilities and more efficient information updates to users in the field. Previously, explains Joe Houghton, Sales Force Automation manager for Hercules in Europe and Asia Pacific, sales people and consultants relied on a standard modem line with limited bandwidth to keep in touch with head office.

“ With Afaría, we can send information down to the laptops and keep it up to date in a highly co-ordinated way,” he says. “ We spent some time looking at other remote management modules, but we selected Afaría because we wanted the complete flexibility that the product offered.” According to Houghton, maintaining the integrity of the information involves a complex sequence of events that might include updating a number of systems simultaneously. Hercules wanted the flexibility to do that in its own way rather than being constrained by a more predefined solution.” Not only is the underlying technology robust, but it helps us to optimise connections over a relatively low bandwidth.

It gives us the tool set we need and it’s highly configurable,” says Houghton. Overall, users have already reported significant improvements in communications speed. Many of them access information systems via Afaría over the Lan rather than modems, and these have experienced connection speeds increased by up to 20 times, one of the key benefits of optimised transmission over TCP/IP. Houghton says the upgrade was carefully planned and executed. Once Christmas 1999 and the anxiously-anticipated advent of the new millennium had passed without incident, the company prepared to upgrade some 500 users who were relying on their existing XcelleNet connections to an OS/2 server.” We created a self-running setup file to install Afaría and added that to a script file which ran automatically when a user dialled in,” he says.

“ When the setup file hit the laptops, it ran automatically, removing access to the old icons and options and automatically converting to the new system, all in one session. The next time they dialled in, they came straight on to the <https://assignbuster.com/hercules/>

new Afaría server in Widnes. All 500 upgrades were seamless. It went totally painlessly!” One of the major benefits from a systems management perspective is that Afaría enables Houghton and his team to be even more reactive to his users’ requirements.” At least 80% of what we do as a corporate resource is driven by comments from our end users,” he says.

“ We constantly listen to them. And if they come back and say that something’s taking too long to access or download, we try and react the same day. We also work closely with our local IT groups so that when new scripts are brought on-line, they’re always aware that something is happening. They certainly don’t like to sit and watch what we do with the system without having some kind of control themselves.” The vital issue of secure access is also addressed by Afaría, which allows the IT department to set its own parameters. Security is handled in scripts, with identification files maintained on laptops and validated against back-end systems when users access the server.

Any incorrect identifications or anomalies are immediately signalled centrally. With 500 users migrated, a further 300 non-legacy users have also been installed across six countries in Europe. In looking at the next version to upgrade – Afaría 3 will help here, with features like byte level differencing. This detects changes in, for example, a Powerpoint presentation, and only transmits those changes. That means that a transmission might only be 2-300kbits, rather than 2-300MB, offering significant reductions in bandwidth requirements, particularly for major program updates.” We’re probably comparatively advanced users because we’re used to doing our own scripting,” says Houghton.

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“ But the standard of support is still reasonably important to us and XcelleNet has been good at fielding our technical questions.” He adds that Hercules has been very pleased with the performance of Afaria and its relationship with XcelleNet over the past number of years. “ That’s why we’ve continued to use their products,” he says. “ After all, it isn’t always possible to get to a phone line when a user is out in the field, hundreds of miles from anywhere. If I found myself in a greenfield site without something like Afaria I’d certainly put it in.”